

COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT

TESTIMONY: RAISED BILL HB-5080

AN ACT CONCERNING DEER MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS ON PRIVATE PROPERTY AND AUTHORIZING BOW AND ARROW HUNTING ON PRIVATE PROPERTY ON SUNDAY

Submitted by Edward Parker

I am testifying in support of HB-5080.

In 1949, when the Sunday hunting prohibition was enacted, Connecticut did not have a deer problem. In fact seeing a deer anywhere in the state was rare. Today the deer population is estimated to be 126,000. The rapid growth of the deer population is attributed to the development of land across the state which provided ideal habitat for deer and an abundant and nutritious food supply; mild winter weather and until recently limited hunting opportunities. The population density established by DEEP for a healthy and sustainable deer population in balance with the ecosystem is less than or equal to 20 deer per square mile. There are 13 deer management zones in Connecticut. Only five zones are at goal. The other 8 zones, which include 123 towns out of 169 have an overabundant deer population. Three of the 8 zones have deer densities of 20 to 32 deer per square mile. Three zones have a population of 32 to 56 deer per square mile and two zones have more than 56 deer per square mile. As the deer population grew DEEP implemented measures to increase the deer harvest to slow population growth. Those measures, including longer seasons, more tags, outreach to private landowners and incentives for hunters have been effective. However, to achieve population goals statewide, hunters need additional opportunities to hunt on weekend days on private property in the overpopulated management zones. Extension of the current hunting season is not practical. The best option is to allow hunting on Sunday during the current bow hunting season. This will add 16 days of hunting when most hunters have the day off. Harvest data collected for many years by DEEP indicates that the number of deer killed on weekend days is more than twice the number killed on weekdays. Also, hunting on Sunday in 42 other states has proven to be effective in increasing the deer harvest. Connecticut's bow hunters harvest 50% of all deer taken during the hunting season

Deer hunting with a bow and arrows is safe. It does not jeopardize public safety. There has never been an incident involving bow hunting that has resulted in injury to a non- hunter since bow hunting was established in Connecticut over 35 years ago.

Bow and arrow hunting does not limit outdoor opportunities on private property. Hunters must obtain written permission from the landowner to hunt. Therefore, private landowners determine what recreational activities they will allow on their property. If the landowner prefers hunting over other outdoor activities it is their choice. It is very likely that hunting on Sunday will occur on private property that is already open to hunters.

The hunter is the most effective and efficient predator. Given the opportunity to hunt and with access to private property, hunters can kill enough deer to achieve and maintain deer population goals statewide. I encourage committee members to read the December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013 Time magazine cover story and the November 3-4, 2012 Wall Street Journal article, titled "America Gone Wild". Both articles address the problem with overabundant wildlife populations and the role of the hunter.

The physical impact of over abundant deer population is well documented in Connecticut and includes deer/vehicle collisions, crop damage, landscape damage on private property , habitat destruction which affects fauna and flora, and a high incidence of Lyme disease.

Every year the economic impact of an overabundant deer population in Connecticut likely exceeds 100 million dollars. In just one town –Redding, deer damage in 2010 was estimated to be approximately 4.5 million dollars. Redding is just 1 of 123 towns that fall within the 8 deer management zones that exceed population goals.

In summary, it is time for Connecticut to address the deer problem. Further delay will only exacerbate the consequences of an overpopulation of deer.

For those who oppose any expansion of hunting ask them what specific measures they would implement to reduce the deer population and to describe the proven effectiveness of those measures

I urge the environment committee to pass this bill. Further, I respectfully request that the committee co-chairs give this bill a high priority and strongly recommend to the House and Senate majority leaders that a vote on HB-5080 be taken by the full House and Senate.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.