

Introduced as: HB1483

Prime Sponsor: Representative David M. Maloney, Sr.

Subject: Wildlife Habitat

In the near future, I plan to introduce legislation to improve deer management and wildlife habitat, and to reinvigorate rural economies in this commonwealth while increasing Game Commission accountability to the legislature.

From 2001-06, the Game Commission initiated a five-year herd-reduction program by harvesting 2,500,000 deer. Commissioners stated that they mistakenly overshot the herd to only 1-2 deer per square mile in some regions. Since then, the Commission has maintained excessive hunting pressure on the herd. Extremely low deer numbers are resulting in virtually unhuntable conditions in many regions of the commonwealth. This is a serious and permanent situation with great social and economic impacts, especially for tourism and recreation upon which rural communities rely. While the economic impact may have now reached over \$7 billion and family businesses continue to close because of the lack of deer, again for the upcoming 2017-18 season the Commission continues its relentless assault on deer by increasing antlerless allocations 7.5% to 804,000, 56,000 permits over the previous year's high number.

The Legislative Budget and Finance Committee calculated that by 2011 the related impact on the commonwealth's economy was \$501.6 million per year, with \$40 million in lost annual state and local tax revenues. Today, this egregious economic impact is likely much higher. To exemplify the impact throughout many northern-tier, eastern, western, and central counties, last year the director of the Cameron County Chamber of Commerce referred to the deer program as "economic suicide for the county." Surviving businesses were down 50-60%. Previously, of the 145 businesses belonging to the Potter County Visitors Association, 60 were bankrupt or up for sale.

This bill would implement proven, scientific, wildlife management techniques to increase deer, grouse, and other wildlife populations. To assure accountability, an independent Forest and Wildlife Advisory Council would be established to assist the Game Commission in performing its duties by working with a Pennsylvania-based, private, nonprofit, independent, scientific organization designated as the Forest and Wildlife Advisory Service. Scientists would conduct annual assessments to determine the condition of the forest and its capacity to sustain optimum populations of deer and other wildlife toward maintaining a balanced ecosystem. The Service would also design a state-of-the-art habitat enhancement program that benefits deer (our State Mammal) and other forest wildlife, from ruffed grouse (our State Bird) and snowshoe hares to songbirds, bats, and pollinators such as honeybees and Monarch butterflies. It would prepare and submit an annual report to the Council that recommends the total number of doe licenses that should be allocated and other beneficial management practices. The Council would provide the report to the Governor, the General Assembly and the Board of Game Commissioners.

It is estimated that this legislation would significantly increase deer and other wildlife while improving the health and productivity of the forest ecosystem, return over 200,000 sportsmen who have quit hunting because of the lack of deer, reinvigorate the \$5-billion tourism and recreation industry, generate \$500 million per year in jobs and economic activity for rural communities and the commonwealth, increase annual state and local tax revenues by \$40 million, and generate \$8 million in hunting license sales for the Game Commission. There is no cost to the General Fund or taxpayers.

Please join me in co-sponsoring this important piece of legislation. Thank you in advance for your consideration.