

# The Roanoke Times

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## Taking another look at Sunday hunting

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**Bill Cochran**

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The last time the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries conducted a major survey on how hunters felt about Sunday hunting, the results were pretty close. Forty-five percent said they strongly opposed it; 39 percent said they strongly favored it.

In the heavily populated Tidewater and Northern Virginia, those who favored Sunday hunting outpaced those who opposed it, according to the 5,000 licensed hunters who were contacted. The older the survey participant, the more likely he or she opposed it.

That was 10 years ago?

How do hunters feel today?

The department has decided to find that out. During a committee meeting Monday, board members directed the DGIF staff to conduct a survey this fall to see if opinions have shifted.

“We know that our data is not current,” said Bob Duncan, chief of the agency’s wildlife division. Duncan has a gut feeling that there has been a shift in interest, with a greater demand and tolerance of Sunday hunting.

His division is expected to have a survey drafted in time to be presented to the DGIF board at its Oct. 17 meeting. If approved, 5,000 questionnaires will go out to people who have purchased their 2006-07 hunting licenses. The results would be available in time for the 2007 General Assembly.

The DGIF does not have authority to establish Sunday hunting. That is a task of the General Assembly; however, the opinion of DGIF on the issue always has been weighed heavily by legislators.

In the past, the agency has not been an advocate of Sunday hunting. In fact, just the

<a href="#">June? You bet!</a>	opposite. In 1991, Sen. Moody Stallings, Jr. of Virginia Beach, a former DGIF board member, offered to introduce Sunday hunting legislation if board members would support it. A line of the board members present were opposed. The senator withdrew his plans.
■ <a href="#">Column archive</a>	In 1999, the board passed a resolution that basically said it didn't even want to discuss the issue, because only the General Assembly had authority to do something about it.
■ <a href="#">Bill's Mailbag</a>	The fact that the current board has revisited the issue can be viewed as a significant shift in viewpoint. Sunday hunting was requested by numerous hunters during a recent public input period on hunting license increases. That can't be overlooked, said James Hazel of Oakton, chairman of the committee that called for a new survey. Hazel said he favors Sunday hunting, and while the members of his committee were not polled on the issue none spoke against it.
■ <a href="#">Bill's Field Reports</a>	The idea now is to find out what hunters think, said Duncan.
■ <a href="#">Trout stocking schedule</a>	"Let's look at our hunters first," he said. "If they are 90 percent against it, then it is no use to go any farther."

Duncan said that Sunday hunting could have a positive economic benefit and its impact on the agency would be negligible as far as law enforcement and wildlife management issues. There is no compelling biological reason not to hunt on Sunday. The fact that more than 40 states embrace it is an indication that there are no major horror stories associated with it, he said.

It is a social issue, Duncan concluded. And that is where the debate will take place.

Look for the survey to reveal a greater acceptance of Sunday hunting, but that doesn't mean it won't have some fierce opposition. In recent weeks, advocates have been in the headlines. The other side will dig in once it sees serious movement toward Sunday hunting. That will include other users of the outdoors, horseback riders, hikers, anglers, because this isn't just an issue for hunters.

The battle line is being drawn.

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