



To: **The Honorable Kumar P. Barve**
 Chair, House Environment & Transportation Committee
 House Office Building
 6 Bladen Street
 Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

Re: **House Bill 490 (Montgomery County – Deer Management Permit Pilot Project), and
 House Bill 594 (Prohibition on the Sale of Wildlife – Local Venison Donation Programs –
 Application)**

Position: **OPPOSE**

Date: **February 4, 2021**

Dear Chairman Barve,

We, the undersigned organizations collectively representing the interests of hundreds of thousands of Maryland’s sportsmen and women, are writing to express our strong opposition to House Bill 490 (HB 490) and House Bill 594 (HB 594). Both bills, if passed, would authorize the sale of wild venison, and undermine the dedicated conservation work of sportsmen and women. These hunter-conservationists collectively recovered White-tailed deer from an estimate of only 100,000 individuals in the nation over a century ago to the burgeoning populations that are present across their historical range today.

During the early years of our nation there were few game laws or regulations in place that limited harvest, and market hunting – whereby individuals were able to make a profit from the sale of animals they shot – was rampant. As a result, deer^{1,2}, trumpeter swans³, wood ducks⁴, turkeys, and many other species have all experienced periods in which over-hunting or market gunning led to the collapse of populations throughout many of their historical ranges.

¹ DeCalesta, D. S. (1997). Deer and ecosystem management. In *Ecosystem management for deer* (pp. 267-279).
² Woolf, A., and Roseberry, J. L. (1998). Deer management: Our profession’s symbol of success or failure? *Wildlife Society Bulletin*, 26(3), 515-521.
³ Shea, R. E., Nelson, H.V., Gillette, L. N., King, J. G., and Weaver, D. K. (2002). Restoration of trumpeter swans in North America: A century of progress and challenges. *Waterbirds: The International Journal of Waterbird Biology*, 25(Special publication 1: Proceedings of the Fourth International Swan Symposium 2001), 296-300.
⁴ Bellrose, F. C. (1976). *Ducks, geese and swans of North America. Second edition.* Harrisburg: Stackpole, and Washington, DC: Wildlife Management Institute.

The result of this period of unregulated market hunting was that many species throughout the nation were either extirpated or threatened in areas in which they were traditionally found. Eventually, game managers and hunters alike began to realize that this type of harvest was not sustainable, and some form of regulation would be necessary to protect the resource and to ensure future use⁵. This awareness led to banning the practice of market hunting and the creation of the first wildlife management agencies at the state level in the late 19th and early 20th centuries⁶.

The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation – the codification of the guiding principles of wildlife management practiced in the United States for the past century – holds a prohibition on the commerce of wildlife and their parts as one of its seven tenets. Markets for wildlife privatize a public resource and have the potential to lead to precipitous population declines⁷ by financially incentivizing harvest. Today the North American Model is lauded as the most successful model of wildlife management in the world.

Although the darker period of unregulated market-hunting did occur and cannot be ignored, hunting in the United States today is largely a portrait of stewardship for the land that centers on the sustainable use of our nation’s resources. Regulated hunting and game management programs sponsored by hunter dollars through the American System of Conservation Funding have a nearly century-long track record of success in providing active and sustainable management of game species and have proven successful for the restoration of imperiled species⁸ as well.

We urge you to consider this history when evaluating both HB 490 and HB 594. As conservationists, we must learn from past lessons to ensure a return to the darker days of exploitation of our wildlife resources does not occur. These bills set a dangerous precedent by allowing the sale of venison and are diametrically opposed with one of the primary principles of the most successful wildlife management Model in the world. The passage of either bill would bring us one step closer to ushering in a new era of wildlife markets.

Beyond our overarching concerns with these bills, mentioned above, we would also highlight the following points for your consideration.

HB 490

We are deeply concerned about the negative effect the passage of HB 490 would have on programs such as Farmers and Hunters Feeding the Hungry (FHFH), which relies on donated venison from farmers and hunters to provide much needed food for the less fortunate. Maryland has invested hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars into this program which is renowned throughout the nation as a model for other states to follow. Since 2002, FHFH has received grants from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, and then appropriations through the state budget. Regardless of taxpayer support, this program ultimately relies on the charity of hunters and farmers to donate their surplus harvests. Establishing a marketplace for the sale of venison will decrease charitable donations and more Marylanders will go hungry. Each deer sold, rather than donated, will result in an estimated 200 fewer meals for the hungry.

Further, the fact that this bill seeks to reclassify wild deer as “livestock” for the purposes of bringing them to market denigrates the legacy of American sportsmen and women, state fish and wildlife agencies, and

⁵ Woolf, A., and Roseberry, J. L. (1998). Deer management: Our profession’s symbol of success or failure? *Wildlife Society Bulletin*, 26(3), 515-521.

⁶ Duda, M. D., Jones, M. F., & Criscione, A. (2010). *The Sportsman’s Voice: Hunting and Fishing in America*. State College: Venture Publishing Inc. ISBN-10: 1-892132-90-7.

⁷ Organ, J.F., V. Geist, S.P. Mahoney, S. Williams, P.R. Krausman, G.R. Batcheller, T.A. Decker, R. Carmichael, P. Nanjappa, R. Regan, R.A. Medellin, R. Cantu, R.E. McCabe, S. Craven, G.M. Vecellio, and D.J. Decker. (2012). The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. *The Wildlife Society Technical Review 12-04*. The Wildlife Society, Bethesda, Maryland, USA.

⁸ Duda, M. D., Jones, M. F., & Criscione, A. (2010). *The Sportsman’s Voice: Hunting and Fishing in America*. State College: Venture Publishing Inc. ISBN-10: 1-892132-90-7.

other conservationists, whose diligent work over the past century has resulted in the recovery of the White-tailed deer being rightfully recognized as one of the greatest conservation success stories our nation has ever known.

HB 594

We likewise have specific concerns related to HB 594. If enacted, the “benefit” this legislation is seeking to provide would only come though negatively impacting game meat donation programs in other areas of the state. If a specific county is offering what is tantamount to a bounty for deer to be donated to its program it stands to reason that farmers and hunters will capitalize on that additional income and cross county lines to realize their highest potential return. Thus, there are not only fundamental philosophical divides with our conservation Model, but also social equity issues which we encourage you to be mindful of as you evaluate this proposal.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this discussion. We stand ready to provide further information as the Committee deems appropriate, and useful.

Sincerely,

Archery Trade Association
Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Boone and Crockett Club
Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation
Delta Waterfowl
Ducks Unlimited, Inc.
Frederick #1 Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Free State Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Harford County Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Houston Safari Club
Hunters of Maryland
Izaak Walton League of America
Lois Green-Sligo Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Maryland Division of the Izaak Walton League of America
Mid Shore Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Mt. Airy Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Mule Deer Foundation
National Deer Association
Pheasants Forever
Quail Forever
Rockville Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Safari Club International
Sportsman’s Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Washington County Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Wildlife Achievement Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America
Woodmont Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America