

House Game and Fisheries Committee
Harrisburg, PA
Testimony on Sunday Hunting/Senate Bill 147
Pennsylvania State Grange
September 10, 2019

Vince Phillips
Legislative Director
PA State Grange
717-728-1217
legislative@pagrange.org

The Pennsylvania State Grange appreciates Chairman Gillespie's agreeing to accept our testimony on Sunday hunting and Senate Bill 147 after the hearing. As such, that gives us a chance to review the actual testimony and remove redundancies in our testimony as well as reflecting on some of the arguments presented in the hearing.

First, I must submit a comment about decorum. I was appalled by the conduct of a witness in attacking another's testimony and credibility to present his association's views on this issue. While the PA Farm Bureau certainly does not need help from the Pennsylvania State Grange in defending it against accusations of thug-like behavior, the Grange believes strongly in what one legislator said after the hearing about civility. He said, "Attack the position but not the person." It was disheartening to see that there were at least five specific attacks against the Farm Bureau by name and two specific attacks on another anti-Sunday hunting testifier, the Keystone Trails Association, again by name.

Our Position

The Pennsylvania State Grange continues to oppose Sunday hunting consistently since our members voted for that position more than ten years ago.

A Review of some of the arguments presented by proponents at the hearing:

Assertion: There will be an economic boost into the PA and local economies if Sunday hunting takes place.

Dueling statistics was the scene at the hearing.

The Pennsylvania State Grange recognizes the important economic impact of hunting. However, if only measuring economic impact, it should be compared to the economic impact of other outside recreational activities. What the numbers say is that the economic contribution of other outside recreation overshadows hunting. Federal and private studies reinforce the claim by opponents of Sunday hunting, including Pennsylvania State Grange, that public policy should give these activities breathing room by preserving the ban on Sunday hunting.

The U.S. Government's Bureau of Economic Analysis was directed by Congress to prepare an assessment and analysis of the outdoor recreation economy in the United States by the Outdoor Recreation Jobs and Economic Impact Act of 2016. (<https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/outdoor-recreation>) Its summary report issued September 20, 2018, credited outdoor recreation for generating 2.2 percent of the Gross Domestic Product in 2016. The top six outdoor recreation activities were: Boating/Fishing \$36.9 billion; Game Areas such as golfing and tennis \$34.7 billion; RVing \$30 billion; Guided Tours/Outfitted Travel \$25.7 billion; Motorcycling/ATVing \$20.3 billion.

Well down the list came Hunting (the category includes archery as well as firearms hunting) which had \$13.9 billion in economic impact in the U.S.

A non-governmental source, the Outdoor Industry Association, said that hunting generated more retail spending than did the government's study, \$27.4 billion nationally. Humbling was the revelation that even wildlife watching has more of an economic impact than hunting (\$30.2 billion versus \$27.4 billion), generated more jobs (235,825 versus 194,973 for hunting), and more state and local taxes (\$1.9 billion from wildlife watching versus hunting's \$1.7 billion).

This 2017 research shows hunting as a part, but not the dominant part, of the economic contribution to the United States from outdoor recreation. (https://outdoorindustry.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/OIA_RecEconomy_FINAL_Single.pdf)

Assertion: Any decisions should be made on the basis of science, by the PA Game Commission and not by the General Assembly.

While xx generally agreeing, the PA Game Commission like any other state agency must be open to oversight. Recently, the recent audit conducted by the Auditor General raised some eyebrows as an audit should. Any agency's performance needs to be evaluated and assessed to make sure that it is completing legislative goals for them set by elected officials. The Pennsylvania State Grange supports active oversight by the General Assembly. The legislature should not abdicate its oversight role to the agency which should be receiving the oversight.

Assertion: Sunday hunting will spur new hunting licenses and license reinstatements because of the extra opportunities to hunt by allowing Sunday hunting.

All presenters agreed that the decline in hunting licensing is an issue both in PA and nationally. Proponents of Sunday hunting without exception accepted this decline as fact. Here are telling statistics. In 2013-14, 952,989 licenses were sold. In 2014-15, 943,836 licenses were sold. The number dropped to 935,767 in 2015-16, to 914,244 in 2016-17, and to 885,564 in 2017-18. The last fiscal year (2018-19) included the 2018 hunting season and the number of hunting licenses sold was estimated by the Game Commission at 867,853. For the current Budget (FY 2019-20), the expected number of hunting licenses sold would drop another 7,357.

