

Public
Consultation
Report

Sunday Hunting in Nova Scotia

Department of
Natural Resources
July 2015



Overview

The Nova Scotia Government has recently reviewed the ban on Sunday hunting for all types of hunting. Initially the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) sought Nova Scotians' opinions through survey questions administered by Corporate Research Associates Inc. We then launched a 60-day public consultation in order to gain a broader understanding of how Nova Scotians feel about this issue. Nova Scotians were invited to share their opinions on Sunday hunting via online submissions, emails, letters, and phone messages.

There was a significant number of submissions and responses; interest in the issue remains high amongst many Nova Scotians. We received over 21,000 complete online submissions, more than 400 phone calls were recorded, and about 150 letters and emails were collected. This consultation was neither a vote nor a plebiscite. Rather, this feedback has helped to formulate DNR's approach to Sunday hunting. Before finalising the consultation departmental officials engaged with various stakeholders to discuss options and to work towards a viable solution.

Background

Nova Scotia follows the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. This model is a proven standard with regard to the management of wildlife. It requires maintaining wildlife as a public trust, ensuring hunting for all, promoting the use of wildlife for legitimate purposes, prohibiting the unsustainable commerce of wildlife products, and using science as the basis for wildlife management and policy. For these reasons, it is important Nova Scotia ensures that hunting continues to be safe, sustainable and viable.

The *Nova Scotia Wildlife Act* and associated regulations establish the rules for where and when people can hunt. In addition, Nova Scotia's hunting laws have established a hunter education program and introduced minimum distances from dwellings and locations to ensure safety.

Hunting accidents are rare in Nova Scotia and almost never involve non-hunters. Hunting does not typically threaten the safety of those who are not partaking in the activity. Two fatalities occurred in the last 20 years: one hunter in 2005 and one in 1999. Hunters must complete both Canadian Firearms Safety (for hunters who use firearms) and Hunter Education courses where hunters learn and practice safe firearm handling, bow and crossbow handling and hunter ethics. Strong penalties for safety violations are in place and these laws are enforced by Enforcement Officers and RCMP who respond to public concerns, and generally deter unsafe behaviour with their presence in the woods on routine patrols.

Public Consultation Summary of Results

The public consultation took place from February 13 to April 10, 2015. While the online questionnaire was the main source of information, the department also received other responses in different formats that are worthy of mention.

A. Online questionnaire

The consultation was designed to inform the department on public opinion regarding to Sunday hunting in Nova Scotia. The online consultation was open for 60 days between February 13 and April 10, 2015 on the DNR website and received 21,118 complete responses.

1. Are you in favour of lifting the ban on Sunday hunting?

Respondents were asked why they were in favour of lifting the ban on Sunday hunting or why they were in favour of keeping the ban. Respondents were asked to indicate the reasons for their opinion by selecting from a list of options. In addition, respondents could provide additional reasons for their opinion. Respondents were also provided the opportunity to leave additional comments.

Forty-six percent of all respondents were in favour of lifting the ban and 54% were in favour of keeping the ban on Sunday hunting. While not a statistically representative result of the opinions of all Nova Scotians, the percentage reflects the opinions of those who chose to participate in the consultation.

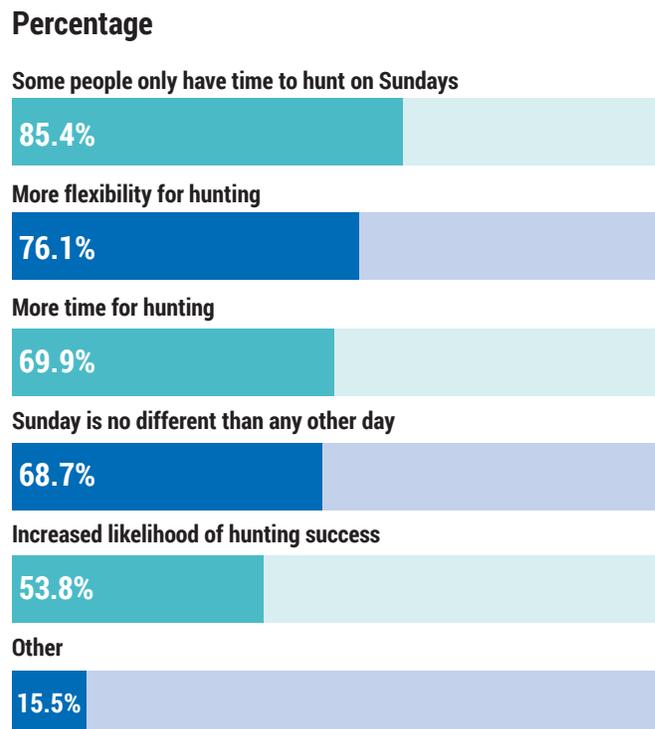
Figure 1: Yes/No distribution of online responses on lifting the ban on Sunday hunting

