

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 588 (Senator Simonaire)
Education, Energy, and the Environment

Natural Resources - Complimentary Fishing and Hunting Licenses - Alterations

This bill modifies provisions authorizing or requiring the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to issue complimentary angler's licenses, Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing licenses, recreational oyster licenses, and hunting licenses to specified individuals, including specified veterans, with the changes establishing consistency among the provisions. The bill also (1) requires that DNR compile specified statistics on hunting licenses, primarily complimentary licenses, and (2) establishes that commemorative lifetime hunting licenses that were issued until December 31, 2011, are not transferable. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill can be implemented by DNR with existing resources, and the bill's changes to hunting and recreational fishing license provisions are not expected to materially affect license fee revenues.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Bill Summary:

Complimentary Licenses

The bill makes changes to provisions authorizing DNR to issue complimentary angler's licenses, Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing licenses, recreational oyster licenses,

and hunting licenses, that establish certain consistency among the authorizations, as follows:

- The bill makes existing authorizations for DNR to issue a complimentary angler's or Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing license to any official of the game and fish department of any other state also applicable to any enforcement officer of the game and fish department of any other state; however, the bill limits the authorizations only to officials and enforcement officers of other states that reciprocally offer a complimentary angler's or sport fishing license, respectively. These changes are consistent with a similar existing authorization for DNR to issue complimentary hunting licenses to officials and enforcement officers of the game and fish department of another state which reciprocally offers complimentary hunting licenses.
- Similar to existing authorizations for DNR to issue lifetime complimentary angler's, Chesapeake Bay and coastal sportfishing, and hunting licenses to specified resident and nonresident veterans, the bill authorizes DNR to issue a complimentary recreational oyster license to any resident of any other state who certifies that the person is (1) a former prisoner of war; (2) an American veteran who the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) determines is unemployable; or (3) a 100% service-connected disabled American veteran. The nonresident's state must extend reciprocal privileges to former prisoners of war, American veterans who the VA determines are unemployable, or 100% service-connected disabled American veterans. This authorization is in addition to a similar existing complimentary recreational oyster license available to residents, and the bill (1) establishes that DNR is authorized, rather than required, to issue the complimentary license to residents and (2) makes both the resident and nonresident licenses lifetime licenses and nontransferable.
- The bill clarifies under the complimentary Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing, recreational oyster, and hunting license provisions that the complimentary licenses are issued without a fee.
- The bill also establishes that DNR may issue an annual complimentary recreational oyster license without a fee to a person that is blind, regardless of whether the person is or is not a resident of the State (under current law, the department must issue a complimentary license to a resident who is blind).
- The bill establishes under the complimentary recreational oyster and hunting license provisions that not more than 20 complimentary licenses (of each type) for each state other than Maryland may be outstanding at any time (there are similar

limitations on complimentary angler's and Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing licenses under current law).

Statistics on Hunting Licenses

The bill adds to an existing requirement that DNR compile statistics, after the close of the hunting season each year, concerning hunting license sales. The bill requires that statistics be compiled annually after each hunting season concerning:

- the number of annual complimentary hunting licenses issued for the previous season, including the names, occupations, and states of residence of the persons who were issued the annual complimentary hunting licenses;
- the number of lifetime complimentary hunting licenses issued for the previous season and in total, including the names, eligibility categories, and states of residence of the persons who were issued the lifetime complimentary hunting licenses; and
- the total number of hunting licenses that are no longer issued by the department that remain valid.

Commemorative Lifetime Hunting Licenses

The bill establishes that commemorative lifetime hunting licenses – which DNR was required to issue, pursuant to Chapter 367 of 2010, until December 31, 2011 – are not transferable, except for the initial sale by a nonprofit organization. The bill repeals provisions governing the initial sale of the licenses by nonprofit organizations and the use of the proceeds.

Current Law:

Complimentary Licenses

Angler's, Sport Fishing, and Hunting Licenses

DNR is authorized to issue annually a complimentary angler's license, Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing license, and/or hunting license to the President of the United States, the governor of any state, and any official of the game and fish department of any other state. DNR may also issue an annual complimentary hunting license to an enforcement officer of the game and fish management agency of another state, but in the case of both officials and enforcement officers of a game and fish management agency of another state, the other state must reciprocally offer complimentary hunting licenses.

DNR is also authorized to issue lifetime complimentary angler's, Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing, and hunting licenses to residents and nonresidents who certify that they are (1) a former prisoner of war; (2) an American veteran who the VA determines is unemployable; or (3) a 100% service-connected disabled American veteran. However, a nonresident's state of residence must extend similar privileges to Maryland residents.

The complimentary licenses are nontransferable. Statute clarifies that a complimentary angler's license is issued without a fee.

For complimentary angler's and Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing licenses, not more than 20 complimentary licenses (of each type) for each state other than Maryland must be outstanding at any time.

Recreational Oyster License

Chapter 518 of 2024 established a recreational oyster license, available to residents of the State, and, as part of the statute, authorized DNR to issue a complimentary recreational oyster license to a resident who certifies that they are (1) a former prisoner of war; (2) an American veteran determined to be unemployable by the VA; (3) a 100% service-connected disabled American veteran; or (4) blind.

Statistics on Hunting Licenses

Statute requires DNR to compile statistics after the close of the hunting season each year concerning the sale of hunting licenses for the previous season, including the names, addresses, counties of residence, and ages of the persons who purchased the hunting licenses and the types of hunting licenses sold.

Commemorative Lifetime Hunting Licenses

Chapter 367 of 2010 established a commemorative lifetime hunting license and required DNR to issue a limited number of them to certain nonprofit organizations, consistent with eligibility criteria developed by the department, until December 31, 2011. Nonprofit organizations issued hunting licenses were authorized to market and sell the licenses in cooperation with the department, and all proceeds were required to be used by DNR to fund conservation law enforcement by the Natural Resources Police Force.

Additional Information

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

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Natural Resources; Department of Veterans and Military Families; Department of Legislative Services

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caw/lgc

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