

Department of Legislative Services
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FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

Senate Bill 888

(Senator Eckardt)

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Environment and Transportation

Dorchester County - Sunday Hunting - Deer Firearms Season

This bill authorizes the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to allow a person in Dorchester County to hunt deer on the second and third Sunday of the deer firearm season on private property. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2019.**

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 Dorchester County, as discussed below.

Analysis

Current Law: 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. There are three seasons to hunt deer in Maryland: deer bow hunting season; deer firearms season; and deer muzzleloader season. Deer hunting with archery equipment extends from early September through the end of January. Firearms season is two weeks in November and December starting the Saturday after Thanksgiving. There is also a two-day firearms season in January. There are two muzzleloader seasons: one in mid-October and a second in late December.

Deer on Private Property

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. 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. In Frederick County, DNR may authorize deer hunting on Sundays on private property and designated public property from the first Sunday in October through the second Sunday in January of the following year.

In Montgomery County, DNR may allow a person to hunt deer on a Sunday throughout the deer hunting season on private property. DNR may only allow such hunting from 30 minutes before sunrise until 10:30 a.m., subject to specified exceptions. The time restrictions do not apply (1) to a participant in the junior deer hunt; (2) on private land only on one Sunday designated by DNR during deer bow hunting season; and (3) on private land only on one Sunday designated by DNR during the firearms season.

In Kent County, DNR may allow a person to hunt deer on a Sunday on private property throughout all deer hunting seasons. However, DNR may only allow a person to hunt deer during firearms season from 30 minutes before sunrise until 10:30 a.m., subject to specified exceptions. The time restrictions do not apply (1) to a participant in the junior deer hunt and (2) on private land only on one Sunday designated by DNR during the firearms season.

Game Birds and Mammals on Private Property and Public Land

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.

Deer Management Permits

Chapter 460 of 2017 clarified statutory provisions related to deer management permits and explicitly authorized deer management permittees and their agents to hunt on any Sunday throughout the year. Deer management permits can be issued for both private and State-leased agricultural land throughout the State.

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 20 counties where it is now permitted.

Hunters have harvested more than 70,000 deer on Sundays since becoming a legal hunting day in 2003. Deer hunters harvested 7,204 deer on Sundays during the 2017-2018 hunting season. Archery hunters harvested 1,314 deer on Sundays during the 2017-2018 hunting season, while firearm hunters harvested 5,756 deer, and muzzleloader hunters harvested 134 deer. Included in the firearm totals, are the 878 deer harvested by junior hunters 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 seven Sunday hunting days in Dorchester County during the 2017-2018 hunting season, 391 deer were harvested by hunters. Firearms hunters harvested 312 deer on the two Sundays open to firearms hunting in Dorchester County.

Small Business Effect: Authorizing additional deer hunting in Dorchester County likely has a meaningful economic impact on certain types of businesses. 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. 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 31,000 deer-vehicle collisions in each of the last five years and that the average cost per collision is \$4,179. The car insurance industry projected total annual damage in Maryland due to deer-vehicle collisions is \$133 million. Reducing the deer population in Dorchester 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: HB 620 (Delegate Adams) - Environment and Transportation.

Information Source(s): Department of Natural Resources; Department of Legislative Services

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