Response	Percentage	Count
NO	53.8%	11,365
YES	46.2%	9,753
Total Responses		21,118

2a. Why are you in favour of lifting the ban on Sunday hunting?

Respondents were given a list of possible reasons to allow Sunday hunting and could check all boxes that applied. The top responses for lifting the ban were: some people only have time to hunt on Sundays (85%), hunters wanted more flexibility (76%), and more time (70%) to hunt.

Figure 2: Reasons for being pro Sunday hunting (online)

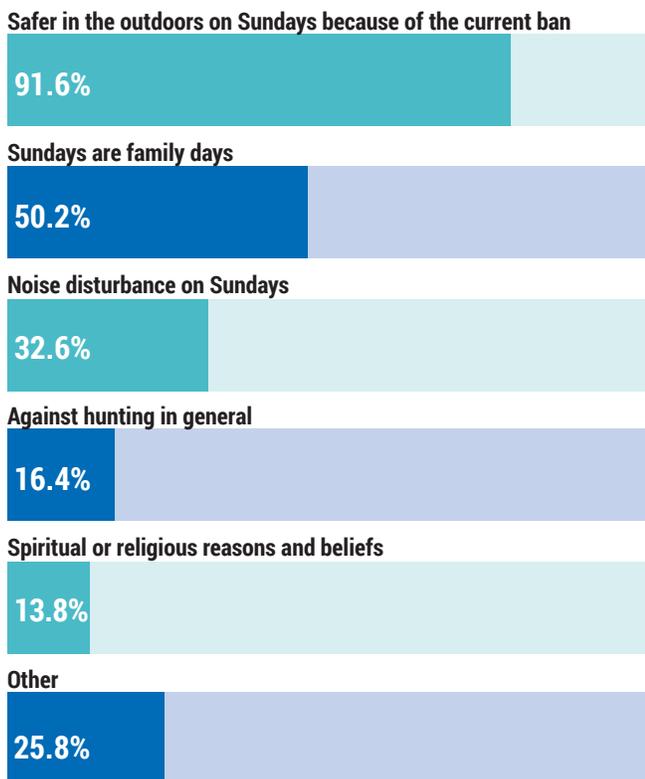


2b. Why are you in favour of keeping the ban on Sunday hunting?

Respondents were given a list of possible reasons against Sunday hunting and could check all boxes that applied. The top responses were: people feel safe on Sundays because of the ban (92%), that Sundays are family days (50%), and because of noise disturbance from gunfire on Sundays (33%).

Figure 3: Reasons for being against Sunday hunting (online)

Percentage



B. Telephone messages

As part of the public consultation, a telephone line was available for people to leave comments. There were 437 messages recorded. DNR offered callers the option of further discussing their concerns if they wished. DNR staff returned thirty-nine calls.

The main reason for supporting Sunday hunting was that it provided additional time for hunting. The other top reasons mentioned were that Nova Scotians are allowed to go fishing on Sundays and that our province has Sunday shopping.

The top response for keeping the ban on Sunday hunting was that callers felt safe spending time in the outdoors on Sundays because of the ban. The other main reasons for keeping the ban on Sunday hunting were that people didn't want an additional day during hunting season when hunters could enter their land, and that other outdoors activities were negatively affected by noise.

