

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2002 Session

FISCAL NOTE

House Bill 311 (Delegate Elliott, *et al.*)
Environmental Matters

Deer Hunting - Length of Season and Bag Limits in Management Regions

This bill provides that the deer firearms season must be 21 days. The bill also provides that in “Deer Management Region B,” for antlerless deer, the muzzle loader bag limit must be equal to the muzzle loader bag limit in “Deer Management Region C” and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) may not impose a bag limit for the bow hunting season.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Potential minimal increase in special fund revenues related to any increase in the number of bonus deer stamps issued by DNR. Expenditures would not be materially affected.

Local Effect: This bill would not directly affect local government operations or finances.

Small Business Effect: Meaningful.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The bill specifies that “Deer Management Region B,” as established by DNR through regulation, includes: (1) Carroll County; (2) that portion of Frederick County that is north of Interstate Route 70 and west of U.S. Route 15; and (3) part of Washington County, as specified in the bill. The bill provides that “Deer Management Region C,” as established by DNR through regulation, includes: (1) Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Howard, Montgomery, and Prince George’s counties; (2) that portion of

Frederick County that is south of Interstate Route 70 and east of U.S. Route 15; and (3) Baltimore City.

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: (1) deer bow hunting season; (2) deer firearms season; and (3) deer muzzle loader season. Currently, the deer firearms season is 15 calendar days (13 hunting days, because hunting on Sundays is prohibited). Under current regulations, for antlerless deer, the bag limit for Region B during the muzzleloader season is two deer; in Region C, the bag limit is four deer. Currently, there is a bag limit of two antlerless deer in Region B during the deer bow season; in Region C, there is no bag limit.

A person with a consolidated hunting license may purchase bonus deer stamps from DNR. A bonus deer stamp allows the person to kill one deer. A person with a basic hunting license and any individual hunting stamp also may purchase bonus deer stamps for use during any deer-hunting season. The fee for each bonus deer stamp is \$5 for residents and \$25 for nonresidents. Fees are paid into the Wildlife Management and Protection Fund.

Background: The State's population of white-tailed deer has steadily increased over the past 50 years, mostly due to a decrease in the number of natural predators. Current DNR estimates place the number of white-tailed deer at over 250,000; however, DNR estimates that the deer population may double within a few years if the population is not controlled. The growth in the deer population has led to an increase in the number of human-deer incidents. According to DNR, the reported number of deer-vehicle collisions has doubled in the last eight years. Over 4,300 automobile accidents that led to deer fatalities were reported last year. DNR conservatively estimates the property damage resulting from all deer-vehicle collisions to be in excess of \$9.7 million annually. In addition to the loss associated with these accidents, deer cause substantial damage to crops and vegetation. Crop damage was estimated at almost \$38 million in 1996. The increase in the deer population is also thought to contribute to the recent increase in the incidence of Lyme disease; the number of Lyme disease cases increased from 12 reported cases in 1988 to 423 reported cases in 1998.

In order to address these concerns, DNR, along with the Wildlife Advisory Commission, Maryland citizens, and interest groups, developed a comprehensive deer management plan that was released for public comment in 1998. The plan directs DNR to consult with counties, municipalities, and residential communities to develop deer management plans compatible with each community. The plan also directs DNR to investigate alternative innovative deer management options. The plan outlines four long-term goals and several

objectives and strategies to meet those goals. The long-term goals are to: (1) ensure the present and future well-being of white-tailed deer and their habitat; (2) maintain deer populations at levels necessary to ensure compatibility with human land uses and natural communities; (3) encourage and promote the recreational use and enjoyment of the deer resource; and (4) inform and educate Maryland citizens concerning deer biology, management options, and the impacts that deer have on landscapes and people.

Management options for dealing with the growing deer population generally fall into two categories: reduction and management. Reduction of the deer population includes regulated hunting, sharpshooters, and contraceptives. According to DNR, regulated hunting constitutes the primary and, to date, most effective method of deer management. Management of the population seeks to reduce the incidents of human-deer conflict through fencing, repellents, and lighting devices.

During the 2000-2001 deer hunting season, approximately 84,800 deer were harvested; this represents a 9% increase over the 1999-2000 harvest. Of the total deer harvested, approximately 48,250 were harvested during the firearms season. DNR reports that 69,400 firearm hunters averaged 5.5 days hunting during the 2000-2001 firearms season. Of the total deer harvested during the 2000-2001 deer hunting season, 44,387 antlerless deer were harvested (25,922 during the firearms season, 10,408 during the muzzleloader season, and 8,057 during the bow season).

State Revenues: Special fund revenues will increase to the extent that the bill results in more bonus deer stamps issued to deer hunters in Region B. Special fund revenues would increase by \$5 for each bonus deer stamp issued to a resident and by \$25 for each bonus deer stamp issued to a nonresident. However, because the majority of deer hunters harvest only one deer, any such increase is anticipated to be minimal.

Small Business Effect: By expanding the deer firearms season, the bill could result in an increase in revenues for small businesses in Maryland. Based on a 1998 survey by the U.S. Census Department, over 90% of fishing, hunting, and trapping businesses, over 93% of certain retail establishments (including sporting goods stores), and over 80% of accommodation establishments had fewer than 20 employees. A 1996 report by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service found that Maryland deer hunting resulted in \$40.4 million in retail sales in the State. The projected impact on the State's economy totaled \$76.4 million.

In addition to businesses affected by hunting, the bill could also affect several other types of businesses. Most farms are small businesses. A 1996 study by the University of Maryland found that grain farmers suffered crop losses of \$38 million annually due to deer. To the extent that the bill reduces crop damage, farmers will benefit. The bill could

also affect vehicle owners and businesses involved in the repair of vehicles. Reported deer-vehicle collisions in Maryland doubled from 1988 to 1996. Property damage related to those collisions was estimated in 1998 at over \$9.7 million annually. 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): Department of Natural Resources, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 1, 2002
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