Testimony for 3/22 public hearing-- OPPOSE HB 6654 (bear hunting) and OPPOSE HB 5412 (Sunday hunting)

Dear Senator Meyer, Representative Gentile, and Honorable Members of the Environment Committee,

Please accept this as my testimony (for public hearing held on 3/22/13) in OPPOSITION to a provision within HB 6654, AAC Sportsmen Related Revisions to the General Statutes. I oppose the provision that would open up a bear hunting season. I also write in OPPOSITION to HB 5412, AAC Deer Management Programs on Private Property—I am opposed to Sunday hunting.

I oppose bear hunting (HB 6654) because:

· I treasure the state's black bears and do not want to see them hunted and orphaned by trophy hunters. Instead, I ask that you maintain protections for Connecticut's bears.

· Bear conflicts typically occur in residential areas, and not where hunting takes place. Trying to manage conflicts in one place by killing bears in another is completely counter-productive - and likely to result in orphaned cubs and much public outcry.

· There are highly effective and humane solutions for managing bear conflicts, such as removing attractants (e.g., accessible garbage, bird feeders), or using proven aversive conditioning techniques to keep bears from areas they're not wanted. (Note: Initial aversive conditioning is usually done by trained professionals). Public education is the key to managing bear-human conflicts – killing bears is not the answer.

· There is no scientific rationale or necessity for instituting a hunt. The exact bear population is unknown; further, any bear population risk assessment would take several years to complete.

I oppose Sunday hunting on private land (HB 5412) because:

· Other states that have opened limited forms of Sunday hunting in one legislative session have immediately proposed a complete repeal of the Sunday hunting prohibition in the following legislative session (e.g., New Jersey, Maryland).

· The public does not want hunting on Sundays, and lifting the prohibition will jeopardize public safety and diminish outdoor opportunities for non-consumptive users.

· Sunday hunting will endanger public safety. Arrows and bullets know no boundaries and pose public safety hazards to anyone who is in a large radius of the hunter. Further, domestic animals, such as dogs and horses, are sometimes mistaken for game animals. Thus, expanding recreational opportunities for hunters diminishes opportunities for hikers, horseback riders, bird watchers, and many others.

· Only 1% of Connecticut residents hunt. Wildlife watchers, hikers, mountain bikers, dog walkers, and horseback riders outnumber hunters in Connecticut by 29 to 1, and represent a growing demographic, while hunters are shrinking in numbers (39% decrease over ten years, per latest USFWS survey). Further, wildlife watchers outspend hunters by 7.4 to 1, contributing around $510 million dollars to our state's economy annually (Source: The United States Fish and Wildlife Service). The overwhelming majority of people do not participate in hunting, and have only one day a week during hunting season when they can use the outdoors safely without the threat of bullets or arrows. Hunters already have four and a half months to hunt deer each year in Connecticut – more than 100 days of recreational deer hunting at six days each week. Farmers can obtain deer depredation permits to kill deer throughout the year. There is no compelling reason to disrupt this longstanding tradition to appease a tiny minority.

· Hunting will not reduce Lyme disease risk. The Black-legged tick has well over 100 hosts, including all mammals, many popular songbirds, and even lizards – thus the removal of one host isn't enough to suppress the Lyme-disease causing tick (Ostfeld, 2011, Jordan et al, 2007). In addition, research indicates that hunting may put the public more at risk by creating disease "hot spots" (S. Perkins et al, 2006, Ginsberg and Zhioua, 1999; Ostfeld, 2011)--Ticks questing for a large host are more likely to end up on people and dogs after deer numbers have been reduced. There's a good reason why the CDC and health authorities don't recommend hunting to control Lyme disease – because it doesn't work. Sunday hunting won't help to curb the spread of this devastating disease, despite the claims of certain interest groups.

· Sunday hunting will not resolve deer-related problems. One of the main problems with trying to manage deer numbers through any kind of hunting -- as repeatedly cited during a Smithsonian Institute conference on Deer Overabundance (McShea et. al 1997) -- is that deer are highly prolific, and their high reproductive rate can quickly compensate for declines in their population. The net result is that their numbers "bounce back" after hunting season.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours truly,

Sam Aukland
PO Box 172,
Aldgate, South Australia 5154
AUSTRALIA