

HB 1483 OVERVIEW: DEER MANAGEMENT & WILDLIFE HABITAT

Prepared by John Eveland

November 11, 2017

This *Deer Management and Wildlife Habitat, Rural Economies, and Accountability Bill* (HB 1483) represents a new, state-of-the-art forest and wildlife management approach for Pennsylvania that would serve the best interests of sportsmen, foresters, rural communities, the general public, and state conservation agencies – both PGC and DCNR. Implementation of the two-part plan would return upwards of 300,000 sportsmen as license-buying hunters; produce \$8.1 million in annual license-fee revenue plus another \$25-57 million in timber-sale revenue for the Game Commission; create \$42-97 million of annual timber sales for DCNR; stimulate \$1.16 billion of annual statewide economic growth for jobs, family businesses, and rural communities; generate \$92.5 million of annual tax revenue for state and local governments; and end a long-standing and growing schism that exists between sportsmen and the Game Commission. There is no cost to the General Fund or taxpayers.

I. Deer Management & Wildlife Habitat, Rural Communities, and Accountability Bill

House Bill 1483 includes seven (7) principal regulatory items:

- (1) Exclude public lands from the Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP).
- (2) End concurrent seasons by changing the length and start date of antlerless deer seasons.
- (3) Redesign Wildlife Management Units and issue antlerless deer permits on a county basis.
- (4) Remove antler restrictions for seniors.
- (5) Apply the maximum sustained yield method of game and deer management.
- (6) Direct broad-scale habitat enhancement on public lands for deer and other wildlife.
- (7) Establish a Forest and Wildlife Advisory Council to assist the Commission and Legislature.

The first four items would not directly increase deer numbers, but are primarily of social concern that are designed to return 200,000-400,000 license-buying sportsmen who have quit hunting during the past two decades. The fifth item would significantly increase the deer herd without harming the forest ecosystem, and a broad-reaching habitat enhancement plan would improve deer and grouse populations, game and nongame biodiversity, and the forest ecosystem to a better condition than had ever existed in the state. However, PGC has stated that it will not comply, and trusts that the Legislature lacks sufficient scientific expertise to verify compliance and hold the agency accountable. Therefore, a Forest and Wildlife Advisory Council is required to assist the Legislature with the necessary scientific and oversight capabilities to ensure PGC accountability.

II. Establish a Forest and Wildlife Advisory Council

An appointed seven-member Forest and Wildlife Advisory Council will represent the Legislature in performing the following specialized deer and wildlife management, accountability, and habitat enhancement duties:

- **Create a Forest and Wildlife Advisory Service.** The Service will conduct independent, scientific research and monitor the health of the forest and deer population toward assuring science-based, maximum-sustained-yield (MSY) management of Pennsylvania's deer herd and a healthy forest ecosystem. It would provide the Joint Legislature with the technical forest and wildlife data, sound-science recommendations, and scientific capabilities that are necessary to oversee PGC. This, along with passage of the MSY portion of the Deer Management Bill, would create a deer-management condition as good as had existed in the heydays of deer hunting in Pennsylvania – prior to herd reduction – without harming the forest ecosystem.
- **Wildlife Habitat Enhancement.** The Service will improve forest ecosystem health and wildlife habitat for the propagation of game and nongame animals on 6,000 square miles of public lands -- 1.5 million acres of state game lands and 2.5 million acres of state forest lands. This would increase populations of deer, grouse, and other game animals; improve nongame biodiversity for 60-100 species; and enhance wildlife management and recreational hunting to a level better than had ever existed in the Commonwealth. 5000M