



## THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

February 28, 2024

Bill: HB 957 – Tundra swan hunting season  
Committee: House Committee of Environment and Transportation  
Position: OPPOSE

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Members of the House Committee of Environment and Transportation:

We submit this testimony in opposition to HB 957, which would require the Maryland DNR to establish an annual tundra swan hunting season if authorized by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. There is no justification for opening up Maryland's tundra swans to hunting just to provide a new opportunity for a very small number of hunters,<sup>1</sup> and doing so could put Maryland's recovering trumpeter swans at risk of accidental kills.

### **Trumpeter swans in Maryland could be killed by hunters shooting at lookalike tundra swans.**

In June of 2023, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources prohibited the hunting of trumpeter swans in the state, after hunters of tundra swans went far over the allowable quota for killing of lookalike trumpeter swans for four years in a row.<sup>2</sup> Even experienced birders have noted that it is difficult to distinguish between trumpeter and tundra swans, both of whom have black beaks with only small differences in coloration.<sup>3</sup> Trumpeter swans have been sighted in Maryland and northern Virginia.<sup>4</sup>

The largest and one of the heaviest of North America's native waterfowl, trumpeter swans were nearly driven to extinction by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by market hunting and habitat loss. While these magnificent birds have begun to make a recovery because of protection from hunting, they continue to face myriad risks from lead poisoning due to ingestion of lead sinkers and spent shot, collisions with power lines, loss of habitat, diseases such as avian influenza, the effects of climate change, and illegal shooting.<sup>5</sup> A tundra swan hunting season in our state would add yet another, entirely unnecessary and completely avoidable hazard that this iconic species could face.

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<sup>1</sup> Only 10 U.S. states (Alaska, Delaware, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah and Virginia) currently allow the hunting of tundra swans.

<sup>2</sup> "Utah Wildlife board votes to prohibit harvest of trumpeter swans, approves other changes to upland game and turkey hunting." The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, June 9, 2023. <https://wildlife.utah.gov/news/utah-wildlife-news/1691-wildlife-board-prohibits-trumpeter-swan-harvest-and-approves-changes-to-upland-game-and-turkey-hunting.html>; Maffly, B. "Utah to ban hunting trumpeter swans, North America's largest bird." *The Salt Lake Tribune*, May 5, 2023. <https://www.sltrib.com/news/environment/2023/05/05/utah-ban-hunting-trumpeter-swans/>

<sup>3</sup> The Trumpeter Swan Society: "Which Swan Species Did You See?" <https://www.trumpeterswansociety.org/swan-information/identification/overview.html>

<sup>4</sup> Cher Muzyk: "Rare trumpeter swans spotted locally late into spring." *Prince William Times*, May 6, 2022 [https://www.princewilliamtimes.com/news/rare-trumpeter-swans-spotted-locally-late-into-spring/article\\_75a84d9a-cc8a-11ec-9bd6-7379f8422e7e.html](https://www.princewilliamtimes.com/news/rare-trumpeter-swans-spotted-locally-late-into-spring/article_75a84d9a-cc8a-11ec-9bd6-7379f8422e7e.html); Hugh Vandervoort, "Rare Trumpeter Swans Breeding in Maryland." *Patch*, June 1, 2022 <https://patch.com/maryland/annapolis/rare-trumpeter-swans-breeding-maryland>; Timothy B. Wheeler: "Trumpeter swans add flourish to Patuxent Refuge's winter." *Bay Journal*, March 19, 2018 [https://www.bayjournal.com/archives/trumpeter-swans-add-flourish-to-patuxent-refuge-s-winter/article\\_3b411a8a-d6b5-5af5-bc24-724bb2bca69f.html](https://www.bayjournal.com/archives/trumpeter-swans-add-flourish-to-patuxent-refuge-s-winter/article_3b411a8a-d6b5-5af5-bc24-724bb2bca69f.html)

<sup>5</sup> Audubon: "Trumpeter Swan" at <https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/trumpeter-swan>; The Trumpeter Swan Society: "Top 10 Threats to Trumpeter Swans" at <https://www.trumpeterswansociety.org/swan-information/threats-to-trumpeter-swans/top-10-threats-to-trumpeter-swans.html>.



