

Agricultural & Rural Affairs: Allowing Sunday Hunting  
Senate Bill 2

Article 1:

**Pennsylvania Game Commission to discuss Sunday hunting's continuation, expansion**

By: Kevin Edwards January 21, 2021

Sunday hunting could be here to stay in Pennsylvania after a historic trial run last year.

The state permitted big-game hunting on Sundays for the first time in November 2020 when it opened hunting on three consecutive Sundays.

Early indications are that the Pennsylvania Game Commission considered the Sunday hunts a success.

The PGC again has three Sundays listed on its preliminary seasons for 2021-22 as the PA Board of Game Commissioners prepares to meet Saturday at 8:30 a.m. They'll do so online to remain in compliance with the state's COVID-19 safety guidelines.

Travis Lau, the PGC's communications director, said the vast majority of feedback on the Sunday hunting initiative has been positive.

"The original idea was to increase hunting opportunities for people who might otherwise not have a chance to go," Lau said. "This applies especially to students and working class folks."

Sunday hunting made its debut on a limited basis last year after completing a long and winding approval process.

Gov. Tom Wolf signed Senate Bill 147 in December of 2019, allowing the Pennsylvania Game Commission to designate three Sundays in 2020 for hunting. The PGC in turn opened Sunday hunting to archery deer hunters on Nov. 15, bear hunters on Nov. 22 and deer hunters during firearms season on Nov. 29.

Now, the Game Commissioners are exploring the possibility of expansion. There would still be just three Sunday hunts in 2021, but, under a new proposal, hunters could legally pursue other species on two of those Sundays. Among the small game that could be hunted on the first two Sundays would be squirrel, rabbit, pheasant and grouse.

"It's just a preliminary proposal right now," Lau said. "If approved, it would have to come up again at the April meeting. Turkey and migratory birds would not be included."

The PGC's preliminary Sunday dates for 2021 are Nov. 14 (archery deer), Nov. 21 (bear) and Nov. 28 (firearms deer).

**Hunters embrace Sundays**

The PGC has yet to announce detailed license sales information from the 2020-21 seasons, which are ongoing.

That data would tell Commissioners whether Sunday hunting — along with the Saturday opening day first implemented in 2019 — has attracted more and younger hunters. It also remains to be seen if the PGC will quantify how many deer were killed on the Sunday hunt during firearms season.

However, as Lau said, anecdotal evidence has been positive.

One example of the positive feedback was an online Big Buck contest held by the Tri-County Independent newspaper in Honesdale. Hunters from Wayne, Pike, Lackawanna and Susquehanna counties were polled in the contest, and every one supported Sunday hunting.

Mike Kuzmiak killed a massive 12-pointer in Wayne County.

“I know there are pros and cons, but I’m definitely for Sunday hunting,” Kuzmiak said. “Many people are busy and hunting isn’t as big anymore so they won’t take off work or let their kids take off school.

“I think Sunday hunting kind of keeps the sport alive. It’s great for people who normally don’t have a chance to hunt.”

Nicole Merron is the mother of a budding outdoorsman. Her 11-year-old son, Caleb, hunts in Cherry Ridge Township.

This year, Caleb bagged an 8-pointer under the watchful eye of his father, Rob. He used a Winchester 30-06 to make the shot from 75 yards.

“We are very much for Sunday hunting,” Nicole Merron said. “As full-time working parents of a young boy who plays sports as well as attending school, Sundays definitely open up time for us all to hunt together as a family. And, we cherish that time.”

Tanner Gillette was the overall winner of the Tri-County Independent’s online contest. He began his hunting career at the age of 12 in the company of his father, Bill.

Gillette has grown into an avid outdoorsman and accomplished hunter. This past year he harvested a massive 10-pointer in Missouri and a trophy-sized eight-pointer in Pennsylvania.

“I’m all for hunting on Sundays,” Gillette said. “I believe in personal choice. If someone else doesn’t want to hunt on a Sunday, they don’t have to.

“But Sunday hunting allows more people to enjoy the outdoors and gets the younger generation involved. I think this would also raise the number of licenses being bought. That in turn helps save the sport of hunting, which I love.”

Kristen Anne Cooke’s family hunts in northern Wayne County, and her son, Kienan, shot a buck.

“We support Sunday hunting because most people work during the week,” she said. “Weekends are for family. My boys are 10 and 12. They love having an extra day with their dad to hunt and put food on the table.”

## **Moving Forward**

Opposition to Sunday hunting originally came from two main sources: farmers and hikers.

They objected for practical reasons. Farm owners were concerned that hunters would trespass on private property, while hikers were afraid they might be in physical danger.

The Farm Bureau eventually relented after years-long negotiations that resulted in a compromise.

Hunters would need to obtain written permission from landowners ahead of time. Trespassing would be deemed a primary offense enforceable by Game Commission officers, and only three Sundays of the year would be affected.

And, while the data for 2020 aren't all in yet, Hunting-Related Shooting Incidents have been trending down for nearly a decade. In fact, there have been fewer than 30 HRSIs statewide in each of the past seven years. There were 26 in 2019.

Those statistics for the 2020 firearms seasons, along with harvest numbers and license sales figures, are usually released in early March.

In the meantime, Lau is cautiously optimistic that Sunday hunting in Pennsylvania can become an ongoing tradition.

"I really think it's a win-win situation," he said. "There are a lot of people out there who just can't participate in a Monday opener. Giving these folks the opportunity to hunt twice that first weekend is a real plus."

