

23 MGPA_HB779 Doe Harvest Contests.pdf

Uploaded by: Lindsay Thompson

Position: FAV



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Date: March 8, 2023

Senate Bill 779 - Natural Resources - Female Deer Hunting Contests - Authorization

Committee: Education, Energy and Environment

MGPA Position: SUPPORT

The Maryland Grain Producers Association (MGPA) serves as the voice of grain farmers growing corn, wheat, barley and sorghum across the state. MGPA supports Senate Bill 779 which would allow the Department of Natural Resources to allow deer harvest contests in the month of January for the purpose of population control.

The National Agricultural Statistics Service estimates that farmers experience over \$10 million in crop damage annually with 75% of that being attributed to deer. Maryland's deer population was estimated to be just over 200,000 white-tailed deer and 10,000 sika deer in 2022. The density of deer to suitable habitat in Maryland is high and therefore causes conflict with not only farmers and their crops but also vehicles and homeowners. Responsible hunting is the best way to control deer over-population.

[Farmers and Hunters Feeding the Hungry](#) is a program where hunters can participate can donate harvested deer for processing and the deer meat is then donated to Maryland Food Bank and participating food pantries. This is primarily funded by the agriculture community. Each deer donated gives the donor an entry into a drawing for mostly hunting gear related give-a-ways.

Another program started by the agriculture community are local Doe Harvest Challenges. County Farm Bureaus and grain producers host a 3-day doe harvest challenge and each antlerless deer checked in enters the hunter in to a cash drawing. If the hunter chooses to donate the deer, it is processed free of charge (paid for my farmers and agribusinesses) and again, donated to food banks and pantries.

House Bill 863 was passed in 2020 which prohibited "killing contests" for fur-bearing animals. During the 2020 session, Maryland Grain Producers Association worked with the bill sponsor to clarify and were assured that this did not impact white-tailed deer and therefore would not prohibit the doe harvest contests.

However, over the last few years, the contests have been scrutinized by the Department of Natural Resources as a violation to Section 10-404 which prohibits the sale, exchange or barter of wild game and we are hoping for official clarification to allow them to continue. MGPA worked with the sponsor to move the language to the correct section of the code and an amendment is forthcoming.

MGPA respectfully requests your favorable report on Senate Bill 779.

Support With Amendment of SB 779 - Natural Resourc

Uploaded by: Colby Ferguson

Position: FWA



Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

3358 Davidsonville Road • Davidsonville, MD 21035 • (410) 922-3426

March 8, 2023

To: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

From: Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

Re: **Support with Amendment of SB 779 - Natural Resources - Female Deer Hunting Contests - Authorization**

On behalf of our member families, I submit this written testimony in support with amendment of SB 779, legislation that authorizes the Department of Natural Resources to allow a person, for the management of the deer population in the State, to sponsor, conduct, or participate in an existing, random contest in the State held during the month of January that has the objective of harvesting a female deer.

Crop damage created by deer is nearly \$50 per acre today. These numbers are even higher on the Eastern Shore. The lower shore county Farm Bureau's along with the Maryland Grain Producers and several local farms worked together in 2019 to set up what they call a Doe Harvest Challenge that focuses on getting hunters to come out and hunt at the very end of the hunting season. The focus is to address the overpopulation of deer on the lower shore. Since the vast majority of hunters hunt only for bucks, the female deer population has exploded in this area. This event is only for female deer and is for the sole purpose of reducing the overpopulation. The deer that are harvested are either kept by the hunter or are donated to the local food bank and the cost of the processing is covered by the sponsors of the event. We believe the bill language is correct but was put in the wrong section of the law.

MDFB requests an amendment to move this new language from 10-427 of the Natural Resources Article to 10-404 of the Natural Resources Article and create a new 10-404 (e)(2)(vi).

MARYLAND FARM BUREAU SUPPORTS SB 779 WITH AN AMENDMENT

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Colby Ferguson'.

Colby Ferguson
Director of Government Relations

For more information contact Colby Ferguson at (240) 578-0396

SB779_UNF_HSUS.pdf

Uploaded by: Jennifer Horsmon

Position: UNF



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

March 8, 2023

Senator Brian Feldman
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Subject: OPPOSE SB 779 – Female Deer Hunting Contests

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Committee,

The Humane Society of the United States, and our Maryland supporters, urge you to oppose SB779/HB934, which would amend the ban on wildlife killing contests (§10-427) to allow a person to sponsor, conduct or participate in a contest that has the objective of killing a female deer. Organized contests to kill deer for cash and prizes are cruel, unsporting, and scientifically unfounded.

