

# 2019 AND 2020 SATURDAY DEER OPENERS.... TWO WRONGS DON'T MAKE IT RIGHT!

Written by Randy Santucci

Last year I ran a full-page ad in this publication titled "Hijacking our Monday Opener" Many hunters voluntarily sent money to help me pay for that ad, they as I, were very upset about going to a Saturday opener. As it turns out, that position was not a fear of change as claimed by some, but solidly identifying multiple circumstances now validated since the Saturday opener has happened. Letters to the Editor in this publication have continued still today, wanting the Monday opener reinstated.... This has not gone away, and the wound is still raw in the hearts and minds of hundreds of thousands of Pa. deer hunters and rural businesses. I hear over and over the Saturday opener does not have the "feel" and is far too "rushed" coming off of Thanksgiving. Again today, hunters and businesses contacted me to write this follow up article comparing what unfolded to my predictions from last year. The damages that have resulted, or benefits that never came to be, are now documented.

- The PGC 2017 hunter-survey identified 65% of hunters opposed changing the Monday opener.
- 82% of direct contacts to the PGC by hunters opposed going to the Saturday opener.
- The majority of hunters clearly did not want this!
- Evidence presented by two PGC staff professionals regarding the Saturday opener revealed that it would **not** be significantly beneficial.
- You would assume a change of this magnitude would have had extensive research and data to support it, nothing is farther from the truth. An over half-century weekend event steeped in tradition and economic benefits was whimsically eliminated.
- The PGC assumed a Saturday opener would benefit college student hunters. The majority of students surveyed by the PGC staff **supported the Monday opener!** Students stated they would miss class for a lot less reasons than the deer opener, it was a non-issue to them.
- Another PGC board theory, was that the Saturday opener would benefit younger hunters entering the work force, this was also disproven. **Only 12 more licenses were sold statewide in the 22-34-year-old age group.**
- Youth license sales again declined in 2019 with the Saturday opener implemented.
- Resident adult sales continued their decline in 2019. The paltry overall increase in sales (.4%) was made up of 80% non-resident hunting licenses. This was likely from the massive changes in the 2019 bear seasons. 27,000 more bear licenses were sold! This success is again evident with a 17% increase in current 2020 bear license sales....
- One PGC commissioner originally floated out the Saturday opener idea. He subsequently changed his position from evaluating strong hunter opposition. He resigned from the board following a 5-3 board vote to change the opener. Not because the change was made, but he could no longer risk his professional integrity serving on a board that could/would not recognize overwhelming evidence in one direction and vote to go the other.
- A popular Saturday small game and turkey hunting day was taken away
- That Friday and Saturday were popular bird farm hunting days. Game bird raisers sales were negatively impacted from losing these two popular days
- Having only one day (Friday) after Thanksgiving, the most traveled family holiday of the year as identified by AAA and the TSA, the Saturday opener has created a "rushed" situation for many hunters and their families.
- There were many negative economic impacts. Small town businesses across the state where many camps exist, lost the strong patronage of that historic weekend army of hunters. **Many businesses identified that weekend as their**

**top sales weekend of the year. There is no longer opportunity for last minute or impulse purchases in that weekend..... This was a sucker punch and sales plummeted!**

- 10 businesses I randomly surveyed after the Saturday opener who were spaced across the state, including 9 sporting goods stores and a restaurant, **collectively they lost \$360,000 of sales that weekend.** They validated those losses from their historical sales records. Imagine the statewide impact!
- The Saturday opener forced hunters away from last minute purchases of food and hunting equipment. Camp hunters that reside in populated areas, have no choice now other than to shop local or on-line before Saturday
- First responders took advantage of the heavy influx of hunters in their small camp laden communities. **The Saturday opener caused large revenue losses to many small fire departments fund-raising events that weekend.**
- A large gathering of hunters near Altoona Pa. (280 at one event) were polled. The hand count against changing the opener was 265 against. That average mirrored other smaller club surveys taken
- Some hunters are required to work, especially those in retail that (black) Friday.
- Hunters lost the weekend for last minute scouting and preparation. The time to mark trails for pre-daylight entry into the woods or tree stand inspection etc. has safety implications.
- We now will lose the perception of hunting importance to the general public from schools that previously closed Monday to accommodate our sport. That Monday will now most likely be bargained back into a school day moving forward.
- Camp/seasonal home hunters lost needed time for travel, and to open camps or possibly address any problems.
- The Pennsylvania traveling hunter demographic makes up 25-35% of our state's deer hunters. Most again hate the Saturday opener, comments of "too rushed" and the opener has lost its "feel".
- This highly anticipated 6 day run from Thanksgiving to the following Tuesday for hunters was arbitrarily eliminated. There is no other game species opening day structure that remotely rivals what this weekend was for many Pennsylvania hunters and businesses.
- That Saturday is small business Saturday, putting hunters in the woods on that day was an irresponsible unneeded conflict with that state initiative.
- Both Democratic Chairmen of the House and Senate G&F Committees opposed the Saturday opener.
- Senator Dan Laughlin Republican Chairman of the SG&F Committee supported the Saturday opener. With the identified negative economic impacts and little benefit to hunting license sales, where does he stand today? Senior Republican Senator Scott Hutchinson sent a strong letter of Saturday opener opposition to the PGC.
- No cost/benefit analysis was done. Even the EPA has guidelines for economic analysis. Their Guidelines provide guidance on analyzing the benefits, costs, and economic impacts of regulations and policies, including assessing the distribution of costs and benefits among various segments of the population. 5 of 8 PGC commissioners voted to change something that unquestionably impacted a large segment of our hunters and state economics with no sound scientific assessment.
- The bond that was cultivated within hunters that weekend of camaraderie, preparation, strategizing, around their dinner tables, campfires, within all hunting families, whether their base camp was from home or a hunting camp was priceless. This is the experience "feel" so many now miss.

**Once again, all the data driven information provided above was presented with documented evidence at the HG&F hearing in Charleroi last February. There has been no refutation of that testimony.**

There was no appreciable license sales increase last year that can be linked solidly to the Saturday opener. This year Covid has driven hunting and fishing licenses upward, the PGC recognizes this circumstance.

How the Saturday opener ever was passed is unexplainable when the facts are known.

Knowing the facts, the question is can we as sportsmen and sportswomen help our small-town businesses and sporting goods stores that we care about, take the stick out of the eye of hundreds of thousands of camp hunters and restore an over half century of hunting tradition. Put back the quality time with family finalizing Thanksgiving issues before having to shift our attention to deer hunting. The best decision brought forth then and now by many hunters, was to leave the opener on Monday, so to not cause the multitude of hardships, and put the newly approved Sunday in the next weekend creating a two-day weekend hunting scenario and a 13-day continuous run of deer hunting starting on the traditional Monday opener. The Saturday opener has been identified for future review by the PGC Board of Commissioners, **hunters and businesses they need your input!**

Email the PGC commissioners at [pgccomments@pa.gov](mailto:pgccomments@pa.gov)

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Care of The Board of Commissioners

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