



THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

March 3, 2023

Bill: HB 954 – Tundra swan hunting season
Committee: House Committee of Environment and Transportation
Position: OPPOSE

Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and Members of the House Committee of Environment and Transportation:

We submit this testimony in opposition to HB 954, which would require the Maryland DNR to establish an annual tundra swan hunting season if authorized by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. There is no justification for opening up Maryland's tundra swans to hunting just to provide a new opportunity for a very small number of hunters,¹ and doing so could put Maryland's recovering trumpeter swans at risk of accidental kills because swan identification is difficult at best (see comparative images from Cornell Lab of Ornithology).²

Trumpeter swans in Maryland could be killed by hunters shooting at lookalike tundra swans.

In November of 2022, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources announced that *for the fourth consecutive year*, it was closing the state's tundra swan season early because hunters had reached the quota for mistakenly killing 20 lookalike, rare trumpeter swans.³ Even experienced birders have noted that it is difficult to distinguish between trumpeter and tundra swans, both of whom have black beaks with only small differences in coloration.⁴ Trumpeter swans have been sighted in Maryland and northern Virginia.⁵

The largest and one of the heaviest of North America's native waterfowl, trumpeter swans were nearly driven to extinction by the early 20th century by market hunting and habitat loss. While these magnificent birds have begun to make a recovery because of protection from hunting, they continue to face myriad risks from lead poisoning due to ingestion of lead sinkers and spent shot, collisions with power lines, loss of habitat, diseases such as avian influenza, the effects of climate change, and illegal shooting.⁶ A tundra swan hunting season in our state would add yet another, entirely unnecessary and completely avoidable hazard that this iconic species could face.

¹ Only 10 U.S. states (Alaska, Delaware, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah and Virginia) currently allow the hunting of tundra swans.

² Cornell Lab of Ornithology's swan identification: https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Tundra_Swan/id#.

³ Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (November 17, 2022). "Utah's swan hunt closes early for 4th consecutive year after federal harvest limit for trumpeter swans met." <https://wildlife.utah.gov/news/utah-wildlife-news/1549-utahs-swan-hunt-closes-early-for-4th-consecutive-year.html>

⁴ The Trumpeter Swan Society: "Which Swan Species Did You See?" <https://www.trumpeterswansociety.org/swan-information/identification/overview.html>

⁵ Cher Muzyk: "Rare trumpeter swans spotted locally late into spring." *Prince William Times*, May 6, 2022 https://www.princewilliamtimes.com/news/rare-trumpeter-swans-spotted-locally-late-into-spring/article_75a84d9a-cc8a-11ec-9bd6-7379f8422e7e.html; Hugh Vandervoort, "Rare Trumpeter Swans Breeding in Maryland." *Patch*, June 1, 2022 <https://patch.com/maryland/annapolis/rare-trumpeter-swans-breeding-maryland>; Timothy B. Wheeler: "Trumpeter swans add flourish to Patuxent Refuge's winter." *Bay Journal*, March 19, 2018 https://www.bayjournal.com/archives/trumpeter-swans-add-flourish-to-patuxent-refuge-s-winter/article_3b411a8a-d6b5-5af5-bc24-724bb2bca69f.html

⁶ Audubon: "Trumpeter Swan" at <https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/trumpeter-swan>; The Trumpeter Swan Society: "Top 10 Threats to Trumpeter Swans" at <https://www.trumpeterswansociety.org/swan-information/threats-to-trumpeter-swans/top-10-threats-to-trumpeter-swans.html>.



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

Maryland’s wildlife is worth far more alive than dead, there is no justification for adding another species to be hunted.

Recent landmark research led by Colorado State University titled the “America’s Wildlife Values Project” found that animal welfare has become an increasingly important concern for the general public, and the number of those who value wildlife as “part of their extended social network” has grown.⁷ In that study, more Marylanders identified with a “mutualist” view that favors coexistence with wildlife, than a “traditionalist” view that wildlife should be used and management for human benefit. And more than 67% of Maryland residents surveyed agreed that their state should strive for environmental protection over economic growth.

Nationwide and in Maryland, wildlife watchers and those who participate in non-consumptive outdoor recreation outnumber and outspend hunters and trappers by a wide margin.⁸ (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3).

Fig. 2

USFWS: Wildlife Recreation Participation & Expenditures: 2011 vs. 2016 data From: 2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation			
	2011	2016	Percent change
Wildlife watchers	71.8M	86.0M	20
Wildlife watcher expenditures	\$59.1B	\$75.9B	28
Hunter numbers	13.7M	11.5M	-16
Hunter expenditures	\$36.3B	\$25.6B	-29

Fig. 3

Outdoor recreation spending in the U.S. (2021) From: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis		
Activity	Spending [in millions of dollars]	% of total
Hunting and trapping	4,831	1.27
Other outdoor recreation	62,796	16.5
Trips and travel	123,860	32.6
Total outdoor recreation	380,471	100.00

Maryland’s non-consumptive public land users outnumber and outspend hunters and trappers by a wide margin. The National Park Service reports, “In 2021, 6.7 million park visitors spent an estimated \$247 million in local gateway regions while visiting National Park Service lands in Maryland. These expenditures supported a total of 2,940 jobs, \$130 million in labor income, \$215 million in value added,

⁷ Manfredo, M.J., Sullivan, L., Don Carlos, A.W., 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/>

⁸ The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service: National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife Associated Recreation (2016) at <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2018/demo/fhw16-nat.pdf>; and Dept. of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis, “Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. and States, 2021,” <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/outdoor-recreation>



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

and \$344 million in economic output in the Maryland economy.”⁹

According to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis-Dept. of Commerce, outdoor recreation in Maryland generated more than \$6.5 billion for the state’s economy in 2021. Of that figure, hunting and trapping generated 1.3%, while spending for RVing was more than twice that. And people spent almost 24 times more on travel and tourism in Maryland than on hunting and trapping (Fig. 4).¹⁰

Fig. 4. Outdoor recreation spending in Maryland (2021 data from U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis)

Outdoor recreation spending in Maryland (2021) From: <i>U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis</i>		
Sample activities	Spending (in thousands of dollars)	% of total
Hunting and trapping	86,230	1.3
RVing	181,823	2.8
Other outdoor recreation	1,137,125	17.3
Travel and tourism	2,042,090	31.1
Total Outdoor Recreation	6,567,148	100.00

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reported that in 2021, only 1.9% of Maryland residents were paid hunting license holders.¹¹ There is no reason to allow the hunting of tundra swans, and put trumpeter swans at risk, simply to provide additional recreational activities for a tiny percentage of the state’s population.

We therefore ask that you issue an unfavorable report for HB 954 to authorize the hunting of tundra swans in Maryland. Thank you again for the opportunity to share these comments.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Bevan-Dangel
Maryland State Director
The Humane Society of the United States
jbevandangel@humanesociety.org

⁹ National Park Service. (2022). National Park Service Visitor Spending Effects Report. <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/vse.htm>.

¹⁰ Bureau of Economic Analysis: Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. and States, 2021. <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/outdoor-recreation>

¹¹ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. (2021). Hunting Licenses, Holders, and Costs by Apportionment Year.