

## Sunday Hunting – Senate Game & Fisheries Committee Hearing May 18, 2016

Good Morning Senators,

I am here as a representative of the Pennsylvania Equine Council (PEC). Pennsylvania's equine industry, according to a Penn State study conducted in 2003, is the second largest and fastest growing segment of Pennsylvania agriculture. The study concluded that the economic impact in Pennsylvania of the equine industry exceeds \$10 billion annually. The PEC is the bi-partisan voice of that equine community in Pennsylvania.

Much of Pennsylvania, farm crops and hay fields, as well as pastures and wooded areas exist because people own horses. Equestrians contribute in many ways as stake holders in Game Lands, hunting and the overall feed and habitat to PA's wildlife. Also higher prices are paid for hay and grain due to crops loss from wildlife damage as well as additional costs related to damaged fences. Many farmers and horse owners also participate in the cooperative Farm Game Project that allows access to their property by licensed hunters. In addition, everyone in PA pays higher property taxes due to the reduced tax fees paid on Game Commission and other public lands.

Agriculture is the largest industry in PA and tourism is the second largest. Equine fit in both categories. Recreational use of horses accounts for about 70% of the horses in the state and the American Horse Council's figures reflect that same percentage nationally.

Depending on the year, regular hunting season days could total 150 days. Sunday hunting would add, depending on the year, another 22 days at most to the seasons. It may not seem like a big deal, but for others who enjoy hiking, biking, bird watching or horseback riding in the nicest time of the year, it creates a problem.

In Allegheny National Forest, State Forests and most State Parks you can still recreate during regular hunting seasons. However, many non-hunters **don't** go out for two major reasons.

**One**, whether real or imagined, they are afraid they or their children may be accidentally shot and number **two**, courteous people do not want to interfere with someone's hunt.

Pennsylvania's 1.5 million acres of public hunting grounds (Game Land) are scattered throughout the state and are undoubtedly a great treasure. Designated trails on Game Lands

are routes that mountain bikers and equestrians as well as hikers, bird watchers and other outdoor enthusiasts have been able to utilize throughout the non-hunting season and on Sundays during regular hunting seasons. These routes too are very important connections to other public lands such as DCNR and National Forest and private land open for recreation and to nature.

If Sunday hunting is expanded, the 1000 plus miles of Game Land designated trails and access to our wild areas will be lost opportunities for the majority to get out into nature and introduce children, grandchildren and others to our wild places and wildlife. Certainly the loss of these trails and access to these lands will be the first consequence to the expansion of Sunday hunting. Remember, designated trails on Game Lands often are the only way to connect to DCNR and National Forest trails and in many areas the only non-private land accessible to an outdoor experience.

PA has a population of over 12.5 million residents. Hunting license sales for 2014 reported 943,836 licenses sold which included non-resident licenses equating to a little less than 7.6 percent of PA population. Also we must remember not every hunter who purchases a license or licenses hunts every season. It seems reasonable that 22 Sundays being left as non-hunting days is not too much to ask for those who would like quiet access to public land as well as their own during the 150 days of general hunting season from the end of September to the middle of January and part of April and all of May. Tourism / recreation is the #2 industry in Pennsylvania. The influx of leaf lookers and Elk viewers during the beautiful fall season has become an economic boost to PA and a time everyone looks forward to, as temperatures cool down and the leaves turn.

Let me share with you some of the statements from the trail riders across the state and those who enjoy being out in nature.

It is important that informed decisions are made in this matter of any expansion of Sunday hunting. Regardless of the hype, an expansion of Sunday hunting will lead to

less people being able to enjoy the outdoors. I have been and still am a licensed hunter, a land owner and a rancher/farmer in PA. I believe the Game Commission would succumb to bias pressure from the hunting community and in financial desperation make decisions that in the long run would be detrimental to hunting.

Hunting is a tradition in my family and I intend to do everything to keep it that way but Sunday hunting is not the answer!

Every year there seems to be fewer hunters for a lot of reasons. Taking Sundays away from everyone else when hunters have the run of the woods 6 days a week is not fair. People need to feel comfortable to be in the woods to learn about it.

Please don't think that I am anti- hunting. My wife and I hunt and have our farm enrolled in the Cooperative Farm Game Project. We are also Hunter Education Instructors. I have sat on many outdoor related state wide committees and I see a growing chasm between hunters and non-hunting outdoor recreationists. I would not want to see Sunday hunting expand that divide.

Respectively Submitted,

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