

PENNSYLVANIA EQUINE COUNCIL

TESTIMONY BEFORE PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE GAME AND FISHERIES COMMITTEE

OCTOBER 27, 2011

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 same study concluded that the economic impact in Pennsylvania of the equine industry exceeds \$10 billion annually and that horse owners accounted for 1.4 million acres of land owned. The PEC is the bi-partisan voice of that equine community in Pennsylvania.

As you know, Agriculture is the largest industry in PA and the tourism is the second largest industry in the state. Equine fits into both categories.

The PEC has approximately 800 memberships, to include individuals and families, plus an estimated 1500 to 2000 associated members. Of that number, we can make an educated guess that 70% or more of the memberships are recreational riders. American Horse Council's figures reflect that same percentage nationally.

While the PEC represents the horse world, our trail educational efforts and access advocacy include all non-motorized users of our open spaces. We feel that our concerns are similar to those of the other recreational users of Pennsylvania's open spaces. The membership of the Keystone Trails Association (an umbrella hiking association) and individuals of their member groups, number about 35,000. Additionally, a DCNR study concluded that PA has 1.4 million bikers in the outdoors.

Whether a correct or incorrect assumption, for many of these people and others who enjoy the outdoors, perception often is reality. They believe that there is potential for harm while conducting their activities during the time that hunters are afield. They will reduce their chosen pursuits if there is a conflict of interest.

The PEC conducted a survey in February 2011 at the PA Horse World Expo. Participants were asked 2 questions:

- 1) Are you a hunter?
- 2) Do you favor Sunday hunting?

Here are the results:

Of the respondents, 74% were non-hunters opposed to Sunday hunting and 1.53% were non-hunters favoring Sunday hunting. But what we found most telling was that in the entire survey, 18.8% of the respondents were HUNTERS who were opposed to Sunday hunting while 5.76% of the responding hunters were in favor of Sunday hunting.

If we consider the response of only the hunters, we find that 77% of the hunters are opposed while 23% favor Sunday hunting. If we look at the total respondents at the Expo, 92.8% oppose Sunday hunting while 7.2% favor it.

Another point I would like to make is a concern expressed to me by hunters that landowners that oppose Sunday hunting might post their lands, eliminating these hunting areas entirely and possibly limiting access to non-hunters as well.

We acknowledge that there would be a positive economic impact for the PA Game Commission by opening Sunday hunting; but I ask, has anyone ever determined how much revenue would be lost when the hikers, bikers, bird watchers, equine enthusiasts, etc. perceive danger and curtail their activities in the outdoors?

In the years prior to 2002, increasing equine usage on the game lands, for which the PGC had no policies or management guidelines, resulted in a PGC decision to limit all equine activity on the game lands. It was justified. This action was the catalyst for the equine community to work diligently with the PGC to create an administrative mechanism by which some secondary usage could be managed on game lands in a way that would not interfere with their primary mandate of wildlife and habitat management.

You see that the PEC does have an interest in the well-being of the game lands (many of our riders are hunters as well) and their efforts to improve and maintain routes through the game lands may benefit hunter access while all enjoy the wilds. Exclusion on Sundays by opening to Sunday hunting will probably reduce volunteer efforts to maintain approved designated trails.

In an era when we are trying to make the outdoors an inviting place to improve the health of adults and children alike, as well as educate our citizens about the natural world around us and how to conserve it, expansion of Sunday hunting seems to be counterproductive.

In conclusion, the PEC is of the opinion that the expansion of Sunday hunting would have an overall negative economic impact in Pennsylvania. We feel that recreational opportunities would be diminished, and therefore respectfully request that House Bill 1760 not be moved out of this committee for action.

Thank you,

Skip Seifert, Vice President

Pennsylvania Equine Council

Further questions may be directed through:

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