

Discrimination?

By Randy Santucci

Our turkey population today, although slightly down, is still within the range of 200,000 and 225,000 birds as has been estimated by the PGC for the last 16 years. Today's estimate by the agency is 212,000. The PGC now wants to eliminate rifles for fall turkey hunters to lower harvest numbers...huh? Eliminating a specific type of firearm for this seemingly knee-jerk reasoning is a slippery slope, and dovetails more with gun control than scientific game management. Purist turkey hunters may disapprove of harvesting a turkey long range with a rifle, but there is a reason, need, and yes sporting enjoyment for many using a rifle in the fall.

Harvest numbers were always regulated by seasons and bag limits, this departure will again discriminate against many hunters unnecessarily, we have seen this in recent board decisions. Rifle turkey hunting is partaken by many older hunters that have health issues and can no longer play the run and bust up a flock game. Running with a firearm is never a safe practice, especially for older hunters for many reasons. Many older, handicapped, or injury disabled hunters need the benefit of sporting optics and the extended effective range of a rifle, particularly in rough terrain. These hunters can have difficulty crouching down on their haunches or sitting on the ground to work a bird within shotgun range. For them, getting down can be difficult, and getting back up worse!...you get the picture! Our older hunters and others are again being forgotten. The ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) would certainly frown on this reduction of opportunity for people (hunters) of whom that law represents. Traditions and preferences of older hunters are fast being removed by fragmentary reasoning. A recent issue of Pa. Game News, which by the way is (The official publication of the agency) has an article titled "Perfect Combination" identifying the value and use of the shotgun/rifle O/U combination for turkey hunting. This Game News article puts into print a long standing enjoyed method of turkey hunting, while the official leadership takes it away? Elimination of the rifle for fall turkey hunting will disenfranchise more older hunters once again, just like the Saturday deer opener did.

Why does this recent proposal parallel the deer opener change? It too is unsupported by sufficient data to validate a radical disenfranchisement of a segment of hunters. Another PGC board theory departing from tradition will again do more harm than good. The PGC BOC Saturday opener theory discriminated against our older hunters that make up the majority of Pa. hunters today, the average age of Pa. hunters is around 56 years old. Of course, some hunters like the Saturday start, equally hunters liked the Monday start that worked for over 60 years. Most hunters did not see the commissioner's working group meetings when this topic was being discussed in late 2018 and 2019, I kept the videos as proof. When it was brought to the commissioner's attention that their own PGC 2017 hunter survey revealed 65% of hunters opposed changing the opening day of the rifle deer season, one commissioner stated "well that's just the old guys" a collective nod followed. A direct inference that many older hunters liked the Monday yet their opinion didn't matter, this was no oversight! I found that comment back then hard to accept, age dismissive, as well as age discriminatory toward the long-standing sportsmen/women who funded the agency all their lives. Our seasoned hunters and many others are victims of the narrow-minded position "increased opportunity is always good". Pursuing a youth demographic that doesn't even exist, has proven a failure as license sales steadily decline as opportunity has steadily been increased over decades. Recent proof of this is youth sales have continued declining during the two years of the new Saturday opener.

A primary indicator of hunter participation is gaged through license sales. When the increase of archery license sales in 2020 was over 30,000, and the total of all license sales only increased by around 26,000, this category alone proves for the second year, there has been no notable increase in hunter participation linked to the discriminatory Saturday deer opener. COVID drove up 2020 license sales from everyone seeking the safety of the outdoors. This was acknowledged by the PGC and the PFBC, it obscured the second year of Saturday opener failure. Thus, elimination of using a rifle as the firearm of choice for many fall turkey hunters, will again be another bad decision that will bear no fruit to benefit our sport's participation.

Age "cancel culture" is within these decisions whether realized or not. The PGC should understand you should always treat your new friends like your old friends, some are silver and some are gold, both are valuable.