

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2016 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

House Bill 203

(Caroline County Delegation)

Environment and Transportation

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Caroline County - Sunday Hunting

This bill expands the authority of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to allow hunting on Sundays in Caroline County by allowing hunting of any game bird or game mammal, except a migratory game bird or wetland game bird, on a Sunday during the open season for that game bird or game mammal on private property.

This bill takes effect July 1, 2016.

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.

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 6,447 deer on Sundays during the 2015-2016 hunting season. Archery hunters harvested 1,527 deer on Sundays during the 2015-2016 hunting season, while firearm hunters harvested 3,791, and muzzleloader hunters harvested 119. Junior hunters harvested 1,010 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, it is likely that most of the additional hunting that would occur as a result of the bill is deer hunting. During the seven Sunday hunting days in Caroline County during the 2015-2016 season, 335 deer were harvested by hunters. DNR estimates that another 50 to 100 deer would be harvested on the additional Sundays in Caroline County as a result of the bill, depending on how the Sundays were allocated for the three weapon seasons in the county.

Small Business Effect: Authorizing additional deer hunting in Caroline County may have a potential meaningful economic impact on certain types of businesses in that county. 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: HB 285 of 2015, a similar bill, passed the House but received an unfavorable report from the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee. Its cross file, SB 117, also received an unfavorable report from the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Caroline County, Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service, Department of Legislative Services

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