



Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Josh Kurtz, Secretary
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

February 4, 2025

BILL NUMBER: **Senate Bill 335**

SHORT TITLE: **Natural Resources – Canada Geese – Bag Limits**

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: **LETTER OF INFORMATION**

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT'S POSITION

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources provides the following information regarding Senate Bill 335 related to Canada Geese hunting bag limits.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Maryland Canada goose hunting is regulated by the federal government's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the authority of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. There are two Canada goose hunting seasons in Maryland; one that targets resident geese and another for the migratory Atlantic Population (AP) geese that nest in the subarctic Ungava Peninsula region of Canada and migrate to Maryland for the winter.

Population trends for resident geese and migratory geese are vastly different, with resident geese considered over-populated, while migratory AP goose numbers are more limited and managed much more conservatively. Fortunately, numerous years of scientific studies involving banding of individual geese, as well as large-scale radio-telemetry studies have provided the Department with the information needed to delineate the wintering grounds of migratory geese. As a result, the Department, in conjunction with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and all other Atlantic Flyway states, have established resident and migratory hunt zones to focus appropriate amounts of hunting pressure on the two Canada Goose populations.

The Late Resident Goose Hunt Zone, as designated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, largely avoids the migratory AP goose wintering grounds. The Canada goose population in this zone is comprised primarily of locally produced resident geese, and only 3-4% of the geese harvested within this zone are migratory AP Canada geese. The designated Atlantic Population Hunt Zone encompasses the known wintering grounds for migratory AP Canada geese in Maryland.

Both season length and bag limits are different for the resident and migratory goose hunt zones. Currently, in the Late Resident Goose Hunt Zone, hunters have approximately 80 days to hunt geese and can harvest 5 geese per day. In the Atlantic Population Hunt Zone, hunters have approximately 30 days to hunt and will be able to harvest 1 goose per day starting with the 2025-2026 season. Senate Bill 335, if adopted, will require that approximately 30 of the 80 hunt days in the resident Canada Goose Zone

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change from a 5 geese daily bag limit to a 1 goose daily bag limit in 2025-2026. The daily bag limit could change four times during the course of the 80-day season, potentially causing confusion for hunters.

The primary purpose of the Resident Canada Goose Zone is to allow liberal hunting regulations to help address the agricultural, ecological and nuisance problems caused by resident geese. Resident geese are a common problem in many states within the Atlantic Flyway, and in Maryland they can cause an estimated \$500,000 in damage annually. The Department routinely responds to complaints from farmers, golf courses, and HOA's regarding over-abundant resident geese, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and USDA Wildlife Services commonly issues depredation permits to assist with Canada goose population management and site-specific damage and nuisance issues.

Based on a hunter mail survey conducted annually by the Department, from 2013-2022 an average of 1,200 hunters hunted resident geese in the Late Resident Goose Hunt Zone. They spent on average 4,757 days hunting in this zone and harvested 5,145 geese annually. It is expected that these numbers would decline if the bag limit is reduced in this zone during the Atlantic Population migratory goose season.

BILL EXPLANATION

SB 335 would require the Department to apply the Canada goose daily bag limit established for the Atlantic Population Goose Hunt Zone to all Canada goose hunting zones when the migratory AP Canada goose season is open. The daily bag limit would follow the current Atlantic Population Hunt Zone bag limit as annually established by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.