The current ban on killing contests already does not apply to deer—it applies only to coyote, fox and raccoon—and does not prohibit “big buck” contests or deer hunting. Big buck contests are very different from killing contests, where the smallest, largest or most animals are killed in competitive events for cash and prizes. As The Wildlife Society explains:

“Killing contests differ from typical regulated hunting by the very nature of the organized public competition and prizes being given specifically for killing the largest, smallest, or most animals. “Big Buck” pools or organized record books differ from killing contests because the animals recognized in these competitions are harvested consistent with ordinary and generally accepted hunting practices and then introduced to the competition.”¹

A. Wildlife killing contests are a bloodsport similar to dogfighting or cockfighting, which Maryland has already banned.

This activity is counter to Marylanders’ humane values and to the spirit and intent of the ban on killing contests that residents and most legislators supported in 2021. During killing contests, participants mass kill animals and then gather to weigh and count the bodies, take photos next to the bloody animals, and celebrate. These contests promote gratuitous violence, and send the message that killing is fun, animals are disposable, and life is cheap. The very nature of these events—in which participants are motivated by financial rewards to kill as many animals as allowed over a designated time period—increases the likelihood that participants will fail to abide by the rules and values embraced by responsible hunters. During these events animals may suffer injuries that can take days or weeks to succumb to, even indirectly due to starvation, predation or exposure.

Killing contest participants display an utter lack of respect for the animals they kill. Photos plastered on social media show contestants grinning next to piles of bloodied animals and showing off their prizes. The animals are carelessly thrown into heaps, with their guts often spilling out and the ground covered in a thick layer of blood, piled into trucks, and hung upside down from railings and barn walls, apparently to

show off the massive number of animals killed. Such behaviors demonstrate a lack of respect for wildlife and serve to undermine the reputation of responsible hunters.

B. The best available science does not support deer killing contests.

Indiscriminate lethal control in the form of wildlife killing contests disrupts wildlife populations, disturbs ecosystem balance, and creates wildlife conflicts. Proponents of deer killing contests may argue incorrectly that killing is necessary to reduce deer overpopulation, protect ornamental trees, shrubs and gardens, prevent deer/car collisions, protect parks and wooded areas from “over browsing” and biodiversity loss, and reduce Lyme disease.

1. Indiscriminately killing deer will not keep deer numbers down.

Deer are highly prolific, and their high reproductive rate can quickly compensate for declines in their population. When deer numbers are reduced after killing programs, the remaining female deer will often respond to greater food abundance by giving birth to twins or triplets. Fawns also have higher survival rates and earlier onset of sexual maturity. The end result is a quick “bounce-back” in numbers. To be successful, a killing program must not only significantly reduce the deer herd, it must sustain enough pressure to prevent this bounce-back effect, while also preventing deer from the surrounding area from wandering in. All of this usually poses an insurmountable challenge in most urban and suburban communities.

2. Indiscriminately killing deer for cash and prizes will not protect Maryland gardens or crops.

Killing deer will not resolve people’s conflicts with deer in their gardens. Certain plants like tulips and hostas are irresistible to deer. Even if the deer population could be brought to a very low level, these top-choice flowers would still be eaten by any remaining deer. That’s why effective solutions focus on deterring deer and protecting flowers and ornamentals rather than trying to shoot every deer that may come along and eat them.

The key to success is for residents to understand that deer are here to stay. Once homeowners overcome their initial resistance and take steps to protect valued plants, “deer-proofing” will quickly become a normal part of life in deer country.

3. Indiscriminately killing deer will not stop deer/car accidents.

One of the most distressing results of human encroachment into deer habitat is the frequency of deer/auto collisions. Killing deer will not solve the underlying problem, which is that we have trapped these animals within a network of highways crisscrossing their territory and have failed to construct wildlife underpasses or overpasses that allow safe crossings.

Studies have shown that reducing the deer population does not necessarily reduce the number of collisions between cars and deer. In some cases, collision numbers are actually lower in areas with more deer. Many factors contribute to deer-vehicle collisions, such as traffic volume, speed limits, the extent to which roads bisect habits and migration routes and the use of visual barriers. This is why reducing the number of deer alone does not work to reduce vehicle collisions with deer.

