

# Pennsylvania Farm Bureau

## **TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE PA HOUSE STATE GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE REGARDING HB 2083**

**BY**

**Martin Yahner, Chairman**

**State Wildlife and Damage Control Committee**

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Good morning. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony regarding House Bill 2083. I am Marty Yahner and I am an active farmer and hunter who serves on the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau Board of Directors and I also Chair our organization's State Wildlife Damage Control Committee. Pennsylvania Farm Bureau is the state's largest general farm organization with over nearly 62,000 member families.

I operate my farm in partnership with my brother, raising about 500 head of beef cattle annually, and growing 1,800 acres of corn, oats, wheat and hay in northern Cambria County. Our family has deep roots in Pennsylvania's hunting traditions that run through many generations.

Our farm properties are enrolled in PA Game Commission's hunter access program, and the Red Tag Program to reduce the impacts of crop damage from deer. In addition to helping us manage farm damage, these programs allow us to provide additional hunting opportunities to those hunters we trust will respect our property to legally take wildlife on our farm.

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau opposes House Bill 2083, because the bill would eliminate any meaningful ability of the PA Game Commission's Board of Commissioners to base hunting and deer management decisions on professional evaluation and analysis of habitat and animal concentration around the state. Instead, the bill would require the Commission to follow without question the will of a body of untrained individuals with special interests and predisposed agendas to manage our wildlife resources, regardless of whether decisions made this body conflicts with scientific analysis or by common sense. This bill's approach would cause Pennsylvania's wildlife management programs to be driven purely by political interest. Given the bill's proposed make up of political interests to be represented on this body, Farm Bureau strongly believes the workings of this body will greatly diminish the ability of agriculture to control wildlife damage and remain profitable.

Under the current system used to manage wildlife, Commissioners who are appointed by the Governor and then confirmed by the Senate, are charged with the responsibility of decision making in regards to all species, seasons and bag limits, and the game lands and other programs that the PA Game Commission manages. Commissioners must take all perspectives on wildlife management issues into consideration, including consultation with professional staff and wildlife biologists, as well as individual and organizational interests and legislators each time decisions are made.

Quarterly public meetings held by the Board of Commissioners provide opportunity for any organization or individual to directly speak to the entire Board of Commissioners, and allows the Commissioners to interact directly with those whom testify. Commissioners evaluate public input and seek advice and counsel of professional staff to provide decision outcomes that are often measured and adjusted over time to resolve issues.

While the existing Commissioner based decision making process may not be perfect as it relates to wildlife management, and it is certainly not one under which everyone gets the end result that they believe they need or want to solve a particular problem, the system does allow accessible interaction with the Commissioners and provides all stakeholders a platform to voice issues of concern.

We are seriously concerned about how the lack of qualifications and accountability of individuals permitted to manage the state's wildlife resources under the provisions of House Bill 2083 could influence decisions that would directly impact the level of crop damage, food safety and possibly even animal health concerns on our farms.

House Bill 2083 would also mandate the elimination of the Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) from public lands, which can impact adjacent and near-by farm properties. We have dire concerns about the bill's attempt to extensively remove the Commission's authority to utilize DMAP from the "toolbox" of deer management. We additionally are concerned that this may be the first step toward total elimination of DMAP, which has been one of the most successful tools used at the local level to control crop damage by deer on farms.

It is troubling that the Game Commission's authority to utilize DMAP would be severely crippled under House Bill 2083, particularly on public lands. DMAP utilizes hunters to solve deer damage concerns and has been highly popular for hunters and landowners alike by opening thousands of acres on public and private lands to hunting where overpopulation of deer often exist.

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau believes the provisions of House Bill 2083 would be a direct threat to the profitability of our farmers and increased deer damage to other landowners who provide the majority of free access to hunters on private lands each year. The bill is designed to primarily serve the interests of some hunters and trappers, while putting the concerns of farmers, landowners and citizens-in-general at risk by creating a politicized bureaucracy intended to replace the analysis and evaluation of trained and professional Game Commission staff. We

urge opposition to House Bill 2083. Thank you for your consideration on this important matter to our members across the state.