



**U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance House Bill 1760 Testimony**  
Pennsylvania House Game and Fisheries Committee  
Evan Heusinkveld, Director of State Services  
October 27, 2011

Chairman Evans, Chairman Staback and members of the House Game and Fisheries Committee thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of House Bill 1760 - a repeal of the ban on Sunday hunting in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Protecting &  
Advancing

My name is Evan Heusinkveld and I am the Director of State Services for the U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance (USSA). I am here today as part of the Sunday Hunting Coalition which is comprised of the leading hunting and conservation organizations throughout the country.

America's  
Heritage  
of Hunting,

In addition to USSA, the National Shooting Sports Foundation and the National Rifle Association, the coalition includes the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, Archery Trade Association, Boone and Crockett Club, Cabela's, Delta Waterfowl, Mule Deer Foundation, National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses, Pheasants Forever, Quail Forever, Quality Deer Management Association, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Safari Club International, and the Wildlife Management Institute.

Fishing &  
Trapping

I am joined today by Mike Budzik and Jeff Watkins and I will introduce them both shortly.

There has been much debate this year about House Bill 1760, the effort to lift the ban on Sunday hunting. We have heard all sorts of arguments, many of them without merit. Mike and Jeff are here today to talk about their experiences in Ohio when that state voted to lift its ban on Sunday hunting. But first I wanted to put to rest some of the misconceptions about House Bill 1760 and the comments we have heard in the course of our fight.

First is the misguided idea that sportsmen are in some way asking for special treatment. That we are asking for an "extra" day. This couldn't be further from the truth. What we are asking for is to be treated just like every other group of people in the Commonwealth who are able to recreate as they see fit 7 days a week. Currently, sportsmen and women are restricted to 6 days a week - no matter if it is on land they bought and paid for themselves, or on public ground paid for by hunting license sales. We just want the ban to be lifted and to be afforded the same rights as everyone else to pursue our passion.

We have also heard how the economic impact has been greatly exaggerated. Yet, the opponents only have conjecture, while study after study after study keeps showing the same thing: Sunday hunting will create thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars in economic activity in Pennsylvania. Just last week the Legislative Budget Finance Committee released the most up-to-date report yet, showing \$800 Million in economic impact - every single year.

Another argument we have heard is that farmers work 6 days a week and would like to have Sunday's free to use their land as they see fit. We couldn't agree more! House Bill 1760 actually gives landowners (including farmers) more choice... more ability... and more freedom to use their land however they see fit.

The landowner will still control who gets access, just as they do now Monday – Saturday. We are very respectful of farmers who wish to control access to their lands on Sunday. And we are simply asking that they respect our wish to do the same! A farmer's personal choice shouldn't limit another private landowner from choosing what he/she wants to do on their own land, just as a private landowner should not have the ability to prohibit a farmer from the use of his farm.

Under House Bill 1760, land owners can still prohibit hunting on their own land. And sportsmen are certainly not forced to go hunting on Sundays if they do not want to. Lifting the ban on Sunday hunting would simply put the choice in the hands of sportsmen and landowners, rather than the government.

What surprises the Coalition the most about the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau's stance is this: The PA Farm Bureau is actively advocating for a policy that **RESTRICTS** their own members' property rights. By not allowing landowners to decide if they want to allow, or partake in hunting on Sunday, the state is limiting their property rights with the blessing and encouragement of the PA Farm Bureau. How quickly would they march to Harrisburg if an otherwise legal agricultural practice was prohibited on Sundays ... or for that matter ... on Tuesdays?

There has been much confusion and misinformation about what exactly this bill does. I want to be clear:

House Bill 1760 does not force a SINGLE landowner to allow Sunday hunting if they do not so choose.

House Bill 1760 does not force a SINGLE hunter to go hunting on Sunday's if they do not so choose.

HB 1760 simply moves the authority where it belongs - to the Pennsylvania Game Commission where it can be used as another management tool in setting seasons and bag limits.

When and if the Game Commission allows Sunday hunting, private property rights for landowners (including farmers) will *increase*.

Landowners (including farmers) will continue to have FULL control over who has access to their lands and when that access occurs.

And finally, I would like to take a moment to correct the record about sportsmen. Many people opposed to HB 1760 have inferred that "family time" in the outdoors will be restricted if it passes. On behalf of the sportsmen and women of Pennsylvania I would like to remind you all that **we** have families too. And some of our greatest family memories are created while spending the day in the outdoors doing what we love to do... with our families!

