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By John C. Street



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The Outpost

By John Street

If you've been following the brouhaha over the deer management program, you probably think – based on what you've read recently in the outdoor press – that a resolution is at hand, thanks to the hard work and diligence of Rep. David Levdansky (D-Allegheny). Hallelujah!

For over two years, it's seemed like this controversial program was about to implode. First there was the lawsuit filed by the Unified Sportsmen of Pennsylvania that ended up in - and is still winding its way through - the Commonwealth Court and then there's all the talk about an "audit" of the Pennsylvania Game Commission. And, finally, droning along in the background, there's the PGC's long-standing request for a license fee increase that seems to have everyone upset.

Now we appear to be on the eve of having an independent "Examination of the Pennsylvania Game Commission's Deer Management Program" performed. Within the year, we're being told, all this controversy will be behind us.

Nothing, as the following will explain, could be further from the truth.

As a backdrop for what you are about to read, please remember that hunting is one of the largest businesses in Pennsylvania . According to a report commissioned by the National Shooting Sports Foundation, Keystone State hunters – nearly all of whom are deer hunters - spend \$1.7 billion every year in the conduct of their favorite pastime and, as a direct consequence, support 28,000 jobs and add 214 million tax dollars to the state's treasury.

Given this enormous financial impact (and especially in light of the decline in license sales from nearly 1.2 million to just under 800,000 in the last couple decades), it would be logical to assume whatever the Pennsylvania Game Commission did in relation to managing whitetail deer, its prescription would be deferential to this economic reality. Remarkably, however, this logic was apparently lost on the PGC.

It could be argued the first hint of the troubles we're now experiencing surfaced at a PGC board of commissioners meeting back in October of 1997 when then Commissioner Sam Dunkle said, "I firmly believe one of the first steps to be taken in regaining the credibility that this agency once held is to have a thorough evaluation by an outside...agency."

Within a year of Commissioner Dunkle's pronouncement, but with remarkably little fanfare, the PGC was undergoing an external evaluation conducted by the Management Assistance Team of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. And when the final report (dubbed the "MAT Report") was completed in July of 1999, Commissioner Dunkle's call for an evaluation seemed prescient. "Currently," the MAT Report advised, "in a number of ways, the [Pennsylvania Game Commission] is in the dysfunctional category."

And the authors of the MAT report didn't mince words in their final conclusion. The Pennsylvania Game Commission, the report stated bluntly, "has maintained a strong

[law] enforcement orientation, but has not achieved concurrently strong orientation for professional wildlife biology."

Given this stinging indictment, one might rightly expect the leadership of the Pennsylvania Game Commission to have gone to Hades and back to incorporate sound biology in its deer management program. But, as the controversy that soon erupted over the program revealed, it was samo-samo on Elmerton Avenue .

Rather than putting the mechanics of the deer management program on hold until it had the whole biology matter firmly in hand, the PGC's leadership employed the Wildlife Management Institute to create a public relations campaign "to increase dialogue and communication leading to the development of informed consent on deer management."

And then, in 1999, it authorized the creation of a stand-alone Deer Management Section and drafted the high-profile Dr. Gary Alt to run it, immediately sending the deer doctor on a statewide speaking tour to "inform and educate the public about managing deer and management challenges."

Unbeknownst to most people, though, at the very same time the PGC was kicking-off its deer management program, the National Audubon Society was awarded a \$3.5 million grant from the Pew Foundation to establish the "Heritage Forest Campaign."

Interestingly, as a little research revealed (see www.unwatch.com), the "Heritage Forest Campaign" is one small component of the much larger "Agenda 21," the operating manual of the United Nations' campaign to achieve a "New World Order." This just might explain why the National Audubon Society (as you will discover further on in this treatise) and its enablers at the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources are prominent players in this debacle.

Suffice to say, the deer management program was not created in a vacuum. And it most certainly was not created to nurture the economic force that spends \$1.7 billion every year, sustains 28,000 jobs and contributes \$214 million in state taxes.

With all the vitriol directed towards the Pennsylvania Game Commission, no one was really surprised when, in September of 2007, the Unified Sportsmen of Pennsylvania "filed a petition in Commonwealth Court to stop doe hunting in Pennsylvania until such time as the PGC could scientifically substantiate how many deer there actually were in the state." But, these sportsmen weren't the only people, or the first, to take action.

According to information obtained from the Pennsylvania Legislatures' Game and Fisheries Committee, on June 14, 2007 , John Eveland submitted what was to be the first proposal to perform an examination of the PGC's deer management program. And he was imminently qualified to do the job; by profession a forester, a wildlife biologist, and an ecologist. Eveland received his education at Penn State University where he also served on the faculty.

More to the point, though, he conducted the first statewide research on black bears and authored the bear management plan used by the PGC to this day.

