

EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA FIREARMS COALITION: Hearing / March 19, 2014

EPFC is a coalition of sixty-three (63) sportsmen's clubs in eight of the State's Eastern counties: Berks, Bucks, Carbon, Lehigh, Monroe, Northampton, Pike and Schuylkill. Our aggregate club membership is estimated at approximately 150-175,000. Since 2000 and the launching of the current PGC deer management program there has been evermore concern that the PGC deer program was a flawed program. More importantly, its goals were suspect by our clubs from the inception. There never was a clear or transparent process which the PGC engaged sportsmen right from the outset. The program was launched more as a marketing thrust which experienced people such as our membership represents were suspect.

This initial concern was apparent to our membership by the hunting seasons of 2004-2005. At that time it was evident in our Eastern region, other than for high density suburban sections, where hunting is limited by housing and commercial activity, otherwise private and public hunting areas were significantly depleted of deer densities due to PGC practices. Wrongly the PGC kept expanding and overlapping hunting seasons in what they described as expanded "opportunities". Our membership reported, from that time and to the present, more so, even with inordinate time "in the woods" few if any deer are seen much less presenting a viable hunting "opportunity". In our view the PGC has purposely limited the voice of our concerns and at best given lip service if not outright hostility to our numerous requests for transparency.

By 2005, the EPFC, which heretofore, worked with the Allegheny Sportsmen's League and Firearm Owners Against Crime on a host of firearms issues, now joined with the ACSL/FOAC and also with the Unified Sportsmen of Pennsylvania (USP) in attempting to enlighten the Executive and Legislative branches to the concern we jointly expressed. Simultaneously, we tried to work with the PGC to get a clear and empirical understanding of where deer hunting in Pennsylvania was headed.

To our collective dismay, all legitimate authority, even the courts, were willfully blind to the disgraceful and cavalier attitude that was continuously destroying the economic and social value of the deer hunting tradition in our State. Perhaps the height of this willful disregard for the facts was recently centered in the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee report which clearly demonstrated the enormous damage the PGC deer management program had caused. Yet even this led to indecisive, if not further subterfuge.

THE CRUX OF THIS DEBATE SIMPLY STATED IS DEER DENSITIES. REPORTS FROM OUR VARIOUS CLUBS SINCE APPROXIMATELY 2003 HAVE BEEN STARTLING. TIME AND TIME AGAIN WE HEAR FROM VARIOUS MEMBER CLUBS and members themselves THAT SPORTSMEN HAVE BEEN IN THE WOODS FOR MANY DAYS, ALL DAY ON PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LAND AND NOT SEEN "A" DEER. THIS RENDERS THE STATISTICS THE PGC ISSUES IMPLAUSABLE, INDEED, IMPOSSIBLE TO BE BELIEVEABLE. ASK THE PGC ABOUT DEER DENSITIES..JUST ASK. You will find the most circuitous answersthat never answer the question. Hunting is contingent on reasonable densities.... Ask them what are reasonable? Ask them how we can achieve what are reasonable or acceptable?

In 2012, I personally had twelve full days in the woods between archery and rifle season and did not see one lonely deer ...these were eight and nine hour days. Being in proximity to New Jersey we hear from hunters that heretofore came to PA for deer hunting that have just plain stopped buying a license. We have seen up in the Pocono Mountains and the Delaware State Forest areas the negative economic impact on the businesses that depended on the hunting trade. With these eyewitness reports year after year, the PGC continues to release remarkable data regarding the deer herd size and harvest estimates

and at the same time not actually listening to what sportsmen are reportinga complete disconnection. With license sales declining there is a direct correlation....no deer, no license purchase. My own grandson who is now 19 won't come to camp for just that reason....yet I go out hoping against hope to see "A" deer.

In December 2011, I was personally present at the formation meeting of Governor Corbett's Sportsmen's Advisory Council. At that time not only myself but other concerned citizens presented a cogent argument to the Governor's staff and related agencies....this too has proven futile in moving this matter any way forward to a remedy, let alone an acknowledgement by those so called stewards of Pennsylvania's resources.

I urge this Committee/hearing to delay no longer and not postpone any longer the need for redress. This is in our memberships view a tragedy for Pennsylvania should it continue for a moment longer. We encourage the legislature to pass the following pieces of legislation:

HB 870 –Exclude public land from the DMAP program

HB 1370-Restricting the length of and start date of antlerless season

HB 1724-Redesignating WMUs and issuing antlerless tags on a county basis

SB 547 -Remove antler restrictions

HB1726/ SB 1086- Direct deer program to be based on maximum sustainable yield and enhancement of habitat

Respectfully submitted

Jack Iannantuono , Chairman