That is a clear danger sign to the future of the Game Commission and to hunting in the Commonwealth. The decrease in hunting licenses sold is not just a fluke. The decline is longer-term.

https://www.budget.pa.gov/PublicationsAndReports/CommonwealthBudget/Documents/2019-20%20Proposed%20Budget/2019-20_Budget_Document_Web.pdf Page 479

However, Sunday hunting proponents at the hearing were unable to specify any states where allowing Sunday hunting resulted in an increase in new licenses or reinstatements. Thus, it remains an assertion, a guess. The Pennsylvania State Grange believes that we should not guess our way to public policy.

Assertion: A ban on Sunday hunting is a 300-plus years old Blue Law relic that should be eliminated.

This is probably the most often heard argument for Sunday hunting. A personal example: My family and I go to Ocean City, New Jersey, a dry town. When we want an alcoholic beverage we either consume off-island or we bring it in for our consumption. Is this law a relic? I don't know. All I know is that we go to Ocean City. We respect the local law. We continue to invest enough into the local economy to make shopkeepers and restaurants happy. In other words, the 'relic' argument does not have merit. I do not see anything wrong with a state banning Sunday hunting if that's what it wants to do.

The Sunday prohibition came about for several reasons. One was the fear that Sunday hunting would erode family time or diminish the importance of religion in our society. While today's secular society downplays religion, reverence and family values still rank high with many Pennsylvanians. Another reason may have been the view expressed at the hearing that non-hunting uses of the recreational outdoors should be given a day where the fear of being accidentally shot is not a disincentive to fully enjoying the outdoors.

Hunters are not being treated as second-class citizens because they cannot hunt on Sundays. Outdoor recreation enthusiasts such as hikers, equestrians, bird watchers, etc. simply believe they should be given their day just as hunters have the other six.

Granted, outside recreation takes place throughout the year versus hunting which has prescribed seasons. However, if the assertion is true that November is a 'down' season economically, an argument can be made to accelerate efforts to have more outdoor recreation in that time period rather than allowing Sunday hunting which may be an impediment for other recreational activities. The testifier from the Keystone Trails Association pointed to two specific hiking events that relocated to PA because our state still had the ban.

Pennsylvania State Grange advocates two specific proposals in contrast to Sunday hunting.

First, the General Assembly can direct the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to study why license numbers are decreasing. Their work could be a review of existing studies or it could undertake PA specific research although that would take more time. Knowing the whys gives us the hows. If the decrease is due to a cultural shift away from hunting or guns, the public strategy would be different than as proponents argue, a matter of adding Sunday since Saturdays have been consumed by sports and other activities. If this is the case, it appears inconsistent with the hunting season now opening on Saturday instead of the traditional Monday

The second action is more immediate. The Senate must pass House Bill 102 which the Pennsylvania State Grange has supported since its introduction. This bill permits hunting and gun safety education on school property after the school day is done. As you know, this passed the House on May 15 by a bipartisan vote of 143-46. HB 102 has remained in the Senate Game & Fisheries Committee since May 24. Increasing young people's access to learn more about hunting is recognized by almost everyone as a basic and essential first step.

Enacting these two measures would certainly clarify the debate about Sunday hunting in the context of a larger issue – license declines.

Closing Note

I should add that I am sorry that the PA Game Commission did not testify to explain their position in favor of Sunday hunting. The point was made that existing Game Wardens and other workers would have to deal with the added workload if their responsibilities were increased to handle trespass issues. I say this because their FY 2019-20 budget calls for 686 job slots, the same as in the previous year. Perhaps this is moot since a legislator at the hearing noted that several new Game Commission positions were created dealing with public relations. Since they were not there, they could not explain staffing.

Likewise, the PA Game Commission would have seen some oversight questions independent of Sunday hunting. The issue of declining habitat for grouse and pheasants was raised but those answers will wait for another time and day.

In any event, the Pennsylvania State Grange appreciates the courtesy extended to our group in allowing us to present this written testimony.

The PA State Grange was founded in 1873 as an advocacy organization for farmers, families, and businesses that make up Pennsylvania's rural communities.