

**Department of Legislative Services**  
Maryland General Assembly  
2025 Session

**FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE**  
**First Reader - Revised**

House Bill 1024 (Delegate Hutchinson, *et al.*)  
Environment and Transportation

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**Agriculture - Catastrophic Damage Caused by Deer**

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This bill authorizes the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) to take extraordinary measures to control the local deer population and prevent future crop loss if it determines that deer have caused catastrophic damage to a field. The bill defines “catastrophic damage” as the loss of 50% or more of crops from a single field. MDA must adopt regulations to implement the bill.

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** General fund expenditures increase by \$117,700 in FY 2026. Future years reflect annualization and inflation. Revenues are not affected.

| (in dollars)   | FY 2026     | FY 2027    | FY 2028    | FY 2029     | FY 2030     |
|----------------|-------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| Revenues       | \$0         | \$0        | \$0        | \$0         | \$0         |
| GF Expenditure | 117,700     | 91,800     | 95,800     | 100,100     | 104,400     |
| Net Effect     | (\$117,700) | (\$91,800) | (\$95,800) | (\$100,100) | (\$104,400) |

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

**Local Effect:** None.

**Small Business Effect:** Potential meaningful.

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**Analysis**

**Current Law:**

*Deer Management Permit*

Maryland landowners or agricultural lessees who are experiencing severe economic loss to commercially grown crops (including row crops, truck crops, pasture, nursery stock,

orchards, and certain tree plantings) or significant ecological damage to certain native plant communities due to deer may apply to receive a deer management permit from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). A deer management permit is issued after an investigation of the damage by DNR's Wildlife and Heritage Service (WHS) and a decision of what actions must be taken, if any, to reduce the deer population, considering the (1) nature, extent, and severity of damage; (2) type of damage; (3) time of year; and (4) deer population surveys and estimates. The permit must describe the hunting device to be used and the number and type of deer to be taken.

The permit allows permit holders or their agents, known as "designated shooters," to remove deer from the designated property outside the established deer hunting seasons and deer bag limits, subject to permit conditions imposed by DNR, including on any Sunday throughout the year. Both a permit holder and all designated shooters are required to carry a copy of the permit signed by both the permit holder and designated shooter while attempting to take a deer under the terms of the permit. A deer management permit is valid for a period not to exceed one year and is free.

#### *Deer Cooperator License/Permit*

WHS may also issue deer cooperator licenses that allow a licensee to conduct deer removal and handling operations. The agricultural deer cooperator license is valid only on agricultural lands actively farmed for commercial crops (a general deer cooperator license is valid on other lands). An applicant must pay a \$100 fee, and the license expires one year from the date it is issued. An applicant for a license must be the owner or lessee of the land, or their employee, and must meet certain requirements, including successful completion of a written examination and a shooting proficiency test. In addition to licensees, certified shooters may operate under a deer cooperator license to assist with operations if they meet certain requirements, including successful completion of a shooting proficiency test.

A licensee must submit an operational plan to WHS 45 days before an operation in order to be issued an agricultural deer cooperator operational permit to implement the plan. The operational plan must contain various, detailed information and approvals, including evidence of community support for the operation and a letter of authorization from the county office of law permitting the discharge of weapons at night.

**State Expenditures:** General fund expenditures for MDA increase by \$117,712 in fiscal 2026, which accounts for the bill's October 1, 2025 effective date. This estimate reflects the cost for MDA to hire one full-time agricultural resource conservation specialist to implement the bill's authorization, including (1) surveying deer damage to determine whether "catastrophic damage" has occurred; (2) determining what extraordinary measures must be taken if catastrophic damage has occurred; (3) implementing those measures; (4) serving as a point of contact for deer-related inquiries from farmers; and

(5) coordinating with WHS. The estimate assumes that (1) there are more than minimal occurrences of catastrophic damage and (2) implementation of extraordinary measures requires a relatively sustained effort to manage the local deer population and prevent future crop damage. MDA anticipates working with at least 25 farmers per year and indicates that these activities cannot be absorbed by existing staff. The estimate includes a salary, fringe benefits, one-time start-up costs (including costs to purchase a vehicle), and ongoing operating expenses.

|   |                  |
|---|------------------|
| Position                                | 1.0              |
| Salary and Fringe Benefits              | \$70,343         |
| Vehicle Purchase                        | 40,000           |
| Operating Expenses                      | <u>7,369</u>     |
| <b>Total FY 2026 State Expenditures</b> | <b>\$117,712</b> |

Future year expenditures reflect a full salary with annual increases and employee turnover as well as annual increases in ongoing operating expenses.

As described above, this analysis assumes there are more than minimal occurrences of catastrophic damage (as indicated by MDA's expectation of working with at least 25 farmers per year). To the extent catastrophic damage, that is not otherwise managed under a deer management permit or deer cooperator license/permit, instead occurs relatively infrequently, MDA may be able to implement the bill with existing resources.

**Small Business Effect:** Small business farmers experiencing significant crop loss may benefit from measures taken under the bill to control the local deer population and prevent future crop loss, to the extent those measures are more effective than those that are otherwise available under a deer management permit or deer cooperator license/permit issued by DNR.

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### **Additional Information**

**Recent Prior Introductions:** Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

**Designated Cross File:** SB 958 (Senator Mautz) - Education, Energy, and the Environment.

**Information Source(s):** Maryland Association of Counties; Maryland Municipal League; Maryland Department of Agriculture; Department of Natural Resources; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:**      First Reader - February 25, 2025  
rh/sdk                              Revised - Clarification - March 1, 2025  
   Revised - Updated Information - March 1, 2025

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Analysis by: Beatrice F. Amoateng

Direct Inquiries to:  
(410) 946-5510  
(301) 970-5510