Is it really deer?
Using focus groups to explore the causes of lapsed hunting license buying in Pennsylvania

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Photos: Joe Kosack
Hunter Age at Date of Purchase

Age of Hunter at Time of Purchase

Quantity Sold

- 2009 - 213 - (946006)
- 2010 - 213 - (919985)
Survey of Lapsed Hunters

- Bought a License in PALS in 2009-10, but did not for the 2010-11 season
- Five thousand resident and non-resident lapsed hunters were sampled
- Hunters who purchased in 2009-10 but not for 2010-11: 169,543
  - 17.8% of total 2009-10 licenses
  - 1,968 surveys were used in the analysis
- What influenced them to not purchase a license in 2010-11?
  - 30 factors listed
- What would motivate them to purchase again?
  - 12 factors listed
Factors that most “strongly influenced” this decision

- Not enough game (23.1%)
- Amount of personal free time (16.5%)
- Cost of additional licenses (14.3%)
- Work obligations (13.9%)
Factors that would most “strongly encourage” lapsed hunters to start hunting again

- Higher game populations (32.3%)
- Opportunity to hunt on Sunday (30.0%)
- Having more personal time to hunt (25.8%)
- Being asked by a child (or grandchild) to take them hunting (23.3%)
Focus Groups

- Not Enough Game
  - Which species?
    - Anecdotal information for the last decade suggests deer
- Cost of license
  - General Resident License is $20.70
    - Includes small game (pheasants), antlered deer, and turkey
- Access to land
  - Discuss how they felt about public and private land
- Amount of personal free time
  - Is it amount of actual free time or priorities on how it is used?
  - Explore its relationship to Sunday hunting
Focus Groups

- Focus groups conducted in 2012
- Locations chosen based upon where hunters were lapsing
- Six Focus Groups in four locations
  - Trout Run, PA
  - Harrisburg, PA
    - One youth (15-22) and one adult group
  - Erie, PA
  - Cranberry Township, PA
    - One youth (15-22) and one adult group
Focus Group Information

- Discussion guide was used for each group
  - Allows for consistency in data collection
  - Discussion guide created in collaboration with Responsive Management Staff

- Each group contained 10-12 individuals
  - Lasted two hours
  - Recorded for analysis and transcription purposes
  - Monetary incentives and food provided
Focus Groups
Reasons for Lapsing

- Work or family obligations
- Financial Constraints
- Overcrowded and unsafe State Game Lands (SGL)
- Belief that hunting regulations are unnecessarily confusing and complex
  - Season dates
  - WMU delineations
  - Point restrictions
Focus Groups
Not Enough Game?

- Belief that deer have decreased in the last decade
  - Perception that the deer population is too low in areas where they hunt
  - Crucial “make-or-break” deciding factor in license purchase
- They see deer in suburban areas where they live, work, shop but not where they hunt
  - Frustrating when they see deer in places where they can’t hunt
- Understand why the deer population has been reduced
  - When they have limited time, not enough to make them want to hunt

Photo: Hal Korber
Focus Groups
Types of Land

- Evenly split on where they hunt: use both public and private land
  - Have a clear preference for private land
  - Believe that SGL’s had more opportunity for turkey, bear, and small game hunting
    - Less opportunity for deer
  - Concerns about safety and crowding on public land made them less desirable

- Agreed that private land provide optimal hunting opportunities:
  - Accessibility
  - Better habitat
  - Safety
  - Solitude

Photo: Jacob Dingel
Focus Groups
License Buying Behavior

Three types of lapsed hunters

- Most had bought licenses regularly until recently
  - Did not hunt in 2012 because of time constraints:
    - Work or school obligations
    - Family obligations
- Casual Hunters
  - Usually hunted because of a specific invitations from family members
    - Common among youth and women hunters
- PGC-related
  - Negative experiences with WCO’s
  - Lack of deer but abundance of people on SGL’s
  - Confusion about PGC licenses and tags
Focus Groups
Sunday Hunting

- Acknowledged it as one of only two free days available for hunting
- Often busy on Saturdays with other activities
  - Frequently mentioned by youth hunters who participate in school sports on Saturdays
  - Critical part of decision making process for license purchase for deer-only hunters who only get Saturdays to hunt
  - Acknowledge problems could result with private landowners and some would be happy with Sunday hunting only on public land
Focus Groups
Hunting in the Future?

- Large majority said they planned to hunt in PA in the future
  - Depended upon certain factors:
    - Available free time
    - Increased confidence in the PA deer population
    - Viable hunting opportunities and access on suitable land
- Youth acknowledged that participation in other activities may compete with hunting
  - Would like to hunt again & hoped to maintain involvement in the sport
  - Academic and career goals may have a higher priority
**Next Steps**

- Results from lapsed hunter survey and focus groups made it clear that reasons are complicated
- More research needed about hunting motivations
  - Active hunter survey in progress (purchased a license 4 or 5 times out of 5 years)
  - Less active hunter survey planned (1-3 years purchased out of 5 years)
  - New lapsed hunter questionnaire will be written using results from focus group and hunting motivation surveys
Questions?