

Society & Politics in Wayne's World

Deer Season...Sure Ain't What It Used to Be

By Wayne A. Bush

Deer hunting is an annual tradition in Pennsylvania, or at least it used to be, and as such it is certainly a part of our society.

At this point I blame the members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly for their inaction almost as much as I blame the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC).

So I'm writing this column as an open letter to our state elected officials. If you agree with me I would encourage you to cut it out and send it to your state representative and state senator with a note of your own.

To the Senators and Representatives who represent Pennsylvania Deer Hunters:

Another deer season has come and gone. In my 40 years of hunting deer, this one may be my saddest: it is the season I felt my deer hunting spirit die. That's saying quite a lot given that my wife once described me as "obsessed" with deer hunting.

I did more scouting and prep this year than I have for many years mainly because my 13-year-old daughter expressed an interest in archery hunting. I really wanted her to experience those heart pounding hunts that my friends and I used to experience with deer coming so close you could hear them chewing on acorns. Those were the hunts that hooked me: the hunts that hooked a lot of us.

After a lot of practice and prep she was excited to get into the woods. But the excitement quickly waned after many hours over multiple days without seeing deer.

She ended her first archery season without seeing so much as a tail.

How excited do any of you think she'll be for next year?

My 22-year-old son has already given up on hunting. There were still a few deer left when he started hunting and we were willing to hike for hours before daylight in order to get to spots where we had a chance to see deer. Now, it really doesn't matter how far you hike, or don't hike.

He has decided that the small chance of seeing a deer is not worth his vacation time or the expense of a hunting license.

A cursory look at hunting license sales from 2001-2014 suggests that many others have also decided that the investment is no longer worth the potential return.

Total resident adult hunting license sales in 2014 were down over 410,000 from 2001;

and total junior license sales for the same period were down just over 20,000.

Over 430,000 fewer license sales since the current management plan was implemented would suggest that many others have decided that the cost of a hunting license is no longer worth the abysmal chances of success.

The PGC has been begging the General Assembly for a hunting license price increase while at the same time refusing to take any action to increase the availability of Pennsylvania's number one wildlife commodity: the White Tailed Deer.

Heck, I'm just a bumpkin from the Cove but even I can figure out that there is a direct correlation between the decline in deer numbers and the decline in total hunting license sales. Perhaps if hunters would have a better chance of seeing a deer they'd be willing to buy a license? More deer = more sales = more revenue.

Yes, yes, I know..... The PGC has different explanations for the overall decline in sales but if you would be listening to your constituents, even a little bit, you would know that the PGC is not being truthful with you.

The people within the PGC who are telling you that your complaining constituents are nothing more than spoiled children are the very same people who have their entire careers at stake with this deer elimination program. It is in their best interest to never admit that their program has cost the state millions, perhaps even billions in economic activity over the past 10+ years.

When will you, the members of the General Assembly, stop letting the PGC buffalo you? When will you finally tell them that enough is enough? When will you reign them in?

The PGC has clearly demonstrated that they don't care what hunters think. We've been screaming from the mountaintops, literally, for more than ten years now and they've ignored us.

The question now is: Why do our representatives in the General Assembly refuse to hear us?

Unified Sportsmen of Pennsylvania, Allegheny County Sportsmen's League and former PGC wildlife biologist John Eveland have provided ample evidence that the harvest estimates and deer population estimates concocted by the PGC are not possible and yet you still choose to believe the people whose very reputation depends on the continued façade that the deer management program has been a success.

It's truly a shame that you, our elected representatives, have sat idly by over the last ten years and have allowed the PGC to destroy the once great tradition of deer season.

This is yet another example of broken government. A commission of political appointees ignoring the people they're supposed to be serving, instead serving the special interests of the timber and forest industry, while the elected officials who have

oversight responsibility ignore the pleas of their constituents to intervene.

After yet another disappointing season, I've decided that if my daughter decides that she's done sitting in the woods, hour after hour - day after day, trying to see a deer..... I'll be done too.

This originally appeared as a Society & Politics in Wayne's World column in the February 18 edition of the Morrisons Cove Herald, Martinsburg PA. Email comments or feedback to comments@sapiww.com. To read other columns visit www.sapiww.com and stop by and like Society and Politics in Wayne's World on Facebook!