

February 15, 2023

Committee: Education, Energy and Environment

Senate Bill 327 - Hunting, Wildlife Conservation, and Outdoor Recreation - Funding, Promotion, Management, Licenses, Permits, and Stamps

Position: **OPPOSED**

This letter represents the views of the undersigned waterfowl hunters and club members, outfitters and conservationists on Maryland's Eastern Shore. We opposed Senate Bill 327 based on the provision allowing waterfowl hunting in Maryland on Sundays. The Eastern Shore of Maryland was once considered the Goose Capital of the World but overhunting led to the decline of Canada Goose populations to the point of a six-year moratorium on hunting in the 1990's.

The 2019-2020 season was cut to one-bird per day for 30 days due to consecutive years of a bad hatch in Canada precipitated by weather. Situations beyond our control, such as weather, impacting goose populations compounded by hunting pressure make managing the Canada Goose population on the Eastern Shore a delicate balance. The DNR mid-winter waterfowl survey in 2018 counted 641,000 Canada Geese. In 2019, that number was 250,000 and in 2023 still only 320,000. The population cannot sustain the additional hunting pressure that Sundays would result in.

It may come as a surprise that avid hunters and those of us who earn a living guiding hunting parties are opposed to Sunday hunting. The fiscal note even states it would result in increased revenue for our clubs and businesses. But that is short-sighted. We are interested in the long-term sustainability of waterfowl populations in Maryland so that we have a business and hunting tradition to pass down to the next generation.

It is no surprise that the disproportionate amount of waterfowl are harvested on Saturdays compared to weekdays. Sunday hunting coupled with the 2023-2024 proposed bag limits for Canada Geese and Mallard ducks doubling and an extended season will inevitably result in exponentially higher harvest than the species cannot support.

Outfitters are waterfowl managers and conservationists. We provide food and safe roost for waterfowl species. Outfitters and hunting guides likely know more about the populations and movement of waterfowl than anyone else in the state because that is our business. It is worth noting that the Maryland Department of Natural Resources did not consult or even notify the outfitter community before supporting this legislation. There has not been an in-person public comment session on the waterfowl season since 2019 and close to zero input solicited or considered from the waterfowl outfitter community and the hunters we support.

The fact that other states have Sunday waterfowl hunting is irrelevant to whether or not Maryland should allow Sunday hunting. Maryland was the Goose Capital of the world because of our unique geography as home to the Chesapeake Bay and all its tributaries; as well as farmland, providing a much needed food source and a safe haven for Canada Geese and other waterfowl. Adding Sunday hunting and overhunting will put us right back in the moratorium of the 1990's.

Not only do we know waterfowl best, we also know the hunters, we are the hunters! We hunt and guide hunters daily, year after year. Adding Sunday hunting is not going to sell more hunting licenses. The same people who hunt now both will continue to hunt.

Decisions about hunting seasons and bag-limits should be based on science and what is best for the species, not purely hunter opportunity and desire.

We ask for your unfavorable vote on Senate Bill 327.

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