

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2007 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

Senate Bill 717

(Senator Colburn)

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Environmental Matters

**Somerset County, Wicomico County, and Worcester County - Deer Hunting on
Private Lands - Sundays**

This bill allows Sunday deer hunting on private land in Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester counties, with a bow and arrow, during open season on the last three Sundays in October and the second Sunday in November. The bill also authorizes deer hunting on private land in those counties on the first Sunday of bow hunting season in November and the first Sunday of deer firearms season by removing the counties from the list of counties in which Sunday deer hunting is prohibited.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2007.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill's changes would not materially affect State finances.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

Analysis

Current Law: The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) establishes the open season to hunt forest and upland game birds and mammals by regulation each year. DNR may adopt regulations to enlarge, extend, restrict, or prohibit hunting wildlife. Except for specified persons and under specified conditions, hunting game birds or mammals on Sundays is prohibited. Chapter 170 of 2003 authorized DNR to allow for deer hunting on

private property on two Sundays (the first Sunday of the bow hunting season in November and the first Sunday of the deer firearms season). The Sunday hunting provisions do not apply in Baltimore, Carroll, Frederick, Harford, Howard, Prince George's, Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester counties or in Baltimore City.

There are three seasons to hunt deer in Maryland: (1) deer bow hunting season; (2) deer firearms season; and (3) deer muzzle loader season.

In Dorchester County, a person may hunt deer on private land with a bow and arrow during open season on the last three Sundays in October and the second Sunday in November.

Background: Because white-tailed deer thrive in habitat that is composed of woods and openings, and because hunter access in those areas is limited, suburban development has provided excellent deer habitat in the State, resulting in a significant increase in the deer population. The high population of deer has resulted in a marked increase in the number of human-deer conflicts, including deer-vehicle collisions, damage to crops and vegetation, and incidents of lyme disease. In addition, numerous research studies have documented negative ecological impacts on native vegetation and other species.

According to DNR, regulated hunting remains the most cost-effective deer population control mechanism available throughout most of the State. The first four years of Sunday hunting have contributed positively to managing the State's white-tailed deer population in the 14 counties where it is now legal.

Between 99 and 235 deer have been killed each year on the one Sunday when bow hunting is permitted, and between 1,996 and 2,899 deer have been killed each year on the one Sunday when firearms hunting is permitted. In the counties in which Sunday hunting is permitted, the Sunday firearms harvest typically represents about 10% to 15% of the total two-week firearms harvest. DNR estimates the bill's changes could result in an additional harvest of 175 to 240 deer in Somerset County, 210 to 260 in Wicomico County, and 295 to 375 in Worcester County.

Small Business Effect: By providing for Sunday deer hunting in Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester counties, the bill could result in an increase in revenues for small businesses. A 2001 report by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service found that Maryland deer hunting resulted in about \$80 million in retail sales in the State, or \$979 per deer harvested. The projected impact on the State's economy totaled \$156 million, or \$1,862 per deer harvested. In addition to businesses affected by hunting, the bill could also affect several other types of businesses. Most farms are small businesses. A 2001 survey by the Maryland Department of Agriculture found that farmers suffered crop

losses of \$13.6 million due to deer (or about \$57 for each deer in the population). To the extent that the bill reduces crop damage, farmers would benefit. The bill could also affect vehicle owners and businesses involved in the repair of vehicles. In 2001, approximately 4,200 deer were reportedly killed by vehicles (or about one deer killed for every 57 deer in the population). Each deer-vehicle collision results in an average of \$2,000 in collision damage. Property owners and businesses could also be affected to the extent that the bill reduces damage to ornamental shrubs and gardens.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Somerset County, Wicomico County, Worcester County, Department of Natural Resources, Department of Legislative Services

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