



Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs
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House Democratic Policy Committee Hearing
Wednesday, March 22, 2006

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, and guests, please accept my apology for not being able to be present at today's hearing. Prior commitments did not allow me to be in attendance. Our Executive Director also had prior commitments, and is unable to attend. The following testimony is submitted on behalf of the Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs.

Although the intent of this hearing is to address deer management, as you know, there are several important issues facing us in 2006 with respect to the PA Game Commission, and our organization looks forward to working with your members on all those issues, not just deer management.

Like many others, we are hearing the concerns expressed, particularly in certain areas, about lower deer numbers; deer, both buck and doe, being harder to locate; and being seen in fewer numbers than years past. We are also hearing reports of more plentiful bucks, bigger racked bucks and heavier, healthier deer in some of those same areas. Weather conditions were poor for the start of rifle season, but did improve as the season progressed.

By and far, the majority of our members do believe that the Pennsylvania Game Commission's (PGC) herd reduction program is working; in some areas, they believe it is working better than anyone could have imagined, and some think it has worked too well. Just recently, at one of our meetings in St. Marys, members reported seeing significant regeneration in areas that have not seen such regeneration in years due to over browsing. This is certainly a tribute to sportsmen and their ability to respond to the PGC's management objectives. Unfortunately, as you well know, there are those that believe the PGC management objectives are not in their best interests! We continue to believe that there certainly are "cold" spots as well as "hot" spots, and that the agency needs to further tweak its deer management program to deal with these problem pockets within existing wildlife management units.

We believe each wildlife management unit should be managed individually, based on sound science and data collected from that area. PGC biologists need to be given an adequate opportunity to study, evaluate and recommend changes where such changes are needed to reach management goals and objectives, and they need to provide us with justification for their recommendations. The current deer management program was intended to be at least a five-year program. We recognize that some hunters are becoming impatient and frustrated as they wait for the completion of those initial five years. Currently, the majority of our membership, although feeling some of the same frustrations, still understands the objectives of the plan and realizes that we are too far along to simply abandon the entire program and change the basic format of this initial five-year phase. We believe the major tool to tweaking the existing program is through the allocation and usage of antlerless licenses within the WMU's and we have encouraged the PGC to give the utmost priority to fine tuning the existing deer program through that allocation process, whether it means reducing or increasing such allocations, including DMAP.

This past year's antlerless allocation was reduced considerably, and by as much as 40% in some areas, such as WMU 2G. Again, we have asked for continued fine-tuning of the program through antlerless allocations to address hot and cold spots, even if that means an additional 40% reduction for the coming year.

With respect to antler restrictions, they continue to be supported by the majority of our membership. However, our members who hunt in the four-point restriction area have indicated they would like to see that reduced to a three-point restriction, making the antler restriction uniform statewide.

Finally, the PFSC, along with numerous other sportsmen's organizations, continues to promote the need for an increase in revenue for the PGC, either through increased license fees or alternative sources of revenue. It is truly unfortunate that some claim that no license increase should be implemented until the "perceived" deer problem is fixed and that license fees should be based on the amount of available game. New programs, such as the mentored youth hunting program, are going to need additional finances to be implemented properly to help recruit and retain young hunters. A number of agency shooting ranges are in need of repair and much concern has been expressed about the reductions in pheasant propagation. As many of you know, access is always an important issue for the sportsmen of this Commonwealth. Due to increasing financial burdens to the agency, it's hunter access programs have already been curtailed due to budget cuts, as well as its outreach programs to the public. It is our hope, that as legislators responsible for providing adequate funding to our resource agencies, you will work together to secure the necessary funding to carry wildlife conservation efforts into the next decade.

Thank you.

Ted Onufrak, President