<https://www.goerie.com/story/sports/outdoors/2021/01/22/pa-sunday-hunting-deer-pgc-pennsylvania-game-commission-meeting-bear/6668504002/>

Article 2:

### **Prohibition on Sunday Hunting and a Look at Its Incredible Staying Power**

By: Amy Hatfield February 28, 2019

The debate over Sunday hunting in Pennsylvania has made its fair share of headlines since the beginning of the new year, which has some hunters wondering: What is this debate really about?

Nowadays, Americans can do most things on Sundays, albeit not all things. Many states restrict or prohibit alcohol sales on Sundays, and horse racing on the Sabbath used to be considered scandalous. These restrictive laws, known as "Blue Laws," were originally used as a way to "funnel" colonists to church on Sunday mornings by limiting their competing options. At one time, there were even restrictions on when families could cook and when farmers could till their land.

As for hunting, these eight states still impose Blue Laws on Sunday hunting: Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Virginia.

Pennsylvania, however, may soon be off this list. A senate bill is currently working its way through state government. The legislation would open up hunting during the state's hunting seasons on an, "at will basis," according to the *Titusville Herald*.

The *Herald* reports, “under the current prohibition, only three animals in Pennsylvania can be hunted on Sundays. These are coyotes, which are permitted to be shot year-round, and foxes and crows, which are limited to certain seasons.”

Those in favor of Sunday hunting cite the declining number of hunters nationwide, and how restricting hunter activities only compounds a situation that's already creating cause for concern. Hunters pay into each state's conservation funding through a self-imposed federal excise tax on guns, ammunition and archery equipment. Even more, as hunting license sales decline, so too does wildlife conservation dollars.

Then there's the changing lifestyles of those who are active hunters. Generations before, more Americans lived in rural areas, and rising before work to hunt their own property or hunting in the evenings after arriving home again was not uncommon. Today, many hunters make weekend journeys to public-hunting land or out-of-town hunting leases. Hunting opportunities are limited by where hunters live, their work weeks and longer commutes. Often hunting opportunities are confined to two days: Saturday and Sunday. In those states where hunting is restricted on Sundays, opportunities are cut by half.

Conversely, those who oppose lifting restrictions or prohibitions on Sunday hunting often cite reasons similar to those offered by Pennsylvania's Republican Senator Scott Hutchinson, who is also a hunter. “I’ve hunted my whole life,” he says, in an interview with Titusville’s newspaper. “I’m a member of the NRA, but I think there are a lot of downsides to Sunday hunting and I would say I’d be against it.”

The senator cited three reasons for his opposition, some of which reflect the reasons for opposing Sunday hunting in other states as well.

1. Sundays have become a day for nature enthusiasts like hikers and those who enjoy horseback riding, for instance, to spend time outdoors without concern for nearby hunting activities.
2. Hutchinson cited conversations he’s had with farmers and other landowners across the state who said they would close their land to hunting if Sunday hunting is permitted.
3. There would be a negative economic impact to retailers relying on hunters who purchase gear and supplies on Sundays.

The negative economic impact is speculative, and is also being challenged by the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF). In fact, the trade association for the firearms industry suggest just the opposite. According to a fact sheet published to the group’s website, Sunday hunting could create up to 27,000 jobs in the eight states that currently prohibit or restrict hunting, resulting in \$730 million in wages and contributing \$2.2 billion in additional economic activity.

Still, if upholding Blue Laws like restrictions to Sunday hunting is a matter of faith, economics and money dim by comparison. What could ease such concerns is an unexpected cause-and-effect: States that allow Sunday hunting actually have the highest rates of church attendance in the country, according to the NSSF.

<https://www.grandviewoutdoors.com/news/prohibition-on-sunday-hunting-and-a-look-at-its-inexplicable-staying-power>

Article 3:

### **Pennsylvania doesn't need to allow Sunday hunting. This is why**

By: Vince Phillips September 15, 2019

As expected, a Sept. 10 House Game & Fisheries Committee hearing on whether to allow Sunday hunting in Pennsylvania showed strong contrasts between proponents and those seeking to preserve the status quo ban.

The Pennsylvania State Grange continues to oppose Sunday hunting consistently since our members voted for that position more than 10 years ago. The Grange hopes that this op-Ed will provide perspective on some of the issues raised by Sunday hunting's proponents.

#### **The Claim: There will be an economic boost into the PA and local economies if Sunday hunting takes place.**

Measuring the economic impact of hunting should be compared to the economic impact of other outdoor 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 the 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.

Its summary report issued in September 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; games 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.

The non-governmental Outdoor Industry Association, said that hunting generated \$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.

**The Claim: 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 Pennsylvania 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 PA. In 2014-15, 943,836 licenses were sold. The number dropped to 867,853 for the 2018 season.

That is a clear danger sign to the future of the Game Commission and to hunting in the Commonwealth.

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.

**The Claim: 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 vacation at Ocean City, New Jersey, a dry town. When we want an alcoholic beverage, we either consume off-island, or 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 shot by accident 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.

The 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 Pennsylvania-specific research although that would take more time.

Knowing the why's gives us the how's. 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.

The second action is more immediate.

The Senate must pass legislation (HB102) sponsored by Rep. David Maloney, R-Berks, which authorizes hunting and gun-safety education on school property after the school day. The bill passed the House on May 15 on a bipartisan vote of 143-46, and the Pennsylvania State Grange has supported the measure since it was introduced in January. 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.

<https://www.penncapital-star.com/commentary/pennsylvania-doesnt-need-to-allow-sunday-hunting-this-is-why-opinion/>