

**I represent the membership of TRAIL RIDERS OF TODAY (TROT)**, a 40 year old Maryland non-profit organization that advocates for the preservation of equestrian trails and open space for public recreational use. Our members live in counties all across the state. TROT’s members staunchly oppose this bill.

I am also a long-time member and former board member the Tuckahoe Equestrian Center Foundation, Inc., (TEC) a non-profit which leases property within Tuckahoe State Park. Many of TEC’s activities take place in the park, which has trails on both side of the Tuckahoe River: about half the trails are in Queen Anne’s County, and the other half are in Caroline County.

All public land is bordered by private land. Property lines within the woods are often difficult to know – and, even if property lines were flagged with tape or paint, bullets and arrows don’t stop at property lines. The windshields of the cars in our driveway were pockmarked by birdshot. I know of many people who have had issues with hunters. Accidents do happen.

DNR reports of hunting accidents are woefully incomplete. One unreported accident (but verified by park officials) occurred in 2014: a biker in Tuckahoe State Park was shot in the legs. Another unreported accident (but recorded on television) occurred in 2016 when an 87 year old man was struck in the head by a bullet while walking on his own property which adjoined Patuxant River Park in Montgomery County. In 2019 a woman was shooting a groundhog in her back yard and grazed a man’s shoulder; he was walking in a park which bordered her land – again, not reported by DNR but found in the newspaper.

How many other accidents would there be if the perception of danger kept so many Marylanders out of the woods – even when they own the woods -- like my husband and I do? Many horse owners do not own horse trailers, and their own property may be the only place that they *can* enjoy their passions.

My husband is an avid birdwatcher. The Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS) has chapters in 15 counties, and many county chapters schedule bird walks on Sunday mornings. Sundays should be days for everyone to enjoy, not just the 2-3% who like to hunt.

I often hear the argument that hunters need Sundays because sometimes they're busy on Saturday. This argument certainly applies to everyone, and especially to non-hunters, who already have given up 9 Sundays in Queen Anne's County to hunters. During parts of the year, hunters can hunt 30-35 days without a break. This bill would be open season for hunters nearly 365 days of the year. Many people look forward an outing in the fall when the bugs and heat abate. These people, too, might only have Sundays available.

The legislative fiscal note says that this bill is not expected to materially affect state or local finances and will have minimal overall financial impact -- from a hunting standpoint. But what about the wildlife watchers (photographers, hikers, birdwatchers) who make up 83% of the population, according to the 2016 US Fish and Wildlife census report. According to this report Wildlife Watchers spend 3 times more than hunters. Just google "growth of birdwatching" and you'll find numerous articles on the "fastest growing hobby in the US". Wildlife watchers should be given consideration for their dollar contributions, too.

We need to encourage children to get outside, away from their hand-held devices! Why is it unreasonable for people to want a single day to enjoy the outdoors, when hunters already have 6 days to hunt??

The horse industry's \$2.1 billion impact on Maryland's economy is huge. Horse farms make up 10% of Maryland's land, and pastures are among the best filtering devices to protect the Bay from runoff. Pastures are also excellent absorbers of carbon dioxide, they are critical habitat for many grassland bird species that are in severe decline, and they provide open space for all to enjoy.

Please, in the name of equity for all and science for a better environment, vote against HB 558.

Respectfully submitted,  
Joyce Bell