

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2022 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader

Senate Bill 497

(Senator Gallion)

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Environment and Transportation

**Deer Management Permit - Hunting on State Land Leased by Permit Holder -
Authorization**

This bill authorizes a person hunting under a deer management permit on State land leased by a permittee for the cultivation of crops to use a shotgun or breech loading center fired rifle approved by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to hunt deer throughout the year, including all deer hunting seasons, in the locations and under the conditions set forth in the permit. The bill also makes conforming changes. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2022.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill does not materially affect State finances. However, the Maryland Park Service (MPS) anticipates that there may be safety concerns from the expansion of hunting outside established seasons on leased MPS properties. MPS notes that some of its agriculture leases include field edge trails that are used by the public.

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

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

Analysis

Current Law:

Hunting Seasons – Generally

In general, 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 primary seasons to hunt deer in Maryland: deer bow hunting season; deer firearms season; and deer muzzleloader season. Deer hunting with archery equipment extends from early September through the end of January. Firearms season is two weeks in November and December starting the Saturday after Thanksgiving. There is also a short, three-day firearms season in January. There are two muzzleloader seasons: one in mid-October and a second in late December. There is now a three-day primitive deer hunt in early February that was new as of the 2020-2021 season.

Deer Management Permits

Maryland landowners or agricultural lessees who are experiencing severe economic loss from deer to commercially grown crops (including row crops, truck crops, pasture, nursery stock, orchards, and certain tree plantings) may be eligible to receive a deer management permit. Regulations adopted in 2015 expanded the circumstances under which a deer management permit may be issued to include significant ecological damage to specified native plant communities. Deer management permits allow the permittee or his/her agent to remove deer from the designated property outside any deer bag limits and/or the established deer hunting seasons, including on any Sunday throughout the year. These permits are issued by the Wildlife and Heritage Service within DNR; there is no permit fee.

A hunter with a deer management permit in Baltimore, Calvert, Charles, Harford, and St. Mary's counties may use a shotgun or a breech loading center fired rifle approved by DNR to hunt deer throughout the year in the locations and under the conditions set forth in the permit. Additionally, a deer management permit holder who leases State land in Baltimore, Calvert, Charles, Harford, and St. Mary's counties for crop cultivation may hunt deer on the leased land in the locations and under the conditions set forth in the permit.

Small Business Effect: Authorizing additional deer hunting and the use of approved rifles throughout the State may have a potential meaningful economic impact on some farmers by reducing crop damage. Most farms 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 other types of businesses, such as businesses that own or repair vehicles (due to a reduction in deer-vehicle collisions).

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Designated Cross File: HB 592 (Delegate Jacobs, *et al.*) - Environment and Transportation.

Information Source(s): Department of Natural Resources; U.S. Department of Agriculture; Department of Legislative Services

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