



WHISTLING HILL

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Hon. Kumar P. Barve, Chairperson
House Environment and Transportation Committee
House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401 (submitted electronically)

Submitted testimony re: HB 173-2020
Please reject Bill as written, or Amend Bill to reflect
the current *status quo*.

Dear Chairperson Barve & Environment and Transportation Committee Members:

I am a member of the Wildlife Advisory Commission (WAC), charged with monitoring and reviewing policy for the Wildlife and Heritage Service (WHS). I do not speak on behalf of the WAC or WHS, nor am I in any way authorized to do so. I am a lifetime Maryland landowner, farmer, hunter and outdoorsman. For about 10 years, I have sought compromise throughout Maryland on the issue of Sunday hunting, which I believe deserves a limited place in Maryland's crowded outdoor access scheme. HB 173 would upset the delicate balance that has been reached after years of effort and compromise by all parties.

Suffice it to say the current Natural Resources Section 10-410 has 17 different references to "**private property**", primarily limiting Sunday hunting to private property in 13 counties, and four references to "**public land**". Without explanation or apparent input of the local delegations, the version proposed by HB 173 has **zero** references to private property, and a single reference to "**public land**", and opens authorization for Sunday hunting on public property (with the exclusion of State Park System land) that the delegations in those 13 counties saw fit to keep closed as a compromise. Ironically, the bill also closes Sunday hunting opportunities on public land that are currently open to Sunday hunting, and closes the potential for WHS to open additional public land in the six¹ counties that opted to have public land open for Sunday hunting.

What the heck? How does this simplify anything?

It does not, this is simply a Trojan Horse named "simplification" containing a largely unwanted advance of Sunday hunting on public lands in 13 counties that don't want it. Those lands are not insignificant. By rough count those 13 counties contain over 90,000 acres of State Forest, and approximately 90,000 acres of Wildlife Management Areas that the local delegations have previously seen fit to exclude from Sunday hunting.

On the other hand, the same simplified Trojan Horse takes away Sunday hunting opportunities on public lands in the six counties that have opted for Sunday hunting access of their public lands by removing the State Park System from the roster of potential Sunday hunting properties. It is not

¹ There is a seventh County, Dorchester which authorizes WHS to open public land to Sunday hunting, but specifically limited to spring turkey season.

immediately obvious, but "State Park System" public lands include State Parks, but also include Natural Resources Management Areas (NRMA's) - usually open for hunting, including on Sundays in those six counties. Those NRMA's currently open would be closed on Sunday in those six counties by HB 173.

Simplicity cries out to leave the existing law the same, even though I do not necessarily agree with that current law.

If you believe that simplicity and clarity are the be-all and end-all goal of HB 173 and change is needed, then the decision on public land authorization for Sunday hunting should be exactly the opposite of what HB173 does in regard to public property. Six counties authorize public land Sunday hunting and 13 counties exclude public land from Sunday hunting, so if HB 173 needs to be a 'one size fits all' when it comes to public lands, isn't the answer obvious - that Sunday hunting should be closed on public land instead of authorized? I do not suggest that this is the better outcome, but it is the outcome that makes sense, if the priority is change for the sake of simplicity and clarity.

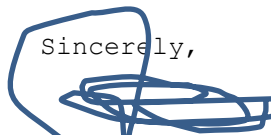
Your committee has important business to do for the citizens of Maryland. To put this issue in perspective, according to WHS, only 1.45% of Maryland residents bought a hunting license in 2017 - myself included, yet year after year, the docket is cluttered with Sunday hunting bills. If I had a magic wand, Section 10-410 would be a simple statewide law with a finite number of Sundays available for hunting throughout the State, but instead we have invested our finite legislative capital in a hodgepodge. It's not what I would want, but more than anything, I urge this committee to quit investing its time in an issue that only benefits 1.45% of the population but negatively affects a far larger number of citizens. ENOUGH! Just close the books on Sunday hunting for ten years or so, and turn to more important issues.

Since the Maryland Legislature has decided that hunting is a local courtesy issue (which I do not necessarily agree with, but that train left the station long ago), I urge you to respect those compromises made over the past two decades, and make one of the following decisions:

- Send HB 173 back for redrafting so that it exactly reflects the status of current Maryland Natural Resources 10-410, but in a more "user friendly" and organized fashion;
- Amend HB 173 subsection 14 to exclude all public lands from Sunday hunting (which may upset some hunters in those six counties where public access on Sundays exists, but which would be far more consistent with the wishes of all of the constituents in the other 13 counties where it does not); or
- Instead of undoing the current system, simply give the bill an unfavorable vote out of committee.

Thanks for listening.

Sincerely,



Joseph S. Michael

Copies: Paul Peditto, Director, Wildlife and Heritage Service