Passage of House Bill 1760 would be a natural extension of the Mentored Youth Hunting program that Pennsylvania had the foresight to pass in 2006. Pennsylvania was the first state to increase opportunities for youth and hard working adults through the Mentored Youth Program. And since then, 32 other states have followed suit. Now we are asking that you continue to bolster that program by passing House Bill 1760 and extending the possibilities for hunters who are not able to hunt during the week.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony today. On behalf of the U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance, and the members of the Sunday Hunting Coalition, I respectfully ask for your support of House Bill 1760. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

**Mike Budzik**

Former Chief of the Ohio Division of Wildlife

Mr. Chairman, I am here today to speak to the aftermath of passing Sunday Hunting in Ohio and to answer any questions committee members might have.

In listening to testimony today, and following the debate from afar, I can't help but think back to 1998. It is amazing how the facts and fears about this issue cross not only state lines but the decades as well.

As Evan said, I was the chief of the Ohio Division of Wildlife for 8 years. When we first moved to open up Sunday hunting we faced all of the same fears – increased trespass violations, increased posting of farm lands, safety concerns, and fear over wildlife population levels.

I am here today to say that Sunday hunting has turned out to be a huge success for sportsmen, farmers, and landowners in Ohio. Sportsmen finally got the privilege to hunt on Sunday with family and friends. These friends in many cases were landowners and farmers!!!! It turned out to provide more opportunity for everyone. Many farmers and landowners now had a chance to get together either Sunday morning or afternoon for some time afield. In fact, if I had to ... I'd be willing to bet that some of you who are members of this committee have spent time hunting in Ohio ... on Sunday!

The fact is, many Ohio farmers love to hunt and now they can. As you know, in Ohio there are three organized groups of farmers, Farm Bureau, Farmer's Union and the Federation of Soil and Water Conservation. The Division of Wildlife worked closely with each to ensure this privilege would be a success. As of this date there have been no complaints.

**Jeff Watkins**

Former VP for Field Services  
Ohio Farmer Bureau

My name is Jeff Watkins. I have worked for the US Sportsmen's Alliance for the past 3 ½ years. Prior to that, I spent 25 years with the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation.

Agriculture is the number one industry in Ohio and the Farm Bureau is by far the largest farm organization, with approximately 230,000 members statewide. Nearly my entire career was spent in the field working directly with farmers. My last 12 years there I was the Vice President for Field Services where I supervised our field staff of 28 individuals. Their job consisted of working with the volunteer farmer members in their 3 to 4 county areas to carry out a program designed to increase farm income and generally improve life on the farm.

When the possibility of a law allowing hunting on Sunday became an issue, the Ohio Farm Bureau, following policy set by its members, took the position of strongly opposing it.

Each year more than 300 farmer delegates gather in Columbus to listen, discuss, and debate the organization's stand on every issue imaginable that affects agriculture. Sunday hunting was discussed every year with result being the same: We are opposed to Sunday hunting.

This issue created quite a stir in Ohio farm communities as I am sure it is right now in Pennsylvania. This was seen as a huge change and challenged one of the organizations longest held, most heartfelt policies. The topic was discussed extensively at county farm bureau meetings. Many members were reluctant to compromise on an issue they felt so strongly about. Even the argument that *it is your land and that you don't have to allow hunters on your property on Sundays* failed to sway many of our long time members.

After months of dialogue, discussion and debate the Ohio Farm Bureau made a compromise, backing off the opposition to Sunday hunting in exchange for a trespassing law with more teeth in it. Allowing people to fully hunt on Sunday's became law in Ohio in 2002.

Farmers' initial reactions in Ohio were mixed. Some felt it was a sign of the times and bound to happen sooner or later. Many felt this was an issue that we should not have compromised on in any way, and that it would be regretted down the line because of the problems it would cause landowners.

In the months following the law taking effect, everyone kept waiting for problems to develop. They never did. An issue that had caused an outpouring of farm member concern just months prior ... dried up overnight. I attended meetings expecting to hear stories of the problems people were experiencing, but the subject was almost never discussed. I expected to hear reports from my field people about Sunday hunting. I heard nothing.

In the end I believe farmers feared change more than the issue itself. Change is not always bad, in fact in this case I believe there were some positives that came from it including allowing an extra day of hunting for many people and allowing landowners the right to choose how their land is used.