



KEYSTONE TRAILS ASSOCIATION

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Preserving Pennsylvania's
Trails
Since 1976

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Testimony

Presented to the Pennsylvania House Game & Fisheries Committee
By Curt Ashenfelter, Executive Director, Keystone Trails Association
October 27, 2011

Good morning, Chairman Evans and Democratic Chairman Staback and other members of the committee. My name is Curt Ashenfelter, Executive Director of the Keystone Trails Association.

The Keystone Trails Association is the statewide voice of Pennsylvania's hikers. Our association represents 52 local hiking clubs throughout Pennsylvania and the 3.8 million Pennsylvania hiking community. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you this morning concerning House Bill 1760.

For generations, that is since 1873 hunters have hunted on Saturdays and hikers have hiked on Sundays. If hikers are hiking on Sundays and hunters are hunting on Sundays, then there is a greater chance for tragic consequences. Current law provides a safe and healthy balance in Pennsylvania. The Keystone Trails Association strongly recommends that this committee rejects Sunday hunting.

The Keystone Trails Association works to provide, preserve, protect and promote recreational hiking trails and hiking opportunities in Pennsylvania. Hiking trails are not an act of nature they are built and maintained by men and women.

Pennsylvania has over 3,000 miles of long distance hiking trails with one third of those miles in State Parks and State Forests, one third in State Game Lands and the rest on private property. We have a very special relationship with the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Pennsylvania Game Commission. We value those relationships and are grateful for their support.

We appreciate the opportunity to share with you the concerns hikers have expressed to the Keystone Trails Association about Sunday hunting. The hiking community has a positive, working relationship with the hunting community and we hope to continue that relationship. Of course many hikers are hunters and many hunters are hikers.

The hiking community has long respected the right of hunters to be afield six days a week. As an illustration of the commitment of hikers to conservation and the recreation goals of the Commonwealth over 3,000 hikers have donated 36,000 hours of labor to build and maintain trails in 2011.

The Keystone Trails Association works to build and maintain trails with volunteer labor in a challenging environment that includes working during hunting season. We provide our volunteers with tools and materials to accomplish their good work and seek to provide them with an environment that is safe and beautiful. Hunt-

ers use and appreciate the many trails we build and maintain that improves access to hunting areas.

Hikers often self select out of the woods so as not to interfere with hunters and their pursuit of game. However we firmly believe that six days a week for hunting is enough and that Sunday needs to be preserved for others such as hikers, birdwatchers, equestrians, mountain bikers and other outdoor lovers who go into the woods on Sundays to pursue their interests in peace and quiet and to enjoy the great outdoors without concerns for personal safety.

Hikers and their families are justifiably concerned about their personal safety when in the woods and the perception of danger is always nearby on hunting days. Families and children that go into the woods to hike or picnic should not be put in danger.

Hikers pursue their hobby for a number of reasons including mental and physical well being. Hiking the unspoiled woods of Pennsylvania provides an opportunity to get away from the stresses of modern life and engage in a healthy lifestyle choice.

The benefits to society and individual mental and physical well being cannot be underestimated. Family bonds forged on hiking trips, friends hiking in groups and clubs leading hikes often take place on Sundays. Older hikers, children and families learning about the environment and others all strive to take better care of the environment after experiencing the outdoors. Having children and others learn about conservation and wildlife in the outdoors is better than any classroom or reading about it in a book.

Proponents of Sunday hunting cite a study that provides statistics that Sunday Hunting will be an economic boom for Pennsylvania because many more hunters will spend money on lodging, food, gas, etc. in pursuit of hunting.

Hikers and others who come to take advantage of Pennsylvania's extensive trail system also travel many miles and spend money on lodging, food, gas, and many of the other items quoted in the study of Sunday Hunting. The study did not consider how many people would leave the outdoors because of Sunday hunting and how much the Commonwealth and its communities would lose in revenue.

The economic benefits of trail users in Pennsylvania can be found in a report released by the Outdoor Industry Foundation (*The Economic Contribution of Active Outdoor Recreation – Technical Report, 2006*).

In 2005, it is estimated that Pennsylvania's 3 million hikers spent \$955 million on their activity. This includes \$864 million for trip-related expenses, both day and overnight, and \$91 million for equipment and services. Pennsylvania's backpackers spent \$111,500,000 on trip-related expenses and \$11,150,000 on equipment and services.

One day trail users averaged \$98 in trip expenditures while overnight trail users spent an average of \$238 per trip. Trail users averaged \$198 in expenditures annually for trail-related apparel, equipment, accessories, and services.

It is estimated that Pennsylvania's hikers and backpackers support 12,500 jobs and paid \$176,900,000 in taxes related to their activities in 2005.

Promised economic benefits of Sunday hunting will be diminished by large numbers of hikers leaving the outdoors. The 2009-2013 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan called *The Pennsylvania Outdoors: The Keystone for Healthy Living* funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and developed with extensive input from citizens, state and local government officials and outdoor

recreationists from across the Commonwealth recognized that Pennsylvania Outdoors is the Keystone for Healthy Living and cited 99 action steps to get more people outdoors. Not one action step included Sunday hunting.

It is hard to understand how letting 8% of the population hunt while discouraging 92% of the state's population and others from outside the state from benefiting from Penn's woods is an economic win/win.

Many individuals travel from out of state to hike Pennsylvania's wonderful network of trails. Many out of state hikers will stay home or travel to other states that prohibit Sunday hunting to hike. Sunday hunting will deprive the state of valuable tourist dollars.

The Keystone Trails Association as an organization is supportive of hunting, as many of our members are hunters. We acknowledge the role hunters have played in managing wildlife and wild areas in the state. Hunters also acknowledge the role hikers have played in building and maintaining trails that provide access to hunting grounds.

We have worked with the Pennsylvania Game Commission on a number of State Game Lands to build and maintain numerous trails.

We believe that the case that is being made for Sunday hunting is seriously flawed. We do not believe that there will be a great economic benefit to Pennsylvania if you drive the hikers and others who take advantage of our rich bounty of hiking, horse riding, and mountain biking trails out of the woods on Sunday and allow a small minority into the woods.

Hikers are not the only people who enjoy not having to be concerned with hunters on Sunday. Birdwatchers, equestrians, mountain bikers, and many other outdoor enthusiasts are out on Sundays.

I have heard Sunday hunting advocates state that hikers don't hike in November or December because of poor weather. That is not true as many hikers and others enjoy the outdoors twelve months of the year and dress appropriately for the weather, whether fair or foul. Additionally cross country skiers and snowmobilers enjoy their sports only during snowy weather.

The Keystone Trails Association wants to be clear on its concerns; expanding hunting to Sunday will change the way of life in Pennsylvania and the ability of millions of Pennsylvanians to enjoy outdoor nature in peace and quiet.

That is a choice the General Assembly must carefully consider.

Our Pennsylvania hiking community, over 3.8 million strong, is justifiably proud of the 3,000 miles of awe inspiring hiking trails that we have here in Pennsylvania. We look to the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to assist us in preserving and protecting the trails in State Forests and State Parks and to the Pennsylvania Game Commission on State Game Lands. The challenges to the trails are great and they are multifaceted. We look to the state legislature to help us maintain a healthy balance between those who seek to use trails for non-hiking interests and the interests of the hiking community.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.