



Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen & Conservationists

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On the Front Lines – So You Can Be in the Woods, On the Water or At the Range!

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PFSC Opposes Legislative Attempts to Change or Set Wildlife Management Season Regulations, Including the Rifle Deer Season Opener

The Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen & Conservationists' members have always appreciated efforts that provide additional opportunities for Pennsylvania's hunter-conservationists, particularly our youth. The PFSC believes that changing the long-time Monday rifle deer season opener to a Saturday opener was a step in the right direction for offering increased opportunity, and we stand by this regulatory change.

PFSC's initial poll on the proposal for a Saturday opener was not supported by member clubs but was supported by individual members. Opposition referenced tradition. Later polling after the addition of Sunday was mostly positive, with 60% supporting the Saturday opener. Comments referenced looking forward to the full weekend of deer hunting and the added opportunity for many youth, college students and hunters unable to get time off work during the weekday. Feedback tells us that, though initially met with resistance, this change ultimately led to more opportunity that better serves the majority of our members, particularly our younger hunters. There's been no recent push or requests to re-poll or seek a reversal back to the Monday opener by our membership. Instead, we have heard stories from members who are excited to be able to hunt with their school and college-aged kids and some who, because of work priorities, are ecstatic to be able to hunt on opening day, something they hadn't been able to do prior to the change.

Change is hard and not often easily accepted by Pennsylvanians who cherish their traditions. We acknowledge that not everyone was happy with the Saturday rifle deer season opener change, and there are still some vocal opponents, but that doesn't mean it wasn't necessary or good.

Over the years, one thing that hasn't changed during PFSC polls – consistent adamant opposition to the legislature mandating seasons and bag limit issues via legislation. This includes the Saturday opener, Sunday hunting, harvesting antlerless deer by seniors, or any other attempt to legislate issues currently under the regulatory authority of our wildlife agency, including control of the agency's finances.

Regardless of personal opinions on what day someone prefers as the opening day of any season, **the Federation's membership is adamant that what we hunt or trap and when we hunt or trap (including the opening day and length of all seasons) are wildlife management regulatory issues dealing with seasons and bag limits. Thus, these decisions are and should remain under the regulatory authority of the subject matter experts—the Pennsylvania Game Commission.**

The PFSC believes that “Ballot Box Biology” IS the greatest threat to hunting and wildlife management here in Pennsylvania and across the nation. Anti-hunters use it to try to get their foot in the door, and now a few short-sighted disgruntled hunters who don’t like decisions made by the Game Commission, our wildlife experts, are asking legislators to set season dates and even control the agency’s purse strings.

History tells us this is NOT a smart move!

In a world in which our culture is increasingly removed from wild places, and hunters make up only 6% of the general population, “ballot box biology” is a terrifying monster and a slippery slope. Anti-hunters, special interest groups and simple ignorance can easily drown out our voice and sound wildlife management decisions and allow emotions, personal agendas and politics to rule.

The Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen and Conservationists supports the Game Commission's science-based and led resource-first model and process. The ability to set seasons and bag limits is a crucial part of the management process. Any other system or interference threatens the management of Pennsylvania’s wild birds, wild mammals, their habitats and our hunting heritage for current and future generations.

As older hunters age out of the license-buying system, the Commission must be able to utilize new ideas to keep the next generation of hunters engaged. The Federation’s board of directors understands that some of these changes may not always make everyone happy and may sometimes shake things up and cause us to create “new traditions.” **If these changes allow for maximum opportunity for Pennsylvania hunters without a negative impact on the resource, we must give it ample time to become the new tradition.** Based on feedback and the increased opportunity the Saturday opener has provided, PFSC believes this is one of those times.

Even if the legislature enlisted the help of the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to conduct an unbiased study on the topic, regardless of the outcome of the study, the PFSC would not seek or support a legislative mandate via legislation. If the results showed significant opposition to the Saturday opener, the Federation would seek consideration of a change by working directly with our wildlife resource experts, the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

The Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen & Conservationists opposes HB 495 and any legislative attempts to mandate wildlife management decisions via legislation.