



Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen & Conservationists

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On the front lines, so you can be in the woods, on the water or at the range!

House Game & Fisheries Committee Hearing Saturday Opening Day of Rifle Deer Season

Charleroi, PA

2/20/2020

Chairman Gillespie, Chairman Kortz and Members of the Committee:

I am Harold Daub, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen and Conservationists - the voice of Pennsylvania's conservationists since 1932. Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts related to conservation, wildlife management, our outdoor heritage, and specifically, the Saturday opening day of rifle deer season.

The PFSC appreciates any effort that provides additional opportunities for Pennsylvania's hunter-conservationists. One of these recent efforts was the move to change the long-time Monday opener to a Saturday opener for the rifle deer season. This move has been controversial, and hence, why we are here today. Change is often hard and not often easily accepted by Pennsylvanians who cherish our traditions. However, just because we may not all be happy with the change, it doesn't mean the change isn't necessary.

When the proposal for a Saturday opener was first introduced, 61% of our clubs who responded to our survey opposed the change. However, 70% of our individual members who responded did support the change. When asked why some opposed the change, the general response referenced tradition.

We are now again polling our members on their opinions following the implementation of the Saturday opener, the proposal to keep the Saturday opener, and the additional opportunity of adding the coinciding Sunday. So far, the feedback has been mostly positive, and many Pennsylvania hunters are looking forward to having a full weekend of deer hunting opportunity in the upcoming season. Our members have until our March 15, 2020, spring conference to weigh in with their opinions. At that time, all votes will be tabulated and shared with our board of directors and delegates. I will be sharing our position with the PGC Board of Commissioners at the April 6 meeting.

We acknowledge the Saturday opener of the 2019-2020 rifle deer season has been controversial and did present challenges to some of our members who travel to a camp. But we've also heard stories from members who were excited to be able to hunt with their school and college-aged kids, and some who, because of work priorities, were ecstatic to be able to hunt on opening day for the first time in many years. The Saturday opener gave them an extra day to hunt. The Saturday opener was especially important for those who only had the weekend to hunt.

The Governor's Youth Council for Hunting, Fishing, and Conservation provided a statement (included in PFSC's package) on the Saturday opener to the PGC on January 25, 2020. I thought these paragraphs warranted highlighting:

"Most post-secondary institutions end the Thanksgiving break on the following Monday, further eliminating opportunities for college kids to go hunting. Remember, too, that for students who travel great distances to return to college, Saturday is likely the only full day for hunting available on the one weekend they have off."

"In 1963, the Game Commission moved the opener from December 3rd to the Monday after Thanksgiving. Traditionalists, though ruffled at first, quickly evolved to accommodate this advantageous change. Old traditions seamlessly meld into new ones with time. Starting the season on Saturday will allow people of all ages, occupations, and backgrounds to participate in making timeless hunting memories." – Emma Olney, President, Governor's Youth Council for Hunting, Fishing and Conservation

While representing PFSC at the NRA Great American Outdoor Show earlier this month, I performed a very unscientific one-day ad hoc poll regarding the Saturday rifle opener. I asked attendees passing by my booth if they were Pennsylvania deer hunters. If the answer was yes, I asked: "Saturday opener - yes, no, undecided?" The results: out of 108 surveyed, 75 people supported; 22 people opposed, and 11 responded as undecided.

PFSC also conducted an all-access Facebook Poll. With more than 1,000 respondents, it shows 65% in support of the Saturday opener. (See attached chart.)

Regardless of the final results of these polls and the official position we will take, the Federation is adamant that the opening day and length of all seasons are wildlife management regulatory issues dealing with seasons and bag limits. Thus, they are decisions that we believe are and should remain under the regulatory authority of the subject matter experts - the Pennsylvania Game Commission. We will oppose any legislative attempts to mandate wildlife management decisions via legislation (A recent poll we conducted with over 700 respondents indicated more than 90% of hunters do not want legislation deciding season & bag limit issues. See attached chart.)

The Pennsylvania Game Commission is entrusted with the management of the state's nearly 500 species of wildlife. This includes the 67 species that we hunt. The ability to set seasons and bag limits is a crucial part of the management process. The Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen and Conservationists supports the science-based and led resource first model and process of the Game Commission. Any other system or interference threatens the management of Pennsylvania's wild birds, wild mammals, and their habitats for current and future generations.

Recent changes in long-standing management practices, while sometimes hard to accept at first, allow for maximum opportunity for Pennsylvania hunters, and have led to an increase in license sales this year. Increases in license sales mean more overall Pittman - Robertson funding coming to Pennsylvania. It also means more general revenue from licenses. Both sources translate into more funds for the Commission to use for habitat and species projects and R3 (recruiting, retention, reactivation) initiatives across the state.

Commission's regulatory authority. While we may not always agree with every decision the Commission makes, it is our opinion that the current Board of Commissioners does a great job over-all of managing Pennsylvania's wildlife using a science-based, resource first decision-making process. A prime example took place during the recent January public comment session, where an individual spoke about the history of raccoon hunting season. He expressed concern as to why the season has not been expanding as less Pennsylvanian's trap and hunt raccoons. During the Board meeting, a Commissioner requested that staff look into expanding raccoon season based on this individual's comments.

As older hunters age out of the license-buying system, the Commission must be able to utilize new ideas to keep the next generation of hunters engaged. The Federation's board of directors understands that some of these changes may not always make everyone happy, and may sometimes shake things up and cause us to try "new traditions." We understand there will be times it won't always be about "what's best for me," but instead, "what's best for the resource and the overall best interests for the continuation of our outdoor heritage." Based on current feedback and the increase in license sales, specifically, the sales referenced on the day before the opener, we believe this may be one of those times.

Thank you again for this opportunity. I am honored to speak on behalf of the Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen and Conservationists, and a conservation community united behind a commitment to provide science-based and led wildlife management for the benefit of all Pennsylvania wildlife, citizens and visitors. I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak before this committee today.

Sincerely,



Harold Daub, Executive Director
Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen & Conservationists



Pennsylvania Federation Of Sportsmen & Conservationists, Inc. created a poll. ...

Published by Harold Daub [?] · February 9 at 12:31 PM · ⚙️

Asking this question today: Saturday rifle opener?

65% Yes ✓

35% No

This poll has ended.

1.1K Votes

7,520

People Reached

731

Engagements

Boost Unavailable



Pennsylvania Federation Of Sportsmen & Conservationists, Inc. created a poll. ...

Published by Harold Daub [?] · February 14 at 5:54 PM · ⚙️

Seasons & bag limits issues, like the Saturday opener, should be made by the PGC or by legislation?

92% PGC ✓

8% Legislation

This poll has ended.

787 Votes