

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2005 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 128

(Delegate Costa, *et al.*)

Environmental Matters

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

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Anne Arundel County - Deer Hunting on Private Lands - Sundays

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This bill repeals the prohibition regarding deer hunting on private land in Anne Arundel County on Sundays.

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** The bill would not materially affect State operations or finances. Enforcement could be handled with existing budgeted resources.

**Local Effect:** The bill would not materially affect Anne Arundel County finances or operations.

**Small Business Effect:** Potential meaningful.

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**Analysis**

**Current Law:** The Department of Natural Resources (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 and under specified conditions, hunting game birds or mammals on Sundays is prohibited. Chapter 170 of 2003 authorized DNR to allow for deer hunting on private property on two Sundays (the first Sunday of the bow hunting season in November, and the first Sunday of the deer firearms season). The Sunday hunting provisions do not apply in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Frederick, Harford, Howard, Montgomery, Prince George's, Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester counties or in Baltimore City.

There are three seasons to hunt deer in Maryland: (1) deer bow hunting season; (2) deer firearms season; and (3) deer muzzle loader season.

**Background:** Because white-tailed deer thrive in habitat that is composed of woods and openings, and because hunter access in those areas is limited, recent suburban development has provided excellent deer habitat in the State. Prior to the 2003-2004 deer hunting season, Maryland's deer population was estimated at 264,000. The high population of deer has resulted in a marked increase in the number of human-deer conflicts, including deer-vehicle collisions, damage to crops and vegetation, and incidents of lyme disease. In addition to the impact of deer overabundance on humans, numerous research studies have documented negative ecological impacts on native vegetation and other species. White-tailed deer in protected forest areas have been shown to lower vegetation density and cause significant shifts in the composition and abundance of bird communities, including migratory bird populations. Additionally, research has shown that 15 mammalian species, including raccoons, squirrels, and skunks, may be affected by the increased populations of deer.

In response to these concerns, legislation was passed during the 2002 session to increase the deer harvest by expanding the firearms season from 13 days to at least 21 days. In seven counties, the first Sunday of the season was to be included in this longer season. Because the first Saturday of the season annually accounts for approximately 35 percent of the total firearms harvest, the addition of the first Sunday of the season was viewed as the strategy most likely to maximize the harvest. Also included was an increased harvest in urban management regions in which deer overpopulation constitutes a nuisance or presents public health or safety issues. This measure was vetoed by Governor Glendening for the policy reason of preventing the loss of the "certainty of having one weekend day during hunting season when... families and children can safely enjoy the outdoors." Chapter 170 of 2003 allows for limited deer hunting on Sundays in certain counties.

According to DNR, hunting remains the most cost-effective deer population control mechanism available throughout most of the State. In addition, DNR advises that the first year of Sunday hunting contributed positively to managing the State's white-tailed deer population. During the 2003-2004 hunting season, the deer harvest in Maryland totaled 87,223. During the bow season, 18,577 deer were harvested, including 99 deer on the one Sunday that deer hunting was allowed. During the firearms season, 48,988 deer were harvested, including 2,668 deer on the one Sunday that deer hunting was allowed. The opening weekend harvest was up an average of 14% in the 12 counties that permit Sunday hunting, while the weekend harvest was down an average of 11% in those counties where Sunday hunting is prohibited.

DNR estimates that the bill's changes could result in the harvest of an additional 150 to 200 deer.

**Small Business Effect:** By providing for Sunday deer hunting in Anne Arundel County, the bill could result in an increase in revenues for small businesses. A 2001 report by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service found that Maryland deer hunting resulted in about \$80 million in retail sales in the State, or \$979 per deer harvested. The projected impact on the State's economy totaled \$156 million, or \$1,862 per deer harvested. In addition to businesses affected by hunting, the bill could also affect several other types of businesses. Most farms are small businesses. A 2001 survey by the Maryland Department of Agriculture found that farmers suffered crop losses of \$13.6 million due to deer (or about \$57 for each deer in the population). To the extent that the bill reduces crop damage, farmers would benefit. The bill could also affect vehicle owners and businesses involved in the repair of vehicles. In 2001, approximately 4,200 deer were reportedly killed by vehicles (or about one deer killed for every 57 deer in the population). Each deer-vehicle collision results in an average of \$2,000 in collision damage. Property owners and businesses could also be affected to the extent that the bill reduces damage to ornamental shrubs and gardens.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Department of Natural Resources, Anne Arundel County, Department of Legislative Services

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