

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2017 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader

House Bill 894 (Wicomico County Delegation)
Environment and Transportation Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Wicomico County - Deer Hunting - Sundays

This bill authorizes a person in Wicomico County to hunt deer on private property on the first Sunday of the bow hunting season in November and each Sunday in the deer firearms season.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill is not expected to materially affect State operations or finances.

Local Effect: The bill is not expected to materially affect local operations or finances.

Small Business Effect: Minimal overall, but potential meaningful impact for certain businesses in Wicomico County, as discussed below.

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.

Hunting game birds or mammals on Sundays is generally prohibited, with specified exceptions. In Calvert, Caroline, Carroll, Charles, Dorchester, Harford, Queen Anne's, St. Mary's, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico, and Worcester counties, a person may hunt deer on private property with a bow and arrow or crossbow during open season on the last three Sundays in October and the second Sunday in November.

In Calvert, Caroline, Charles, Harford, Queen Anne's, St. Mary's, Somerset, and Worcester counties, a person may hunt deer on private property on the first Sunday of the bow hunting season in November and each Sunday in the deer firearms season. In addition, DNR may allow deer hunting on private property statewide (with the exception of Baltimore City and Baltimore, Howard, and Prince George's counties) on the first Sunday of the bow hunting season in November, and the first Sunday of the deer firearms season. In Carroll County, DNR may authorize deer hunting on Sundays on private property from the first Sunday in October through the second Sunday in January of the following year.

DNR may allow hunting on Sundays in Allegany, Garrett, and Washington counties for any game bird or mammal, except migratory and wetland game birds, during the open season for these animals on specified private property and public land designated for Sunday hunting by DNR. Additionally, DNR is authorized to allow Sunday deer hunting in Frederick County from the first Sunday in October through the second Sunday in January of the following year on specified private property and public land designated for Sunday hunting by DNR.

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. This has resulted in growing deer populations in suburban areas. Higher populations of deer can lead to a greater number of negative interactions with suburban residents, such as deer-vehicle collisions and vegetation damage. Deer also cause agricultural damage.

According to DNR, regulated hunting is the most cost-effective deer population control mechanism available throughout most of the State, and Sunday hunting has contributed positively to managing the State's white-tailed deer population in the counties where it is now permitted.

Hunters have harvested nearly 50,000 deer on Sundays since becoming a legal hunting day in 2003. Deer hunters harvested 6,447 deer on Sundays during the 2015-2016 hunting season. Archery hunters harvested 1,527 deer on Sundays during the 2015-2016 hunting season, while firearm hunters harvested 3,791 deer, and muzzleloader hunters harvested 119 deer. Junior hunters harvested 1,010 deer on the Sunday of the Junior Hunt Weekend. The Sunday firearms harvest typically represents about 10% to 15% of the total two-week firearms harvest each year in those counties that permit Sunday hunting.

During the six Sunday hunting days in Wicomico County during the 2015-2016 season, 278 deer were harvested by hunters. DNR estimates that another 50 to 100 deer would be harvested on the additional Sundays in Wicomico County as a result of the bill.

Small Business Effect: Authorizing additional deer hunting in Wicomico County may have a potential meaningful economic impact on certain types of businesses in that county. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reports that, in 2011, the average hunter in Maryland spent \$49 per hunting day on trip-related expenditures and \$9.67 on ammunition. In 2011, the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife Associated Recreation estimated that hunters in Maryland spend more than \$260 million annually on food, lodging, equipment, and transportation.

In addition to businesses directly affected by hunting, the bill may also affect several other types of businesses. Most farms, for example, are small businesses. In 2011, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service estimated that Maryland deer caused \$7.7 million in agricultural damage statewide. Based on past estimates of crop damage losses, DNR estimates that an individual deer causes \$33.05 in agricultural damage annually. To the extent that the bill reduces crop damage, farmers benefit.

The bill may also affect vehicle owners and businesses involved in the repair of vehicles. DNR estimates that there was an average of more than 32,000 deer-vehicle collisions in each of the last five years and that the average cost per collision is \$3,995. The car insurance industry projected total annual damage in Maryland due to deer-vehicle collisions is \$119 million. Reducing the deer population in Wicomico County likely reduces the number of deer-vehicle collisions, which has a positive impact on vehicle owners and a corresponding negative impact on vehicle repair businesses.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Natural Resources; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; U.S. Department of Agriculture; Department of Legislative Services

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