

Ed Farley Testimony on HB 983 (Maryland State Senate)
Environment and Transportation Committee
Friday, March 3rd, 2023

Thank you, Chairman Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and Members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify today in support of HB983 and to provide a scientific perspective on the impacts of the legislation. My name is Ed Farley, and I am the Regional Biologist for Ducks Unlimited in Maryland. We are the world leader in wetlands and waterfowl conservation and, guided by science, we have conserved 15 million acres of habitat since 1937. I have been with DU for 7 years, but I've studied ducks my whole life.

As a waterfowl scientist, I am excited about this legislation, especially the opportunities to raise additional revenue for waterfowl conservation and the inclusion of Sunday hunting. The revenue from users, like hunters, is critical to sound science and Sunday hunting creates new opportunities for the users who generate that revenue. This is the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation that underpins our country's wildlife management. With access to Sundays, we can hopefully stem the declining numbers of hunters and ensure a steady stream of user fees for years to come. Without more paying users, we all will suffer from a lack of funding. Importantly, while this bill will increase hunter opportunity, it will not have an impact on waterfowl populations or behavior.

Waterfowl are among the most studied group of wildlife across the globe. All 50 states, Canadian provinces, and the US, Mexican and Canadian governments work together to study waterfowl populations and heavily regulate them. The USFWS manages waterfowl populations on a flyway scale, from where birds breed in Canada to their wintering areas further south. Maryland is one stop on that long journey. Part of this management system includes a hunting season framework that outlines the length and dates of waterfowl seasons within the flyway. MD hunting seasons follow the federal framework that all other states in the flyway must abide by, which ensures a sustainable harvest.

Next year, with or without Sunday hunting, the number of hunting days in the season will stay the same. And because season length is the primary driver of harvest, there should be no meaningful change in harvest numbers with the inclusion of Sundays. The only change would be a slightly reorganized calendar. I know of no scientific evidence that birds need a single day of rest or that Sunday hunting has a negative impact on bird populations.

Science is behind this legislation, so again I thank you Mr. Chairman, Vice Chair and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify in support of this historic legislation, that will overturn a 300-year-old law, in favor of science. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.