

Unified Sportsmen of Pennsylvania



Established 1983

"The largest statewide individual membership sporting advocacy organization in the Commonwealth" Conservation supported through thousands of voices for hunting, fishing, trapping and our second amendment gun rights.

Testimony to the House State Government Committee Hearing on HB2083

September 15, 2016

Wayne Haas, President Unified Sportsmen of Pa

Members of the Committee

Unified Sportsmen of Pa (USP), supports HB2083.

Recently the Pa Game Commission (PGC) wrote that USP has been against PGC's deer management since our existence in 1983. That is not true. The late Dr. N. Charles Bolgiano, one of USP's founders and a past President, was given the Conservation Award by the PGC for contributions in wildlife management including a new deer management system that provided private land owners with adequate doe harvest permits to limit crop damage in 1998. At that time Charlie and USP thought we were on a path for the betterment of all. Happy – Yes.

Then in 1999 came a new PGC initiative that declared the whole state a deer damage area, a new deer project leader was hired, and a march for concurrent buck/doe seasons that would significantly reduce the deer herd would begin. The reason for this march would be so the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) could gain more revenue from their timber sales. In 1998, DCNR entered into America's first Green Certification Agreement with the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) – a German-based environmental organization. According to the agreement, DCNR's purchase of the Green Certification "Award" was intended to generate a perception in retail and wholesale lumber markets throughout America, Europe, and Asia that timber and wood products harvested from State Forest Lands were superior in quality to timber from land owners who were not Green Certified, and, therefore, would increase revenue from the increased sale of DCNR timber. A condition in the agreement was receipt of the Green Certification Award depended on DCNR's ability to reduce Pennsylvania's deer herd. Because DCNR lacked the authority to regulate deer harvests, the Green Certification Award was contingent on DCNR's ability to convince the PGC to reduce the statewide deer herd. PGC, through the agency's chief of wildlife management, quickly complied. In a meeting between the PGC and DCNR, the deer project leader said – we can't take baby steps and DCNR has a gun to its head, Forest Certification.

The Joint House and Senate Legislative Budget and Finance Committee in 2012 did a study of the costs and benefits of DCNR's Green Certification Award Program and resulting reduction of the statewide deer herd. Considering that the primary reason for Green Certification was to increase DCNR revenue from the domestic and international sale of timber cut from State Forestlands, only an average of about \$1.1 million per year was realized by DCNR as a result of Green Certification. However, the costs of the program were found to be a whopping \$285-415 million lost in Commonwealth economic activity each year. As a result of herd reduction (that was initiated as a condition for achieving DCNR's Green Certification award), over \$4 billion has been lost in economic activity since starting the deer reduction program in 2000. It is growing at the rate of \$285-415 million each year that deer reduction continues which is an unacceptable trade-off for DCNR's \$1.1 million annual gain from being Green Certified. The study concluded that Green Certification was based on politics, not on science. It was determined that upwards of 200,000 sportsmen stopped buying hunting licenses, a number that does not begin to indicate the actual number of sportsmen who continue to purchase a license but fail to spend many, if any, days afield due to herd reduction.

Now you know why we are not happy.

In considering HB2083, this is what passage of the bill will not do. It will not increase deer numbers to the effect that there will be a deer behind every tree. It will not mean reinstating deer to 100% carrying capacities of the pre 1980's.

As my Grandpap always told me, if you don't like something you need to come up with a solution. We have done that – HB2083. For years USP has been asking for an independent assessment that would provide legislators in its oversight responsibility of the PGC informational services that they do not have. Right now if anyone questions the PGC (whether it be hunters, legislators, or whomever), the PGC simply says they are the experts and we may have our opinions. This will be no longer. HB 2083 will bring accountability. HB2083 will increase wildlife populations and diversity, increase forest regeneration, and improve the quantity and quality of food and cover for wildlife. It will benefit game animals such as our State Mammal (white-tailed deer) and our State Bird (ruffed grouse), as well as hundreds of other game and nongame birds and mammals that continue to decline in numbers as our forests age throughout the state's public lands system. It will create jobs and increase state revenue by doing this habitat work.

The PGC is asking for a license fee increase. A few years ago, former State Rep Ed Staback, who was the head of the Game and Fish committee at the time, told them that there would be no increase unless there are changes made to deer management. The PGC got no raise and have not made any changes. If the PGC had not shot themselves in the foot by joining in with Green Certification, which cost them millions, the need for a raise would be much different.

If we can help in any way, we would be happy to.

HB2083 is a good and needed bill.

Respectfully,

Wayne Haas, USP President
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