



March 3, 2023

Delegate Kumar P. Barve, Chair
House Environment and Transportation Committee
House Office Building, Room 251
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: House Bill 983 - *Hunting, Wildlife Conservation, and Outdoor Recreation - Funding, Promotion, Management, Licenses, Permits, and Stamps*

Position: **SUPPORT**

Dear Chairman Barve and Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee,

On behalf Delta Waterfowl members both in Maryland and across the United States, I am writing to enthusiastically **SUPPORT House Bill 983**. This legislation, which represents the culmination of work among Maryland residents, hunters, outdoor enthusiasts, lawmakers and conservation minded individuals, will drastically increase hunting access and opportunity while boosting conservation funding for wildlife and their habitats for all to enjoy across Maryland.

As background, Delta Waterfowl is a leading conservation organization founded at the famed Delta Marsh in Manitoba, Canada, with its United States Headquarters in Bismarck, North Dakota. We have members and supporters all across North America, including thousands in Maryland, who represent waterfowl hunters in all arenas.

Delta Waterfowl works to produce ducks through intensive management programs and conservation of breeding duck habitat while also providing vital waterfowl research, and promoting and protecting the continuing tradition of waterfowl hunting in North America.

While this legislation is truly robust and will greatly impact all wildlife and sportsmen and women of Maryland, for the purposes of this testimony, we would like to highlight just a few of the provisions specifically and provide some additional background to underscore the potential impact.

Increased Conservation Funding

One of the main provisions of this legislation is its ability to drastically increase the overall funding for conservation through the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR). By slightly increasing the price of the suite 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. This “user-pay” system affectionally called the *American System of Conservation Funding* is the crown jewel model for conservation funding and has been in place for almost a century.

A modest, inflation adjusted price increase will allow the DNR to not only add roughly \$2 million in funding each year, but will allow them to tap into over \$6 million annually through federal matching funds. The



additional funding will go straight back into the core mission of the agency and allow them to better manage wildlife and their habitats while providing additional access and opportunities for the sportsmen and women of Maryland to hunt.

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, as well the breeding grounds of the Prairie Pothole Region. Since 1974, stamp sales have provided more than \$7 million for migratory game projects. This price adjustment is consistent with neighboring states around Maryland including Virginia (\$10) and Delaware (\$15).

Access and Opportunity

This legislation will also repeal the antiquated 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. Many hunters are prevented from introducing new or novice hunters to the great outdoors because they are competing against work, organized sports and other activities on Saturdays, which is currently their only opportunity to hunt outside of the typical work and school week. Allowing an extra day to access the outdoors will provide equity and also help recruit and retain a robust hunter population that is needed to provide critical 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 zero negative consequences on the resource or little to no user-conflict as a result. In Virginia, the Department of Wildlife Resources estimated that there was "no measurable impact" on waterfowl populations with the additional day of hunting – adding that "[duck] harvest on Sundays was comparable to duck harvest occurring on Mondays-Thursdays and about 1/3 that of Saturdays." More than 40 other states across the United States currently offer waterfowl hunting seven days a week during the season with no detrimental impact. Again, it's important to stress that there is zero data to support allowing Sunday hunting will negatively impact waterfowl populations or hunter satisfaction. More than 75% of waterfowl hunters surveyed in Maryland support the idea.

Another provision of this legislation also seeks to allow non-resident individuals enrolled at colleges and universities across Maryland to obtain a hunting license under the current resident rate. College-aged sportsmen and women are one of the fastest growing user groups within the hunting community, but often they are limited financially from purchasing licenses outside their home state. Currently, 29 states have implemented legislation allowing non-resident college students to purchase hunting and/or angling licenses at resident prices, with pending legislation in several legislatures across the country.

Recruitment, Retention, Reactivation

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 under-served communities, and foster an interest in outdoor recreation, stewardship, hunting, and wildlife conservation.



The R3 movement is one that is widely 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.

In closing, House Bill 983 will provide Maryland with a once in a generation opportunity to drastically increase conservation funding for the DNR while providing Maryland residents with new and expanded hunting access and opportunity, outreach and education. We want to thank Senator Elfreth for her leadership on this legislation, as well as the co-sponsors. We look forward to working with this committee and the rest of the General Assembly as it works its way through the legislative process. We respectfully ask that you support the bill.

Respectfully,

Cyrus Hunter Baird

Cyrus Hunter Baird
Senior Director of Government Affairs
Delta Waterfowl Foundation

CC:

The Honorable Jack Bailey
The Honorable Dawn Gile
The Honorable Michael A. Jackson
The Honorable Mary-Dulany James
The Honorable Nancy J. King
The Honorable Mike McKay
The Honorable Jim Rosapepe
The Honorable Johnny Ray Salling
The Honorable Nick Allen
The Honorable Marvin E. Holmes, Jr.
The Honorable Dana Jones
The Honorable Jeffrie E. Long, Jr.
The Honorable Natalie Ziegler
Paul Peditto, Director, Maryland Department of Natural Resources