

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2015 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

Senate Bill 117 (Senators Hershey and Eckardt)
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Caroline County and Dorchester County - Sunday Hunting

This bill expands the authority of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to allow hunting on Sundays in Caroline and Dorchester counties by allowing hunting of any game bird or game mammal, except migratory game birds and wetland game birds, during the open season for that game bird or game mammal on specified private property and public land that is designated for Sunday hunting by DNR.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2015.

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: 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.

Hunting game birds or mammals on Sundays is generally prohibited, with specified exceptions. In Calvert, Caroline, Carroll, Charles, Dorchester, Harford, Queen Anne's, St. Mary's, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico, and Worcester counties, a person may hunt deer

on private property with a bow and arrow or crossbow during open season on the last three Sundays in October and the second Sunday in November.

In Calvert, Caroline, Charles, Harford, Queen Anne's, St. Mary's, Somerset, and Worcester counties, individuals are authorized to hunt deer on private property on the first Sunday of the bow hunting season in November and each Sunday in the deer firearms season. In addition, DNR may allow deer hunting on private property statewide (with the exception of Baltimore City and Baltimore, Howard, and Prince George's counties) on the first Sunday of the bow hunting season in November, and the first Sunday of the deer firearms season. In Carroll County, DNR may authorize deer hunting on Sundays on private property from the first Sunday in October through the second Sunday in January of the following year.

Chapter 506 of 2014 authorized DNR to expand hunting on Sundays in Allegany, Garrett, and Washington counties for any game bird or mammal, except migratory and wetland game birds, during the open season for these animals on specified private property and public land designated for Sunday hunting by DNR. Additionally, Chapter 507 of 2014 expanded hunting on Sundays in Frederick County by allowing DNR to authorize deer hunting from the first Sunday in October through the second Sunday in January of the following year on specified private property and public land designated for Sunday hunting by DNR.

Turkey hunting is authorized on private property in Calvert, Caroline, Charles, Dorchester, and St. Mary's counties on Sundays during the spring turkey hunting season. In Dorchester County, an individual may hunt turkeys on Sundays on public land during the spring turkey hunting season; however, this authorization is limited to public lands designated for hunting by DNR.

Forest game mammals are black bears, deer, fox, squirrels, excluding the Delmarva subspecies, and gray and red squirrels. Fur-bearing mammals are any coyote, raccoon, bobcat, opossum, beaver, mink, muskrat, otter, fox, skunk, fisher, and long-tailed weasel, or any part, offspring, or dead body of any of them. Upland game mammals are rabbits or hares. Forest game birds include ruffed grouse and turkey. Upland game birds are blackbirds, crows, doves, pheasant, quail, and woodcocks. Migratory game birds are any wetland game bird, dove, and woodcocks. Wetland game birds are brant, coots, ducks, gallinules, geese, mergansers, rails, snipe, and swans, including any of these birds that are raised in captivity and released to the wild or otherwise used for hunting purposes.

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. This has resulted in growing 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. Deer also cause agricultural damage.

According to DNR, regulated hunting is 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 counties where it is now permitted.

Hunters have harvested nearly 50,000 deer on Sundays since becoming a legal hunting day in 2003. Deer hunters harvested more than 7,000 deer on Sundays during the 2014-2015 hunting season and will harvest approximately that many again during the 2015-2016 season. Archery hunters harvested 1,150 deer on Sundays during the 2014-2015 hunting season, while firearm and muzzleloader hunters harvested approximately 6,000 deer on Sundays. Junior hunters harvested nearly 1,000 deer on the Sunday of the Junior Hunt Weekend. The Sunday firearms harvest typically represents about 10% to 15% of the total two-week firearms harvest each year in those counties that permit Sunday hunting.

Although this bill applies to the hunting of certain game birds or game mammals, DNR advises that most of the additional hunting that would occur as a result of the bill is deer hunting. DNR estimates that the bill could result in the harvest of an additional 200 to 300 deer in Dorchester County and an additional 50 to 100 deer in Caroline County.

Small Business Effect: Authorizing additional deer hunting in Caroline and Dorchester 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.

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. 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: None.

Cross File: HB 285 (Caroline County Delegation and Dorchester County Delegation) - Environment and Transportation.

Information Source(s): Caroline and Dorchester counties, Department of Natural Resources, Department of Legislative Services

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