4. Indiscriminately killing deer is not the solution to forest regeneration.

It is easy to point the finger at deer and blame them for our forest regeneration woes, yet the reality is that our ecosystem issues are fraught with complexity and subject to human aesthetic preferences

which are often not grounded in any sort of biological reality. Nature is not static. A forest floor once carpeted with wildflowers can rapidly transition into another state as a result of forest succession. Certain plant species are shaded out as trees mature and the forest canopy closes. Later succession stages are, by their very nature, less diverse. Forests are subject to many influences that affect their growth, some less visible than others. Arbitrarily killing deer isn't likely to bring back the type of forest people may want to see.

5. Indiscriminately killing deer will not reduce the incidence of Lyme disease.

Scientific studies and health authorities have demonstrated that killing deer won't reduce people's risk of contracting Lyme disease. The tick that spreads the disease, the black-legged tick (or deer tick), feeds on many different hosts—almost all mammals, most songbirds and even lizards. Killing deer does not reduce the risk of contracting Lyme disease because deer kills do not significantly reduce the tick population. In a study from Great Island, Mass., where up to 70 % of the deer were removed, there was no marked reduction in the tick abundance.

The black-legged tick is very adaptable. Where deer are scarce, the ticks switch to other hosts or congregate in higher numbers on the remaining deer. Deer killing programs have little effect on the tick population—and don't reduce human disease risk. Better alternatives include using products like 4-Posters and Damminix Tick Tubes to lower the tick population as well as taking proper precautions to avoid contact with ticks.

6. Nonlethal solutions are the best way to reduce conflicts with deer.

Communities should first do objective public surveys to define and assess the nature, scope and location of the particular deer problem so solutions can be tailored to particular sites. Then a community should develop a comprehensive plan using applicable non-lethal methods, along with setting up a robust data collection and evaluation system to monitor if deer damage mitigation strategies are achieving set goals and adapt the programs accordingly.

C. Allowing deer killing contests would be an abdication of the State's solemn duty to protect the public's wildlife for all residents.

Marylanders have already spoken: they do not support killing contests. And a national poll taken by Remington Research Group in January 2022 found that 80% of Americans oppose wildlife killing contests.² Motivation for hunting affects public support for it. The *American Attitudes Towards Hunting, Fishing, Sport Shooting, and Trapping 2019* report by the National Shooting Sports Foundation found that, while 84% of survey respondents supported hunting for meat, only 29% supported hunting for a trophy.³ It is likely that support for killing contests is even less than it is for trophy hunting. Very few Marylanders engage in hunting (only 1.9% of Maryland residents were paid hunting license holders in 2021)⁴ and the portion of those hunters who participate in contests is miniscule. Wildlife belongs and is important to all Maryland citizens—not just the very small percentage of people who participate in this activity.

Americans, including Marylanders, increasingly care about wildlife. A keystone study, the *America's Wildlife Values* project, has documented a substantial shift in public attitudes away from a traditional view of wildlife—a view of human mastery over wildlife and that wildlife should be managed for human benefit—and toward a mutualist view of wildlife, or the belief that humans and wildlife should coexist and that the welfare of animals is important.⁵ The Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies and the Wildlife Management Institute have noted these studies and underscored the need for state wildlife management

agencies to appeal to a broader constituency to ensure that wildlife agencies remain influential in the future.⁶

Wildlife killing contest participants often try to vilify wildlife species targeted in these events in order to justify the contests, but current social science studies show that the majority of the public does not share these views about wildlife.⁷ Other studies, including the *Nature of Americans Report*, have found that Americans express broad interest in nature, believe connecting with nature is important, and want to conserve wildlife species and their habitats.⁸

D. The state should not allow deer killing contests.

As outlined above, it is well-established that wildlife killing contests in Maryland do not achieve any science-based wildlife management objective. In fact, these events are counterproductive to sound science. Killing contests are held for the sole purpose of killing animals for entertainment and the chance at cash and prizes. Killing contests are incompatible with Maryland's values of sportsmanship, good stewardship, and respect for wildlife. Allowing a small group of individuals to engage in this senseless waste of life violates the State's duty to responsibly manage the State's wildlife in trust for all Marylanders. The science and significant public outrage against these events, which only continues to grow, cannot be ignored.

