

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2002 Session

FISCAL NOTE
Revised

House Bill 9

(Delegate Owings, *et al.*)

Environmental Matters

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Deer Management Plans - Increased Harvest

This bill relates to the management of the deer harvest by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Specifically, the bill increases the deer firearms season from 13 to at least 21 days, including the first Sunday of the season in specified areas, and authorizes DNR to increase the harvest in specified areas under certain conditions.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2002.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditure increase of \$2,800 in FY 2003 related to overtime for officers. Future year estimates are adjusted for inflation. No effect on revenues.

(in dollars)	FY 2003	FY 2004	FY 2005	FY 2006	FY 2007
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	2,800	2,900	3,000	3,100	3,200
Net Effect	(\$2,800)	(\$2,900)	(\$3,000)	(\$3,100)	(\$3,200)

Note:() = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate effect

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

Small Business Effect: Meaningful.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The Sunday hunting provision would not apply in any part of the “urban management region,” which includes Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Caroline, Carroll, Cecil, Frederick, Harford, Howard, Kent, Montgomery, Prince George’s, Queen Anne’s, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico, and Worcester counties and Baltimore City.

In a zone of the urban management region in which the deer population has become, or if left unattended will become, a threat to public health or safety or a nuisance because the population is in excess of the “carrying capacity” of the zone, DNR’s deer management plan may allow for an increased harvest by the use, as appropriate, of bait, professional sharpshooters, lethal darts, or capture and euthanasia. “Carrying capacity” means the maximum number of deer that can be supported by the available habitat and coexist compatibly with the local human population.

The bill authorizes the donation of meat from deer harvested under the bill. Processing costs for donated meat may be paid by private donations and, as determined appropriate by DNR, a portion of the revenue obtained from the purchase of deer hunting licenses and stamps issued under the bill.

DNR must report annually and make recommendations to the Legislative Policy Committee, the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, and the House Environmental Matters Committee on: (1) the status of the carrying capacity of regions and zones to the current population of deer, as projected for the next two years; (2) the impact and anticipated impact of increased harvest measures on the overpopulation of deer in each management region; (3) the extent to which natural predators have reduced, and are expected to reduce, the population; (4) law enforcement issues; and (5) citizen response.

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. Except for specified persons, hunting game birds or mammals on Sundays is prohibited. 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 13 days.

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.

According to a 1996 study by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, retail sales of deer hunting equipment and supplies generated \$40.4 million for Maryland's economy. The projected impact on the State's economy totaled \$76.4 million. The study reported that deer hunting in Maryland generated over \$2.8 million in Maryland sales taxes, almost \$1 million in State income taxes, and \$2.3 million in federal income taxes.

State Expenditures: Sundays have traditionally been a non-hunting day in the State. Accordingly, the Natural Resources Police (NRP) currently provides minimal enforcement on Sundays. Because this bill would allow for hunting on the first Sunday of the deer firearms season in Allegany, Calvert, Charles, Dorchester, Garrett, St. Mary's,

and Washington counties, NRP officers would need to work overtime on that day. Accordingly, general fund expenditures could increase by an estimated \$2,800 in fiscal 2003, which includes \$2,400 in overtime (including Social Security) for seven NRP officers and \$400 for travel-related expenditures. The estimate is based on the average overtime rate for Officer First Class and Corporal. The information and assumptions used in calculating the estimate are stated below:

- one officer per county not within an urban management zone (seven officers, including four Officers First Class and three Corporals);
- each officer would work an eight-hour shift; and
- each officer would travel approximately 200 miles during a shift.

The provisions of the bill relating to the donation of meat and the use of deer management techniques in the urban management region are not anticipated to impact State finances. According to DNR, this authority is not new.

Future year estimates reflect: (1) 3.5% annual increases in overtime; and (2) 1% annual increases in ongoing operating expenditures.

Small Business Effect: By expanding the deer firearms season and providing for hunting on one Sunday, 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

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