

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: LOSS OF HUNTERS

QUESTION: If the PGC deer management program is working so well, why are we losing so many hunters in PA?

ANSWER: There's no doubt we're losing hunters in PA. The number of licenses sold speaks for itself. However, there are other verifiable numbers that point to the fact there may be factors other than deer management that account for the loss.

According to the PGC 2016 Annual Report, during the 2015-16 deer seasons, hunters took an estimated 315,813 deer, an increase from the 2014-15 harvest of 303,973. Hunter success was relatively stable in 2015-16: about 15 percent of all licensed deer hunters took a buck and about 24 percent of the antlerless licenses issued were used to take an antlerless deer. These success rates are similar to those in recent years. PA's deer management seems, at the least, to be stable.

If you check around, PA is not alone in the decline of hunters. News stories from varied media outlets over a long period of time in big and small hunting states across the nation bemoan the situation, and recruitment for replacement hunters is meeting with little success.

HUFFINGTON POST, December 4, 2016. The number of U.S. hunters is dropping about 10 percent a year with the greatest losses among the young. All they care about is social media, smartphones and video games. Ask young people about the decline and many will tell you hunting is just not cool. Kids think it's boring to sit in a tree for hours and have nothing walk by. For every 100 hunters who retire, only 62 take up the sport. The steepest hunter decline in Wisconsin, a big hunting state, is males 25-44—millennials. Overall, hunting is a “dying” sport with 33 states showing dramatic declines in hunting license sales. Hunters now constitute only six percent of the nation and are 89 percent male, 94 percent white and old. (Yes, the same demographic as the NRA.)

NJ.COM, December 07, 2016. It's part of a changing lifestyle in the Garden State--a declining number of hunters has been a trend for a

number of years. Many children who learned how to hunt from their parents are busy with other things -- school sports and activities, video games and TV among others. Parents, too, have less time to hunt and thus pass on their knowledge of the sport, officials say. In 1975, there were 241,522 hunting licenses issued by the state. In 2015 that number dropped to 146,152 -- a decline of almost 100,000, according to data from the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife. As of Dec. 1 of this year, only 124,280 hunting licenses had been issued. Nationally, the trend appears to be the same, according to the latest data available from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife--Associated Recreation.

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, November, 2012. *Number of Hunters on a Steady Decline.* The DNR says hunting has been on a steady decline here and across the nation. The DNR says there's more competition for people's free time and the biggest decline in hunting is happening in the 35 to 55 year old age range. The DNR says those hunters are weighing the costs versus benefits, is it worth their time? The DNR estimates by the year 2030, it could lose 1/3 of its hunters.

CBS NEWS, September 3, 2007. New figures from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service show that the number of hunters 16 and older declined by 10 percent between 1996 and 2006 - from 14 million to about 12.5 million. The drop was most acute in New England, the Rocky Mountains, and the Pacific states, which lost 400,000 hunters in that span. The primary reasons, experts say, are the loss of hunting land to urbanization plus a perception by many families that they can't afford the time or costs that hunting entails.

PRARIE STATE OUTDOORS-ILLINOIS, September 02, 2007. Hunting remains vibrant in many rural states — 19 percent of residents 16 and older hunted last year in Montana and 17 percent in North Dakota, compared with 1 percent in California, Connecticut, Massachusetts and New Jersey. Ray Schoenke, founder of the American Hunters and Shooters Association says the NRA's extreme positions have hurt the hunting movement. Soccer moms now believe hunters have made things more dangerous.

MACKINAC CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY Nov. 13, 2007.

Michigan's Deer Herd Flourishes While Hunters' Numbers Decline.

Not only has the absolute number of permits dropped, but so, too, has the proportion of Michigan residents who purchase one. A 2003 Harris Poll, for example, found that recreation requiring physical activity has declined in popularity. When asked to name their favorite leisure-time activities, the largest numbers of adults mentioned reading (35 percent) and watching TV (21 percent). Moreover, the median number of work hours has increased while leisure time has remained flat. For a generation accustomed to immediate gratification, hunting may simply require too much time and patience. The recreation economy has been hard-hit by the decline in hunting. Fewer hunters mean fewer hotel and cabin bookings; fewer restaurant orders; and fewer equipment purchases.

That last statement has support from Randy Santucci, a McKees Rocks resident and Chairman of the Board of Unified Sportsmen of PA, except with a different twist. Santucci said the latest figures confirm what he has long contended – that hunters are turned off by deer management in Pennsylvania. “I know a lot of things affect whether people buy licenses,” he said, “but in Pennsylvania, the strongest factor, no matter whatever else, is deer management. Santucci said he also talks to the proprietors of hunting-related businesses in counties such as Potter, Cameron and Clinton. “They tell me business has dropped way off, and they relate it strongly to the way deer are managed.” Based on his 'my gut tells me' comments, it would seem Santucci and the USP are hell-bent on blaming the PGC deer management program for the loss of hunters in PA. As a long-time critic of the PGC, that is his opinion--ignoring that the facts, statistics, and logic from across the nation say otherwise.

National Surveys of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife--Associated Recreation (FHWAR) for 2011 states the demographic change of an aging population will likely put continued downward pressure on (hunter and fisher) retention. This has already started for fishing, and the trend will likely continue, as the population surge of baby boomers moves past 50 years of age. If recruitment does not increase, it will

likely not offset the entire effect that the aging of the population will have on fishing participation (as well as hunting).

Loss of hunters is from a combination of factors--the greatest of these being the change in today's culture and the inevitable result of the circle of life.