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SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
March 10, 2021

SENTE BILL 899
Natural Resources – Canada Geese – Bag Limits
SUPPORT

“The Atlantic Population (AP) of Canada geese has experienced below average reproduction seven out of the past ten years due to poor weather conditions on their sub-Artic breeding grounds, aka Canada’s Ungava Peninsula. Consequently, the number of breeding pairs of AP geese has declined and triggered the need to move into the Atlantic Flyway’s restrictive hunt package to reduce hunter harvest.”

Josh Homyack
Maryland’s DNR Waterfowl Program Manager, May 14, 2019

THE HONORABLE PAUL G. PINSKY, Chair
HONORABLE MEMBERS OF SEHEA

The Hunters of Maryland commend Senator Bailey for his conservation-minded foresight in proposing to mitigate the unintended consequences of harvesting migratory Canada geese (“AP” Atlantic population) during Maryland’s resident Canada goose hunting seasons. For the pending 2021/2022 season, there will be 3 split seasons for hunting resident Canada geese – those nesting within the lower 48 States in the months of March, April, May, or June, and reside within the lower 48 States in the months of April, May, June, July, and August – for a total of over 100 days with a daily bag limit of 5 birds. Comparatively speaking, the season for AP Canada geese is only 30 days with a 1 bird daily bag limit. The 2021/2022 season is the third consecutive restrictive season at 30-days with 1 bird. Accordingly, AP Canada geese experienced a near-total reproductive failure in 2018 b/c of an extremely late spring on their northern Quebec breeding grounds.

Due to the COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) pandemic, most migratory breeding surveys (e.g., the Breeding Waterfowl Population and Habitat Survey, Breeding Bird Survey, and others) conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Canadian Wildlife Service, US Geological Survey, as well as state and provincial agencies were canceled in spring 2020. Clearly, the need for a third year of restrictive hunting of AP Canada geese in 2021/2022 is without question. No one has a defensible projection of the number of AP breeding pairs, gosling production and overall population b/c of COVID. Simply put, why risk harvesting 5 resident geese each day during a 100-day plus season when there is a chance some of those resident birds could be AP birds? We must be cautionary.

The last thing we want in Maryland is to see what happened in 1995, resulting in a 6-year moratorium on AP Canada goose hunting. Breeding surveys of key AP nesting areas in northern Quebec documented a more precipitous decline in AP numbers from 118,000 nesting pairs recorded in 1988 to 90,000 in 1993, 40,000 in 1994, and 29,000 pairs in 1995. This dramatic change in numbers of AP geese, greater than 75 percent in less than a decade, prompted State, Federal, and Provincial wildlife agencies in 1995 to suspend the sport hunting season of AP geese in the United States and in the Canadian Provinces of Ontario and Quebec. The resultant 6-year closure, caused by a precipitous 75 percent drop in this flyway's migratory goose population, figured to cost the region – Maryland’s Eastern Shore -- anywhere from \$20 to \$40 million each year.

Bill Miles,
Advocate, Hunters of Maryland