

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2014 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Revised

Senate Bill 966 (Senators Dyson and Middleton)

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Environmental Matters

Charles County and St. Mary's County - Deer Hunting

This bill requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to establish a three-year program to train rifle shooters to hunt deer to control the deer population in Charles and St. Mary’s counties. The bill adds a deer hunting season specific to Charles and St. Mary’s counties and allows additional hunting of deer in those counties with a shotgun under a “deer management permit.” DNR must adopt regulations to implement certain provisions of the bill, including a system for staggering participation in the program.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2014, and terminates June 30, 2017.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: DNR general fund expenditures increase by \$92,600 in FY 2015 for additional contractual staff to implement the bill. Future year expenditures reflect annualization, inflation, and the bill’s termination date. Revenues are not affected.

(in dollars)	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	92,600	66,100	68,900	0	0
Net Effect	(\$92,600)	(\$66,100)	(\$68,900)	\$0	\$0

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

Local Effect: None. The bill is not expected to affect local operations or finances.

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

Analysis

Bill Summary: A person may hunt deer with a shotgun approved by DNR from January through March in Charles and St. Mary's counties. To protect public safety and welfare, DNR is authorized to (1) terminate the deer hunting season established under the bill and (2) restrict the lands on which an individual may hunt deer.

A "deer management permit" is a permit issued by DNR authorizing the holder to hunt deer outside of deer hunting season for the purpose of preventing damage to crops. DNR is prohibited from requiring a holder of a deer management permit in Charles or St. Mary's counties to apply for renewal more than once every three years. DNR is prohibited from authorizing an individual in Charles or St. Mary's counties to hunt deer on Sundays under a deer management permit.

A person who holds a deer management permit in Charles and St. Mary's counties may use a shotgun approved by DNR to (1) hunt deer throughout deer season in the locations and under the conditions set forth in the permit and (2) hunt deer on State agricultural crop land located in Charles and St. Mary's counties to the same extent as the person is authorized under the deer management permit to hunt on private land in those counties.

Priority for participation in the rifle shooter program must be given to applicants who hold a deer management permit.

DNR must report to the General Assembly by December 1, 2016 on the implementation of the program.

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. There are three seasons to hunt deer in Maryland: deer bow hunting season; deer firearms season; and deer muzzle loader season.

DNR currently issues deer management permits to individuals so that they may harvest a certain number of deer outside of the regular deer hunting seasons in order to mitigate severe crop damage. There is no fee associated with this permit.

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. However, DNR advises that allowing three additional months of shotgun deer hunting effectively eliminates its ability to manage deer populations in a scientific manner in the region.

State Fiscal Effect: DNR’s wildlife programs are funded primarily with revenue from a variety of special funds and federal Wildlife Restoration formula grant funds. As a result, positions similar to the one required by the bill are typically funded with special funds. However, DNR advises that due to very low special fund balances and a small number of staff to manage the southern Maryland wildlife management areas, general funds are required to implement the bill.

DNR’s general fund expenditures increase by \$92,600 in fiscal 2015, which accounts for a 90-day start-up delay. This estimate reflects the cost of hiring two contractual natural resources technicians to assist with the rifle shooter training program required by the bill and with the issuance of deer management permits. It includes salaries, fringe benefits, vehicles, communication costs (including cell phones and monthly charges), other one-time start-up costs, and ongoing operating expenses.

Contractual Positions	2
Salaries and Fringe Benefits	\$49,514
Automobile Purchase/Operations	32,417
Other Operating Expenses/Equipment	<u>10,622</u>
Total FY 2015 State Expenditures	\$92,553

Future year expenditures reflect full salaries with annual increases and employee turnover as well as annual increases in ongoing operating expenses. There is no impact after fiscal 2017 due to the bill’s termination date.

DNR advises that, because the bill does not authorize a fee for the new deer management permit, a fee cannot be collected. This is consistent with the existing deer management permits issued to landowners. In addition, DNR is not eligible for federal matching funds for the activities under the bill as training for wildlife damage mitigation activities is specifically excluded from receiving funds from the federal Wildlife Restoration grant program.

Small Business Effect: Authorizing additional deer hunting in Charles and St. Mary’s counties may have a potential meaningful economic impact on certain types of businesses in those counties. DNR estimates that deer hunters in the State spent more than \$100 million on food, lodging, equipment, and transportation in 2006, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reports that, in 2011, the average hunter in Maryland spent \$49 per

hunting day on trip-related expenditures and \$9.67 on ammunition. DNR also advises that the bill could result in an increase in the sale of rifles in Southern Maryland.

In addition to businesses directly affected by hunting, the bill may also affect several other types of businesses. Most farms, for example, are small businesses. In 2011, the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service estimated that Maryland deer caused \$7.7 million in agricultural damage statewide and \$2.7 million in agricultural damage in Southern Maryland. Based on past estimates of crop damage losses, DNR estimates that an individual deer causes \$33.05 in agricultural damage annually. 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 there were 31,300 deer-vehicle collisions in 2013 and that the average cost per collision is \$3,400. Reducing the deer population in the affected counties will likely reduce the number of deer-vehicle collisions, which will have a positive impact on vehicle owners and a corresponding negative impact on vehicle repair businesses.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: SB 259 of 2010, a similar bill, passed the Senate and passed the House as amended; however, the Senate refused to concur with the House amendments, and no further action was taken. Its cross file, HB 502, passed the House as amended and was referred to the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, but no further action was taken. SB 944 of 2009, another similar bill, passed the Senate as amended and was referred to the House Environmental Matters Committee, but no further action was taken.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Charles and St. Mary's counties, Department of Natural Resources, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 3, 2014
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