

Comments before the House Game and Fisheries Committee, June 12, 2007

Good morning Chairman Staback and thank you for this opportunity to address this distinguished committee. It has been my distinct pleasure to meet almost all of you and I must admit the pleasure has been all mine. Frankly, I have been impressed with the willingness of the members to increase their knowledge of our contentious issues and their willingness to help find resolutions. Thank you and good morning to all.

In an unusual twist, I didn't get involved in this recent debacle concerning the baiting and feeding of our wildlife. Abuse of discretion by PGC WCO's is not really a surprise to me any longer. Actually, there is an internet website where quite a few instances of bizarre circumstances involving WCO's and our citizens are revealed.

Of course, I have read HB 251 and it makes a great deal of sense to establish legal distances from known baited areas. It is equally important to provide protection for the innocent who might be passing through an area that has been illegally baited. HB 251 addresses both of these issues.

However, I must tell you from my treestand, I see a much larger issue. Objective review of every contentious issue we discuss reveals a repetitive core problem, abuse of discretion. This is not unique to Pennsylvania. State agencies across the nation are causing problems for their residents by pursuing programs that don't have prior approval of their citizenry.

The glaring example in Pennsylvania would be the deer management program. Many years ago the PGC was granted discretion to manage our wildlife resources. Never did anyone imagine one day the PGC would condone and/or promote managing for zero deer.

Our forest certification program would be another example of questionable practices by a state agency. The public was never notified and informed of this process and how it might impact their local economy and their lives.

The elk program is a perfect example of how a state agency tainted by the offer of millions of dollars has pursued the wide-scale introduction of a non-native animal. Our citizens once again had no input nor do they have the legal mechanism to resist programs which they feel are inappropriate or mismanaged.

HB 251 is a good one and a step in the right direction. Although, I must tell you that these types of conflicts will not cease until you have a meeting of the minds with our state agencies. It may take even more. I suspect in the near future you will be forced to pass legislation and establish the limitations of discretion for our state agencies.

James J. Slinsky
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