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**Maryland's wildlife is worth far more alive than dead, there is no justification for adding another species to be hunted.**

Recent landmark research led by Colorado State University titled the “America’s Wildlife Values Project” found that animal welfare has become an increasingly important concern for the general public, and the number of those who value wildlife as “part of their extended social network” has grown.<sup>6</sup> In that study, more Marylanders identified with a “mutualist” view that favors coexistence with wildlife, than a “traditionalist” view that wildlife should be used and management for human benefit. And more than 67% of Maryland residents surveyed agreed that their state should strive for environmental protection over economic growth.

In its recently released *2022 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation*, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reports that non-consumptive public land users outnumber and outspend hunters by a wide margin nationwide. Wildlife watchers now outspend hunters by almost 6 to 1 (5.54 to 1) and outnumber hunters 10 to 1.<sup>7</sup>

Maryland’s non-consumptive public land users outnumber and outspend hunters and trappers by a wide margin. The National Park Service reports, “In 2022, 5.8 million park visitors spent an estimated \$199 million in local gateway regions while visiting National Park Service lands in Maryland. These expenditures supported a total of 2,360 jobs, \$104 million in labor income, \$172 million in value added, and \$276 million in economic output in the Maryland economy.”<sup>8</sup>

And according to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis-Dept. of Commerce, outdoor recreation in Maryland generated more than \$8 billion for the state’s economy in 2022. Of that figure, hunting and trapping generated 1%, while spending for RVing was more than three times that. And people spent more than 33 times as much on travel and tourism in Maryland than was spent on hunting and trapping (Fig. 1).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Manfredo, M.J., Sullivan, L., Don Carlos, A.W., Dietsch, A.M., Teel, T.L., Bright, A.D., & Bruskotter, J. (2018). *America’s Wildlife Values: The Social Context of Wildlife Management in the U.S.* National report from the research project entitled “America’s Wildlife Values.” Fort Collins, CO: Colorado State University, Department of Human Dimensions of Natural Resources. <https://sites.warnercnr.colostate.edu/wildlifevalues/>

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Sep. 2023), *2022 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation*. <https://digitalmedia.fws.gov/digital/collection/document/id/2321/rec/1>

<sup>8</sup> National Park Service. (2022). National Park Service Visitor Spending Effects Report. <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/vse.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> Bureau of Economic Analysis: Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. and States, 2022. <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/outdoor-recreation>



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Fig. 1. Outdoor recreation spending in Maryland (2022 data from U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis)

Outdoor recreation spending in Maryland (2022) From: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis		
Sample activities	Spending (in thousands of dollars)	% of total
Hunting and trapping	83,257	1
RVing	270,224	3.3
Other outdoor recreation	1,860,536	22.5
Travel and tourism	2,767,709	33.5
Total Outdoor Recreation	8,263,326	100.00

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reported that in 2023, only 1.9% of Maryland residents were paid hunting license holders.<sup>10</sup> There is no reason to allow the hunting of tundra swans, and put trumpeter swans at risk, simply to provide additional recreational activities for a tiny percentage of the state's population.

We therefore ask that you issue an unfavorable report for HB 957 to authorize the hunting of tundra swans in Maryland. Thank you again for the opportunity to share these comments.

Sincerely,

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The Humane Society of the United States  
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<sup>10</sup> U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. (2023). Hunting Licenses, Holders, and Costs by Apportionment Year. <https://us-east-1.quicksight.aws.amazon.com/sn/accounts/329180516311/dashboards/48b2aa9c-43a9-4ea6-887e-5465bd70140b>