



February 14th, 2023

TO: Senator Bryan J. Feldman (Chair)
Senator Cheryl C. Kagan (Vice Chair)
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee for Maryland

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

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and Committee Members,

On behalf Ducks Unlimited (DU), we are writing to **SUPPORT Senate Bill 327**. This legislation, which represents the culmination of work among Maryland residents, hunters, outdoor enthusiasts, lawmakers and conservation organizations, will drastically increase hunting access and opportunity while boosting conservation funding for wildlife and their habitats for all to enjoy across Maryland. We are writing to highlight just a few of the most important provisions and provide some additional background to underscore the positive impact.

DU is the world leader in wetlands and waterfowl conservation and has been protecting and restoring the continent's wetlands since 1937. DU has conserved more than 54,308 acres in Maryland and invested over \$14.6 million dollars into the state's landscape. We have a committed group of more than 14,550 members in Maryland, many of whom are waterfowl hunters, and all of whom are ardent conservationists. We are deeply committed to expanding Maryland's hunting heritage and conservation ethic.

One of the main provisions of this legislation is its ability to increase the overall funding for conservation through the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR). By slightly increasing the price of both resident and non-resident hunting licenses for the first time since 1989, the DNR is tapping into increased matching federal funds by 3 to 1 through the Pittman-Robertson Act. A modest, inflation-adjusted price increase will allow the DNR to add roughly \$8 million in license sales and federally matched funds. The additional funding will go straight back to the DNR and allow them to better manage wildlife and their habitats while providing additional opportunities for consumptive recreation in Maryland. As the vast majority of wildlife species that are managed by DNR are non-game, this funding boon will have benefits far outside the hunting community as well. Additionally, increasing the price of the Maryland migratory game bird stamp will provide additional funding for critical waterfowl research and enhancement of waterfowl habitat on public lands in Maryland, benefiting a wide array of bird species, not just waterfowl. Since 1974, stamp sales have provided more than \$7 million for migratory game projects. This price adjustment is consistent with neighboring states around Maryland.

This legislation will also repeal the antiquated colonial prohibition on hunting migratory birds on Sundays during the established seasons. Sportsmen and women often cite "lack of time" as one of the number one reasons they stop hunting. Allowing an extra weekend day to enjoy the outdoors will provide more equitable access and help recruit and retain a robust hunter population that is needed to provide funding for the overall conservation efforts in Maryland. In recent years, several

neighboring states (Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania and more) have begun the process of repealing these prohibitions, and to date, there has been no negative consequences on the resource or little to no user-conflict as a result. More than 40 other states across the United States currently offer waterfowl hunting seven days a week during the season with no detrimental impact. We at DU would like to stress that there is zero empirical data to suggest Sunday hunting will negatively impact waterfowl populations or hunter satisfaction. Another provision of this legislation also seeks to allow non-resident individuals enrolled at colleges and universities in Maryland to obtain a hunting license at the resident rate. As evidenced by the other 29 states with this provision already in place, it will help encourage college students to spend time outdoors and support conservation. Data also points to the fact that if people that are college-age are not able to hunt during this time, there is a much lower probability they will continue hunting into the future. This legislation will make every effort to stem that attrition of young people in the outdoors.

Lastly, this legislation will increase Maryland and the DNR's ability to provide robust hunter recruitment, retention and reactivation (R3) programs. By establishing the Wildlife Conservation, Education and Outreach Program, the DNR will be able to help educate and provide outreach to the public, particularly in historically under-served communities, and foster an interest in outdoor recreation, and wildlife conservation. This will be a historic step for Maryland, and the hunting community at-large, as wide swathes of our society have often been left out of outdoor recreation. This bill will ensure that communities that were not offered access and opportunity to hunting will have the same ability to enjoy Maryland's tremendous natural resources as everyone else. The R3 movement is one that is supported by all 50-state fish and wildlife agencies and has had measurable impacts on the overall number of sportsmen and women as well as increasing societal awareness and support for activities like hunting and fishing.

We at DU are committed to protecting wetlands and waterfowl while simultaneously providing opportunities for hunters from all backgrounds to equitably enjoy the outdoors in Maryland. Senate Bill 327 will do just that with a once in a generation opportunity to drastically increase conservation funding while providing Maryland residents with new and expanded hunting access and opportunity, outreach and education. We want to thank Senator Elfreth and all the co-sponsors for their leadership on this legislation. Thank you Chair, Vice Chair and Committee members for your continuing efforts to protect the wildlife and public lands of Maryland, and for considering supporting this bill. Please contact us if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

Nikki Ghorpade
Government Affairs Manager
Ducks Unlimited