

Virginia Horse Council Position Paper Regarding Sunday Hunting on Public Lands

Position: The Virginia Horse Council opposes expanding any form of hunting with a gun, firearm or other weapon to public lands on Sundays, which will adversely impact the safe use of public lands for multiple user groups including horseback riders. In fact all groups, which engage in outdoor recreation, such as hikers, bikers, bird watchers and other outdoor enthusiasts will be impacted.

Background:

- With the exception of the month of June, July and a portion of August there is always some game to be hunted in Virginia.
- Prohibiting Sunday hunting, on public lands, is an equitable use of the Commonwealth's resources on the weekend. Equestrians and other outdoor users have curtailed their activities and adjusted their schedules to enjoy the trails on public land on Sundays. Hunters can still use the same lands on Saturday, as well as the other five days of the week. The VHC is concerned that in opening up public lands for Sunday hunting, the number of individuals concurrently using the land will greatly increase in number and the various groups may well come into conflict with each other.
- The current law prohibiting Sunday hunting on public lands provides bikers, hikers, bird watchers and all outdoor enthusiasts, with the ability to enjoy Virginia's scenic trails and outdoors. To put it simply, two user groups (hunters vs. other outdoor users) with vastly different purposes using the same property at the same time can create conditions that can lead to dangerous consequences for all parties involved.
- The VHC is not opposed to hunting, hunters or wildlife management. In fact many of our members are hunters themselves. However, we wish to preserve one day a week for the majority of the citizens of the Commonwealth who choose to ride, hike, and bike or otherwise enjoy the outdoors. We feel this is a safety issue, not an issue in which one group's rights trumps another.
- Sunday hunting on public land could result in a substantial increase in the use of public lands for which such entities may not be prepared, both physically and financially, for increases in users. Additionally, there is the issue of how hunting areas will be effectively segregated to preclude multiple users from coming into contact with each other.
- Currently there are several organized Virginia foxhunting groups which still hunt on Sunday. Also, numerous horse organizations produce organized trail rides as benefits to raise funds for their various charitable ventures on Sundays. Sunday hunting, on public lands, would adversely affect these activities.

Fact from the American Horse Council Foundation Economic Impact Study of 2017:

- Virginia ranks 13th in the nation in terms of horse populations.
- 1 million Virginia household contain horse enthusiasts.
- The equine industry's direct contribution to GDP is \$1.3 billion while the value-added component of the industry is \$2 billion for a combined effect of \$3.3 billion
- The most popular category of horse use in Virginia is recreational riding which includes trail riding on both private and public lands.

Action Requested: For the afore stated reasons the Virginia Horse Council opposes the expansion of Sunday hunting to include hunting on public lands.