For the aforementioned reasons, we respectfully urge you to oppose this legislation. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Bevan-Dangel
Maryland State Director

¹ "Issue Statement: Wildlife Killing Contests," The Wildlife Society (Mar. 2019), https://wildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/TWS_IS_WildlifeKillingContest_ApprovedMarch2019.pdf

² National Public Opinion, January 2022, Remington Research Group, <https://www.humanesociety.org/sites/default/files/docs/National-Public-Opinion-011022-condensed.pdf>

³ "American Attitudes Towards Hunting, Fishing, Sport Shooting, and Trapping," Responsive Management and the National Shooting Sports Foundation (2019), p. 14, https://www.fishwildlife.org/application/files/7715/5733/7920/NSSF_2019_Attitudes_Survey_Report.pdf

⁴ The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Historical Hunting License Data for 2020 at <https://www.fws.gov/wsfrprograms/Subpages/LicenseInfo/Hunting.htm>

⁵ Manfredo, M.J., Sullivan, L., Don Carlos, A.A., Dietsch, A.M., Teel, T.L., Bright, A.D., & Bruskotter, J. (2018). *America's Wildlife Values: The Social Context of Wildlife Management in the U.S.* National report from the research project entitled "America's Wildlife Values." Fort Collins, CO: Colorado State University, Department of Human Dimensions of Natural Resources. <https://sites.warnercnr.colostate.edu/wildlifevalues/wp-content/uploads/sites/124/2019/01/AWV-National-Final-Report.pdf>

⁶ The Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies and the Wildlife Management Institute: *The Fish and Wildlife Agency Relevance Roadmap (v1.0); Enhanced Conservation Through Broader Engagement*. September 2019 at https://www.fishwildlife.org/application/files/2515/7547/9977/Fish_Wildlife_Relevancy_Roadmap_Final_12-04-19-lowres.pdf

⁷ George, Kelly A., Kristina M. Slagle, Robyn S. Wilson, Steven J. Moeller and Jeremy T. Bruskotter. 2016. Changes in attitudes toward animals in the United States from 1978 to 2014. *Biological Conservation* 201:237-242. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0006320716302774>

⁸ Kellert, S.R., Case, D.J., Escher, D., Witter, D.J., Mikels-Carrasco, J., Seng, P.T. April 2017. The Nature of Americans: National Report. https://natureofamericans.org/sites/default/files/reports/Nature-of-Americans_National_Report_1.3_4-26-17.pdf

Natural Resources - Female Deer Hunting Contests -

Uploaded by: Lisa Radov

Position: UNF



MARYLAND VOTES FOR ANIMALS

PO Box 10411
BALTIMORE, MD 21209

March 8, 2023

To: Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
From: Lisa Radov, President and Chair, Maryland Votes for Animals, Inc.
Re: Natural Resources - Female Deer Hunting Contests – Authorization – SB 779 - Oppose

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Lisa Radov. I am the President and Chairman of Maryland Votes for Animals. We champion humane legislation to improve the lives of animals in Maryland. Speaking for Maryland Votes for Animals, our Board of Directors, and our members across Maryland, I respectfully request that the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee give an unfavorable report on Natural Resources - Female Deer Hunting Contests – Authorization – SB 779.

This bill would authorize the Department of Natural Resources to allow a person, for the management of the deer population in the State, to sponsor, conduct, or participate in a certain contest in the State that has the objective of harvesting a female deer.

Killing does for prize money is neither humane nor effective. Studies have shown that when there is an attempt to reduce deer population by culling a deer heard, the remaining female deer reproduce responding to greater food abundance often having twins or even triplets. This high reproductive rate can offset the declines in their population. Moreover, the fawns born into this environment can have higher survival rates and earlier onset of sexual maturity. More deer move in from surrounding communities with the availability of food and fertile does. The result is a quick "bounce-back" in numbers that rarely solves the problems of communities and the deer population.

In 2021, Maryland made it clear that killing certain furbearing animals for prize money is cruel and inconsistent with reputable hunting and unacceptable in Maryland. This approach feels similar. Marylanders have other days and seasons to hunt deer in our state which they have done for hundreds of years without the need for contests or prizes. If Maryland wants to deal with the issue of deer overpopulation, then that issue needs to be investigated with the Department of Natural Resources and the Wildlife Advisory Commission along with research by scientists and wildlife experts.

In closing, I would like to ask the committee for an unfavorable report on SB 779.