

Department of Legislative Services
2010 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 1207 (Delegate O'Donnell)
Environmental Matters

Deer Hunting on Private Property on Sundays

This bill allows for deer hunting on private property in Calvert County with a bow and arrow during open bow hunting season on the last three Sundays in October and the second Sunday in November. The bill also authorizes deer hunting on private property in Calvert, Dorchester, Frederick, St. Mary's, Somerset, Washington, Wicomico, and Worcester counties with a crossbow on the same Sundays.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill is not expected to materially affect State operations or finances.

Local Effect: The bill is not expected to materially affect local operations or finances.

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

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

In addition, DNR may allow deer hunting on private property on the first Sunday of the bow hunting season in November and the first Sunday of the deer firearms season. This provision, however, does not apply in Baltimore, Carroll, Howard, and Prince George's counties and in Baltimore City.

Currently, crossbows may be used to hunt throughout the State during segments of the bow hunting season (*e.g.*, October 1-15 and January 15-30). In addition, crossbows may be used to hunt during the entire bow hunting season in DNR's suburban deer archery zone which includes Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Howard, Montgomery, and Prince George's counties. Recently, DNR proposed new hunting and trapping regulations that would, among other things, allow crossbow hunting during the entire bow hunting 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, suburban development has provided excellent deer habitat in the State, resulting in an escalation of deer populations in suburban areas. 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, and Sunday hunting has contributed positively to managing the State's white-tailed deer population in the 19 counties where it is now permitted.

Hunters have harvested over 22,000 deer on Sundays over the past seven years, with 4,864 deer harvested on Sundays during the 2009-2010 hunting season. Between 99 and 643 deer have been harvested each year on the county-specific Sundays when bow hunting is permitted, and between 2,000 and 4,300 deer have been harvested each year on the one Sunday when firearms hunting is permitted. In the counties in which Sunday hunting is permitted, the Sunday firearms harvest typically represents about 10% to 15% of the total two-week firearms harvest each year.

DNR advises that increased hunting opportunities help reduce the deer population and also acknowledges the importance of Sunday hunting in years when poor weather conditions are experienced on preceding Saturdays. DNR estimates that the bill could result in the annual harvest of an additional 25 to 75 deer in Calvert County, and 5 to 10 additional deer, per county, in Dorchester, Frederick, St. Mary's, Somerset, Washington, Wicomico, and Worcester counties.

Small Business Effect: By providing for additional Sunday deer hunting in Calvert County and by permitting expanded use of crossbows in several counties, the bill

may 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 may also affect several other types of businesses. Most farms, for example, are small businesses. DNR indicates that a 2008 survey of farmers estimated that deer caused nearly \$7.7 million in agricultural damage in Maryland (equating to \$33.50 for each deer in the population at that time). To the extent that the bill reduces crop damage, farmers benefit. The bill may also affect vehicle owners and businesses involved in the repair of vehicles. 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. Property owners and businesses may 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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