

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2008 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 938

(Montgomery County Delegation)

Environmental Matters

Education, Health, and
Environmental Affairs

Montgomery County - Deer Hunting on Private Lands - Effective Date
MC 804-08

This bill repeals the December 31, 2008 termination date of Chapter 361 of 2006, which allows for deer hunting on private property in Montgomery County on the first Sunday of the bow hunting season in November and the first Sunday of the deer firearms season.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill would not materially affect State finances.

Local Effect: The bill could benefit Montgomery County's Deer Donation Program through continued donations resulting from Sunday hunting, but is not expected to affect the program's finances.

Small Business Effect: Potentially meaningful positive impact.

Analysis

Current Law: The Department of Natural Resources 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: • deer bow hunting season; • deer firearms season; and • deer muzzle loader season.

With specified exceptions, hunting game birds or mammals on Sundays is generally 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 Baltimore, Carroll, Frederick, Harford, Howard, and Prince George's counties or in Baltimore City. Chapter 361 of 2006, which terminates December 31, 2008, eliminated Montgomery County from the list of jurisdictions in which the Sunday hunting provisions do not apply, thereby allowing for deer hunting on private property in the county on the two applicable Sundays.

In Dorchester, St. Mary's, Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester counties, a person may hunt deer on private land with a bow and arrow during open season on the last three Sundays in October and the second Sunday in November.

Background: Because white-tailed deer thrive in habitat that is composed of woods and openings, and because hunter access in those areas is limited, suburban development has provided excellent deer habitat in the State, resulting in a significant increase in the deer population. Higher populations of deer can lead to a greater number of negative interactions with suburban residents such as deer-vehicle collisions and vegetation damage.

According to DNR, regulated hunting remains the most cost effective deer population control mechanism available throughout most of the State. The first five years of Sunday hunting have contributed positively to managing the State's white-tailed deer population in the 17 counties where it is now legal.

In a report on the effectiveness of Sunday hunting in Montgomery County submitted in accordance with Chapter 361 of 2006, DNR indicated that during the 2006-2007 hunting season, 244 deer were killed on the two Sundays on which hunting was allowed, representing 5% of the total Montgomery County harvest for the year. Preliminary data for the 2007-2008 hunting season indicate that 193 deer were killed during Sunday hunting. DNR concluded that Sunday hunting is proving useful in aiding in the management of the deer population in Montgomery County and statewide.

It is unclear to what extent more deer are harvested in a season because of Sunday hunting. However, DNR notes both the importance of increasing hunting opportunities in order to manage the deer population and the ability of Sunday hunting to increase the deer harvest in years when poor weather conditions are experienced on preceding Saturdays.

Small Business Effect: By providing for continued Sunday deer hunting in Montgomery County, the bill could result in an increase in revenues for small businesses. According to DNR, it is estimated that more than \$100 million was spent by deer hunters in the State on food, lodging, equipment, and transportation in 2006. In addition to businesses affected by hunting, the bill could also affect several other types of businesses. Most farms, for example, are small businesses. DNR indicates that a 2005 survey estimated that deer caused nearly \$9 million in agricultural damage in Maryland (\$37 for each deer in the population at the time). 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 2006, 11,553 deer were reported killed by vehicles (or about one deer killed for every 23 deer in the population). DNR estimates that the total number of deer-vehicle collisions each year is between 20,000 and 30,000, with each collision resulting in an average of \$2,000 in damage. 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): Montgomery County, Department of Natural Resources, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 10, 2008
mll/lgc

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