

Testimony HB 2083

By

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For

The State Government Committee

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Ladies and gentlemen, good morning and thanks to the committee for allowing me to testify about House Bill 2083. My name is Rodney Ansell. Of the people testifying here today I may have a unique background for my testimony. I worked as a Wildlife Conservation Officer for the Pennsylvania Game Commission from June 1985 until July 2010. After that I was honored to be picked for Governor Corbett's Hunting Fishing and Conservation Advisory Council.

Its time for change of deer management by the Pennsylvania Game Commission, either voluntary or mandated.

When I started my career with the Pennsylvania Game Commission, the Food and Cover Corp, these are the workers on the ground manipulating, creating, improving and maintaining the habitat to improve carrying capacity for wildlife on the Game Lands, had quite a few positions out of the total personnel compliment of the Pennsylvania Game Commission. Today there are close to 1.5 million acres of State Game Land mostly bought and paid for by the hunting and trapping license buyers of this Commonwealth and these lands are found through out Pennsylvania. At one time to use an example the crews in Greene and Washington County had fourteen people to meet the Land Management Plans in just two counties. Over the years the Game Lands increased in size in Greene and Washington County but when I left the PGC they had only two or three people on each crew to do all the work. This example can be seen through out the state with Food and Cover crews working the State Game Lands. In some cases two or three people are asked to manage 50, 60, 70 thousand acres or more. Over the years Harrisburg headquarters has taken the compliment positions held by Food and Cover and as the people retired they moved these positions to other departments thus reducing the number of people working the habitat on State Game Lands. At one of the meetings of the Gov's Advisory Council we had a presenter from DCNR presenting what they did with habitat on pipelines, right of ways etc. on their lands. When asked "How many people does DCNR have working planting these areas?" The answer was "None, we contract or place within the contracts that we let what is required for the plantings.". You can see this same thing happening with the Pennsylvania Game Commission on out source contracts, they don't do some of the work but rather hire it out. Two years ago I asked how many biologists were on staff and I was told 55.

In the late 90s DCNR applied for and with the help of the Pennsylvania Game Commission enrolled some of their land into a Certified Forest program. The initial certification audit was conducted by SCS (Scientific Certification Systems) who expressed concerns over the impact of deer browsing on the sustainability of DCNR's forest, and stipulated that one of the conditions of certification was that "Steady and continuous progress will be made by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to develop and implement a deer management program that shifts from the current nutritional carrying capacity paradigm to one of diversity carrying capacity." (1) They didn't say that DCNR had to create and implement a new deer control plan but rather the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. I would contend this is deer elimination. There has always been a battle between the Pennsylvania Game Commission Commissioners and the biologist over the allocation of antlerless licenses. Sometimes the Commissioners want less licenses and the biologist want more this is still the case today. So the Game Commission changes its deer management plan from a county based system, sixty seven, to a Wildlife Management Unit of twenty three or twenty two units. The old system a nutritional carrying capacity paradigm based on deer carrying capacities of only the forested areas of Pennsylvania as reported by the Forestry Bureau in square miles of forest broken down into three classes of forest, seedling sapling (most deer carrying capacity), pole stage (least carrying capacity) and saw timber (middle numbers). I don't know today how the Pennsylvania Game Commission determines deer carrying capacities for the Wildlife Management Units as a whole unit. In 2002 a letter to the Pennsylvania Game Commission Executive Director from DCNR; Conservation & Natural Resources Advisory Council noted that "Should they [SCS] determine at any point that satisfactory progress is not being made, certification could be jeopardized." (2) By 2003 with the question being asked how many deer are there? The Pennsylvania Game Commission changed its method for estimating deer populations. (3) From 2001 to 2011 general hunting license sales has been trending downward, although sales have recovered somewhat from the low in 2007. (4) From 2000 until today the Pennsylvania Game Commission has expended a lot of money on youth programs and youth recruitment into the hunting fraternity with no signs of major results. But from 2001 to 2011 nationally the number of big game hunters rose by 6 percent. (5) Economically DCNR a state agency from 2001 to 2006 increased its income from the sale of certified timber by 7.7 million dollars in five years. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service the average hunter expended \$2484 in 2011. With the loss of 114,612 general hunting licenses between 2001 and 2011 there is a

potential loss of 285 million dollars. (6) not to a state agency but to those mom and pop stores, restaurants, gas stations, sporting goods stores, butcher shops etc. even if we cut the loss in half 142.5 million dollars to commonwealth people it doesn't justify DCNR's increase of only 7.7 million dollars. The loss to our public is way too high for a deer control plan required by forest certification for DCNR. The Game Commission had set up citizen's advisory groups to get citizens input as to the antlerless deer allocation numbers set by the commission for different Wildlife Management Units I got to have two people serve on these groups John Wilkinson of Wilkinson Nursery and James McKnight a manager for Clairton Steel Works and a sportsman. After the meetings run by biologist John Wilkinson informed me that his group's biologist flat told him they (Pennsylvania Game Commission) was going to set the allocations regardless of the groups recommendation. James McKnight told me he thought they were lucky just holding the status quo on antlerless licenses in the group he served on. Could these group meetings have been look good meetings? I would ask you to vote yes on HB 2083. Even if it doesn't pass it might send a shot across the Pennsylvania Game Commission bow letting them know to change their ways. There are some parts I really like about HB 2083 Definitions including Carrying Capacity, Maximum Sustained Yield particularly under Power & Duties "—focus primarily on serving the interest of sportsmen —" then lines 13, 14, 15 setting the season for antlerless deer and later returning to county based units. and sub section 14 maximum sustained yield, 15 Enhance deer and wildlife habitat, these are all great proposals please vote yes on HB 2083. I just wish the hunting license buyers of Pennsylvania didn't have to pay for a service the PGC should already be doing by itself. The Pennsylvania Game Commission should run like a business. If your customer base is shrinking you need to ask why and fix the problem but the Pennsylvania Game Commission is not admitting there is a problem but they come to you Legislators and ask you to up the hunting license fees for the shrinking number of hunters to pay their bills. The Pennsylvania Game Commission should be raising more wildlife to attract more customers to purchase a hunting license thus solving their money problem. Hunters don't need certified forest they need wildlife. In a meeting for the Governors Council at the Pennsylvania Game Commission's headquarters the Forestry Program Manager David Gustafson said "If we cut enough trees deer can't effect regeneration."

In closing I believe there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that it's time for the legislature to step in and protect the citizens of this Commonwealth from a state agency that's imposing economic hardships on so many citizens by not adhering to its mission mandate under Title 34, and the legislators can do this by voting yes on HB 2083. Thank you.

Foot notes 1, 2,3,4,5,6 2012 Legislative Budget and Finance Committee
The Costs and Benefits of FSC Certification
of DCNR Forests

1 pg s-2, 2 pg 12, 3 pg 14, 4 pg 15, 5 pg 16, 6 pg 16