So extensive was Eveland's work that Dr. Alt referred to him in a Pittsburgh Tribune Review article as "the bear man ... a legend ... bigger than life as far as I was concerned." Interestingly, Dr. Alt, who everyone thought of as Pennsylvania 's original bear biologist, was a high school student when Eveland was doing this work. And Eveland didn't stop with bears.

He also conducted the first research on Pennsylvania 's elk herd, discovering in the process the brainworm disease that had, for nearly 75 years, prevented the herd from expanding. And, just as he had with bears, Eveland also wrote Pennsylvania 's original management plan for elk.

Having conducted the original statewide research and authored the still-in-use management plans for two of the state's three big game mammals, it's understandable why his proposal to examine the deer management program was met with a great deal of enthusiasm at the Game and Fisheries Committee and why it was immediately put on the docket for funding. Mysteriously, though, Eveland never received the funding he was promised.

Ironically, on May 8, 2007 , Melody Zullinger, the executive director of the Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs, coauthored a letter to the Game and Fisheries Committee asking it to refrain from making any decisions regarding the Pennsylvania Game Commission "until an audit is completed of the PGC's deer management methods." Her coauthor - surprise, surprise - was none other than Dr. Tim Schaeffer from the Pennsylvania Audubon Society, the state affiliate of the very same organization financed by the Pew Foundation to develop the "Heritage Forest

Campaign."

Coincidentally, at the same time Rep. Ed Staback, Chairman of the Game and Fisheries Committee, was scrambling to piece together funding for the Eveland proposal, Rep. David Levdansky (from the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee) and that same Dr. Tim Schaeffer showed up at least twice in chairman Staback's office, attempting to persuade him to dump the Eveland proposal in favor of one they – you probably won't be surprised to learn – just happened to have already prepared.

And just in case you haven't figured this out yet, the proposal this didactic duo was attempting to foist off on the Game and Fisheries Committee was craftily designed to reach a favorable conclusion for continuing the deer management program. This, of course, would have given the PGC cover to tell all the nay-sayers to go pound salt. Alas, however, the political winds had not yet reached tempest stage and Rep. Staback refused to participate in this charade.

Seeing he was getting nowhere with Staback, Levdansky launched an effort to conduct the audit of the deer management program through his own Legislative Budget and Finance Committee and danged if he didn't, as reported in a Pittsburgh Tribune Review article, pull it off. Anyone who read that article would have believed Levdansky was the best thing to happen to deer hunting since the advent of the telescopic sight. But in reality, as we now know, he was about to sell the users of those scopes down the river.

There's a big black information hole between that enlightening Pittsburgh Tribune Review article and today but one relevant fact escaped from the vortex. Early in 2008, Sen. John Pippy, chairman of the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee, sent Levdansky's version of the audit back to Staback for review. And this time, no doubt sensing a shift in the political winds, Staback approved it and gave Levdansky the go-ahead under the authority of House Resolution 642.

In ricky-tick order, then, a request for proposal (containing the Levdansky/Schaefer language) was sent out and, according to a person who was following the process, at least two bids were received; one from the Wildlife Management Institute (who had already done a nifty little public relations campaign for the PGC back in 1999) and John Eveland (who really hadn't done much except, on yea, conduct the research and prepare the management plan for the other two big game species in Pennsylvania).

As you might imagine, the people who were aware of these proposals were dumbfounded when they read in the February 22, 2009, edition of the Pittsburgh Tribune Review that "the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee ... could find no one - employed or retired – willing to undertake the study because the subject of deer management in Pennsylvania is seen across the country as being particularly vicious and caustic." No one, that is, except the PGC's old public relations buddies at the Wildlife Management Institute and -- perhaps the newspaper just forgot to mention -- John Eveland. Guess who got the contract?

Whether this shenanigan was the result of legally contestable malfeasance or simply an example of political mischief is unknown and probably unknowable. Whichever it is, though, Rep. David Levdansky, Sen. John Pippy and Rep. Ed Staback appear to be into it up to their ears.

And if it is allowed to proceed, Pennsylvania hunters will be no closer to having an independent and honest examination of the deer management program than they were on that day back in 1999 when the Wildlife Management Institute was hired by the PGC "to increase dialogue and communication leading to the development of informed consent on deer management."

Even more frightening, though, if it goes unchallenged, Pennsylvania's deer hunters will continue to be unwitting participants in their own demise, victims of the United Nation's quest for a "New World Order," brought to them courtesy of the National Audubon Society and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

But perhaps, as this treatise suggests, that was the real goal of the deer management program all along.

John Street is an inquisitive contrarian who writes, frequently with humor, about current events in fish and wildlife research as well as the ethical and societal issues that affect the outdoor life. He can be contacted at johnstreet@windstream.net

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