

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2009 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 1309 (Delegates Frush and Hubbard)
Environmental Matters

Natural Resources - Hunting - Expansion of Safety Zone

This bill expands the hunting “safety zone,” from 150 to 300 yards, around a dwelling house, residence, church, or other building or camp occupied by human beings.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Special/federal fund revenues may decrease, to the extent the increased safety zone, making larger areas of private land off limits to hunting, results in a decrease in hunting license sales. Any decrease, however, cannot be reliably estimated.

Local Effect: The bill does not directly affect local government operations or finances.

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

Analysis

Current Law: Hunters may not shoot or discharge any firearm or other deadly weapon within 150 yards, known as the “safety zone,” of a dwelling house, residence, church, or other building or camp occupied by human beings, or shoot at any animal while it is within the safety zone, without the specific advance permission of the owner or occupant.

During any open hunting season, a person, other than the owner or occupant, may not hunt or chase willfully any animal within the safety zone without the specific advance permission of the owner or occupant.

Background: The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' *Hunting in America* report, based on data from 2006, found hunters invest \$1.3 billion annually to preserve, protect, and enhance wildlife populations and the environment.

Over 7,200 people take the Maryland Hunter Education Course every year. However, hunting accidents do occur. In December 2008, a stray shotgun slug struck a daycare center in Clarksville, Howard County, raising questions about the adequacy of the current 150-yard safety zone requirement.

State Fiscal Effect: To the extent the increased safety zone, making larger areas of private land off limits to hunting, results in a decrease in hunting license sales, special and federal fund revenues may decrease. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) indicates that the decrease in hunting area may cause some hunters to drop out of the sport due to available areas becoming too crowded. Any decrease in revenues, however, cannot be reliably estimated. DNR indicates approximately \$6 million in special fund revenue is generated from approximately 125,000 licensed hunters each year.

Federal fund revenues will also be affected by any decrease in hunting license sales resulting from the bill. DNR receives approximately \$2.5 million each year in federal funding under the Pittman-Robertson Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act to conduct wildlife management activities in the State. The funding is distributed to states based on a formula that includes the number of hunters in each state, based on the number of hunting licenses sold. DNR indicates the department currently receives approximately \$20 for each licensed hunter in the State.

Small Business Effect: DNR anticipates deer populations increasing as deer take refuge in the larger safety zones where hunter access would be limited. To the extent this occurs, farmers may be impacted by increased agricultural damage. A 2007 survey of farmers estimated that deer caused nearly \$7.6 million in agricultural damage in Maryland (equating to \$33 for each deer in the population at that time). Vehicle owners and businesses involved in the repair of vehicles may also be affected. 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 \$2,600 to \$2,800 in damage.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Allegany, Frederick, Montgomery, and Washington counties; Department of Natural Resources; Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies; Department of Legislative Services

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