



SAVING THE LAST GREAT PLACES ON EARTH

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**Testimony of David Sutherland – Director of Government Relations
Before the Environment Committee – March 9, 2009
In Support of Bill 6553
AAC Sunday Hunting**

I am here today on behalf of The Nature Conservancy's 23,000 members in Connecticut to express our support for Bill 6553 AAC Sunday Hunting. We recommend that the bill apply only to deer hunting.

Large populations of White-tailed deer have been identified as a primary threat to the health and diversity of our forested landscapes, especially in southern Connecticut. Historically, deer populations were controlled by wolves, humans and limitations of food supply. The eradication of wolves, the decreasing numbers of hunters and difficulties of hunting in many residential areas, the availability in winter of landscape shrubbery, and other changes to the landscape have allowed deer populations to dramatically increase in many areas. In southwest Connecticut, the density of deer ranges between 40 and 80 deer per square mile.

Densities in excess of 20 per mile can result in suppression of forest regeneration and reduction of biological and structural diversity. Conservancy staff have documented an alarming paucity of certain native wildflowers, and oak seedlings, in several of the state's most important large forest blocks. Numerous studies in Connecticut and the Northeast have confirmed the effects of overbrowsing on our forest habitats.

Over the past 15 years, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has made a number of changes to the regulations regarding deer harvest that affect two of its twelve deer management zones, southwest (Zone 11) and southern Connecticut (Zone 12). As a result of these changes, the deer harvest in these two zones has nearly doubled but it is still not sufficient to significantly reduce the abundance of deer.

The DEP is considering a variety of ideas to increase the harvest of deer, including making it more convenient for hunters to donate venison because many hunters are able to harvest more deer than they need for themselves; permitting Sunday hunting; and providing incentives to harvest antlerless deer.

In Zone 11, nearly two-thirds, and in Zone 12, over one-quarter, of the harvest is by bow. Approximately 35% of the total harvest occurs on Saturdays when most hunters are currently available. A survey of hunters in Greenwich, CT revealed that most would take advantage of hunting on Sundays. Even if applied to just archery in Zones 11 and 12, Sunday hunting would significantly increase the total harvest.

We would also support measures that would increase the number of deer tags granted to hunters and provide incentives for hunters to take additional does. This could include rewarding these hunters with additional buck tags and making it easier for hunters to donate venison by providing funding for the cost of preparing venison for use at food banks and soup kitchens.