C. Emails and letters

We received 151 emails and letters pertaining to the Sunday hunting consultation. Opinions around Sunday hunting expressed in emails and letters showed similar results to what DNR heard through phone call responses and the online consultation. The top response in favour of Sunday hunting was that people wanted more time to hunt. The main reason for being in favour of keeping the ban was that these residents felt safe spending time in the outdoors on Sundays during hunting season because of the ban. Many property owners also expressed that hunters were a burden for them.

D. Stakeholder engagement

The Minister of Natural Resources and departmental staff met with key stakeholder groups who represented both sides of the Sunday hunting issue and reflected economic, environmental, and social interests. The challenge was to find a viable solution that would work for Nova Scotians, not just one individual or group. Stakeholders reviewed various options and helped to formulate a response that struck a meaningful balance between the many needs and interests.

Emerging Themes

The results from the 2015 consultation, deployed in its various formats, show similar patterns. Following are the themes that were derived from the consultation results.

Supporters of Sunday hunting largely believe that Sundays are no different from any other day of the week, and that permitting hunting on Sundays would increase opportunities for more

people to hunt. Moreover, some supporters mention that hunting should be permitted on Sunday as it was a regular day for them. Many shops are open and many other activities occur on this day and it should be a personal choice that is up to the individual.

Theme	Reason FOR Sunday Hunting	Explanation
Time	More flexibility	Busy work schedules and other commitments for vacation days.
Other provinces	Other jurisdictions allow it	In Canada only NS and PEI prohibit hunting on Sunday.
All days the same	Sunday being no different than any other day of the week	Reference to Sunday shopping; people can go fishing on Sundays.

Generally speaking, opposition to hunting on Sunday stems from the belief that the public should have one day free of concern about hunters in the outdoors. Others disagree with

the idea of Sunday hunting because of family values, property right concerns, or noise pollution. Only a small minority is against hunting in general.

Theme	Reason AGAINST Sunday Hunting	Explanation
Safety	Prohibitive for other outdoors activities	Perception that Sunday hunting will further restrict active lifestyle of non-hunters during hunting season.
Property Rights	Hunters are a burden for property owners	Concerns about damages, garbage left behind, ATVs, and signs being torn down.
Noise	Noise pollution	Hunters firing their guns early in the morning, gun shots frighten horses and affect bird watching.

Ultimately, the consultation and the research conducted by DNR indicate that a slight majority of residents wish to keep the ban on Sunday hunting. The department also heard

that, for a variety of reasons, a large number of Nova Scotians would like the option to hunt on Sunday. Each side provided thoughtful reasons for their particular opinion.

Government's response

Government is changing regulations to allow Sunday hunting for two Sundays in the fall (late October/early November), during the open season for a number of species including deer and bear, but excluding moose. We believe this to be a fair and practical solution for Nova Scotians, given the variety of interests and the overarching need for public safety. The decision strikes a balance that reflects and respects the wishes and needs of people on both sides of the issue. We will monitor the process closely and continue to explore other related factors, like landowners' rights and questions around liability. The new rules will be implemented for the 2015 hunting season.

We further clarified setbacks for discharge of weapons around woods operations, including Christmas tree operations, and agricultural buildings which reinforced already established rules:

- The minimum distance from a dwelling, playground, golf course, athletic field, woods operation, place of business or public building for any discharge of a firearm (shotgun with shot), crossbow, or bow without permission is 182 m, and 402 m for any single projectile firearm (rifle, shotgun with slug).
- No firearm or other weapon may be discharged within 804 m of a school.
- Specific permission requirements for different sites (e.g. agricultural lands, Christmas tree production areas, active forestry operations) are in place.

All these measures enable DNR to ensure sustainable wildlife management and practices continue into the future. As in many other jurisdictions, sustainable hunting is integral to wildlife management in Nova Scotia. Working with our stakeholders, hunting in Nova Scotia will continue to be a safe and sound conservation tool in the 21st century.

Sunday hunting dates, along with all annual open season dates are available on the DNR website at <http://novascotia.ca/natr/hunt/>.