



## Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs

2426 North Second St. • Harrisburg, PA 17110

Phone: 717-232-3480 • Fax: 717-231-3524

info@pfsc.org • www.pfsc.org

Providing leadership and advocacy for the enhancement of our fish and wildlife resources for the benefit of all hunters, trappers, anglers and conservationists. Protecting our 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment Rights.

### HOUSE – GAME & FISHERIES COMMITTEE DEER MANAGEMENT HEARING APRIL 25, 2013

Good Evening Chairman Causer, Chairman Haluska and the Members of the House - Game and Fisheries Committee. My name is Gary Moore, Director of Programs and Legislative Affairs for the Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs (PFSC). This well-known conservation organization was established in 1932. Today, membership is comprised of 225 clubs, 5 statewide groups and represents more than 70,000 individuals.

Thank you for the invitation to provide testimony about Pennsylvania's deer management program. Deer hunting and camp usage are both directly affected by this process which has created an emotional uproar. No one readily accepts change, especially when deep rooted traditions are involved.

Contention is expressed among sportsmen and women with respect to deer population densities being at low levels in some parts of the state. The current program seems to be progressing in the right direction but many have become impatient. Modifications are being made to the program in areas where the habitat can support more deer. However, some areas will never be able to rebound to historical population levels. Concerns and views of the hunters need to be heard and adjustments implemented when they complement the program.

In the early 1940's population data indicated that the Wisconsin deer herd had exceeded the carrying capacity in a large portion of the state. A decisive deer herd reduction plan was implemented and immediately became very unpopular with the hunting community. Aldo Leopold, then Chairman of the Wisconsin Conservation Congress (WCC) and associates prepared the plan. Today, Aldo Leopold is known as the "Father of Wildlife Management" and as the author of the "Sand County Almanac". An incident that occurred on the Kaibab Plateau in Arizona is also a vivid reminder of what can happen when deer issues are not properly addressed.

In 2005, the Pennsylvania Game Commission began reducing deer numbers because deer health, habitat quality and deer-human conflict were at unacceptable levels. Deer populations in some parts of Pennsylvania were clearly reaching the upper limits of the carrying capacities and in some instances had exceeded that value. Only a reasonable number of wild animals can occupy a particular ecosystem without upsetting the natural balance.

Pennsylvania's hunters are fortunate to have an Agency dedicated to and responsible for the management of all wild birds and wild mammals. The Pennsylvania Game Commission is responsible for this very complicated task. Much effort and care was expended before any deer herd reduction measures were finalized. The initial parameters of the deer management plan and subsequent modifications have produced a relatively stable population in most areas over the past five (5) years.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission indicated that between 2006 and 2011 deer populations increased in only 4 WMUs and were stable in 18 WMUs. One of the best ways to manage deer density is through a system that allocates antlerless permits based on accurate and reliable information. A comparison of antlerless license allocations from 2011 to 2013 indicates that the deer population in WMU 1A should be reduced and an increase is proposed in WMUs 2A, 3A, 3D, 4C and 5C. Currently 15 WMUs show stable respectable numbers. A general reduction seems to be the goal in WMUs 2G and 2H. A fair opinion cannot be made about these two (2) units because 2013 is the first year for WMU 2H which was previously part of WMU 2G. Even with the current management program, Pennsylvania's harvest is in excess of 300,000 deer each year.

Many tools and techniques are employed by the Pennsylvania Game Commission to achieve the desired goals of the deer management plan. Antlerless permit allocations, DMAP, red tags, antler restrictions and season length primarily control the pathway of success. These important management tools should never be mandated through legislative initiatives. Weather, predators, CWD and EHD further complicate the objectives. The basics of deer management include sound science, historical data and experience, as well as many ~~the~~ social aspects. An extensive amount of information must be acquired, assembled and analyzed on an annual basis to achieve a high degree of proficiency.

Pennsylvania's hunters should be encouraged that the Pennsylvania Game Commission developed a deer management program with an adaptive style. This displays an understanding and willingness to modify certain parameters as time passes in order to accomplish and maintain a satisfactory balance. Emphasis was made by the Pennsylvania Game Commission that this program would be an evolving process and everyone knew that it would not be free of imperfections. All must recognize the dynamics that are associated with each and every accomplishment. Improved deer health, habitat regeneration and hunter success should be realized in most locations with a few additional years of fine tuning.

The Wildlife Management Institute (WMI) completed an in depth review of Pennsylvania's deer management plan and produced a report in February 2010 for the Pennsylvania Legislative Budget and Finance Committee. The components and models used to guide Pennsylvania's deer management program were endorsed by this exercise. In addition, Pennsylvania's game management initiatives are well-known and many have been adopted by other states. "A skillful blend of (wildlife) science and art in relation to dynamic human circumstances, values and expectations" is how the Institute defines wildlife management.

While we may not all like it, the majority of our membership understands the need for proper deer management. As a member recently said, "*People want it how it was. How it was caused how it is...poor habitat in many areas. People can't understand that, and that is the problem!*"

Thorough and repetitive explanations are essential when an individual's emotional world is abruptly invaded. Hunters must make a sincere effort to understand all parts of this management program, acquire sound knowledge about wildlife management techniques and communicate with the Pennsylvania Game Commission in a constructive way. No one should hesitate to challenge the Agency when best management practices are not employed or when certain points of the program are not easily reconciled. An orderly exchange of information usually occurs if an understanding has been developed (AKA "common ground") at the start of a conversation.

The outreach program of the Pennsylvania Game Commission must continue with a strong emphasis directed toward deer management. Easy to read materials that fully explain the successes and shortcomings may reduce some of the confusion and animosity. Opinions and concerns of all citizens must be addressed. If a particular point of view adds value to the management plan, it should be incorporated.

In closing, I leave you with excerpts from a recent comment made by a Federation member:

*"I think we worry too much about deer, as in looking at them as something to be 'stocked' if you will for consumption. I think that a culture was created in this state that had little regard for the big picture and focused solely on making hunters happy. Often it was at the expense of many, many, other species. The ironic part here is that when those other species thrive, which it seems that a lot of hunters want to undo for their own personal agendas, so do the deer.*

*We are a little over ten years into this. Real recovery from something so damaging to the habitat as a whole is going to take a lot longer than that I'm afraid. It's disheartening to know that so many out there are willing to throw so much under the bus in the name of deer numbers for their own personal satisfaction. There are always going to be deer in this state, despite what you may believe. Are we stewards of the land, all of it, not just what we want from it, or are we merely consumers of the land? Where has the latter gotten us? Yes, there are social issues to be considered here but so many miss out on so much out there with their 'deer blinders' on."*

If time permits, I would be happy to take questions.

Again, thank you, for the opportunity to present testimony at this hearing.

J. Gary Moore, PFSC  
[gary@pfsc.org](mailto:gary@pfsc.org)

