

March 3, 2023

Committee: Education, Energy and Environment

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

Position: **Favorable with Amendment**

This letter represents the views of the undersigned waterfowl hunters and club members, outfitters and conservationists on Maryland's Eastern Shore. We support House Bill 983 with an amendment to remove the Sunday waterfowl hunting provision on page 11, line 25. 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. While this is not always an indicator of overall population, these are the birds that are in Maryland being hunted. 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.

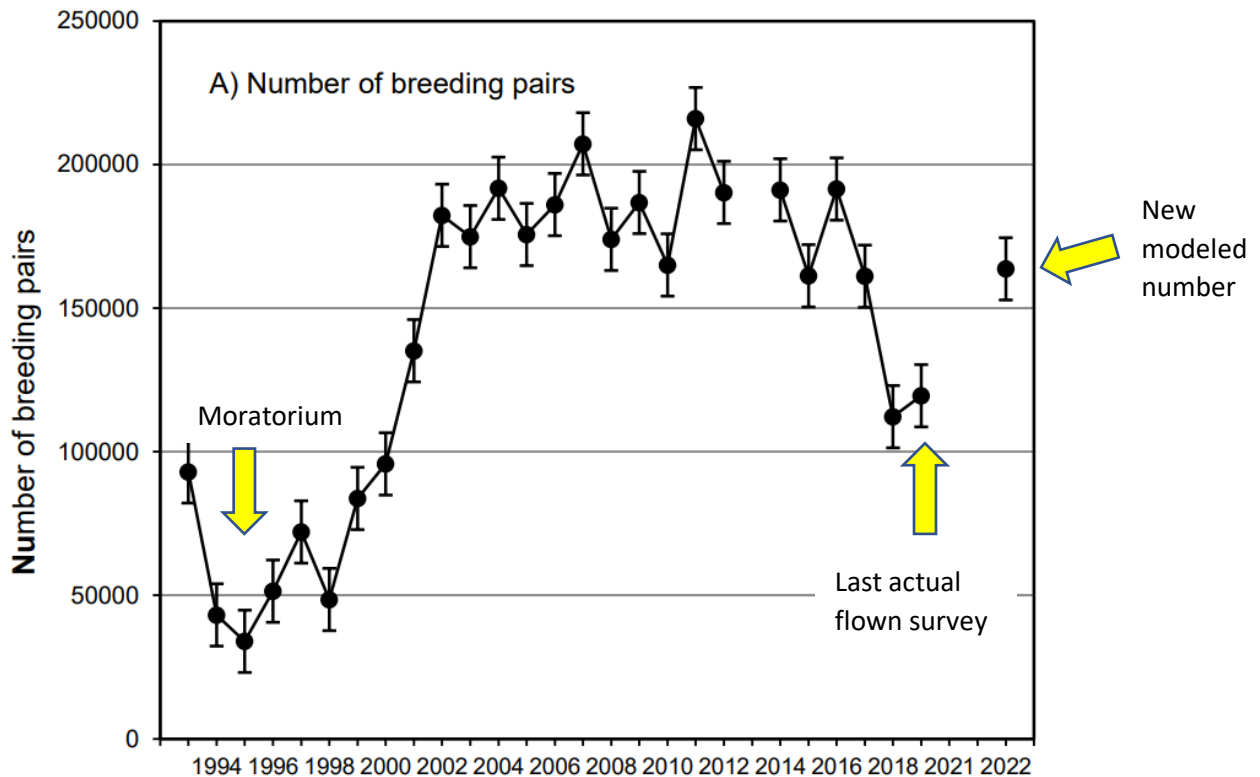
Outfitters are waterfowl managers and conservationists. We provide food and safe roost for waterfowl species. Outfitters and hunting guides likely know more about the populations and movement of waterfowl than anyone else in the state because that is our business. It is worth noting that the Maryland Department of Natural Resources did not consult or even notify the outfitter, landowner or hunting community on the Eastern Shore 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 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.

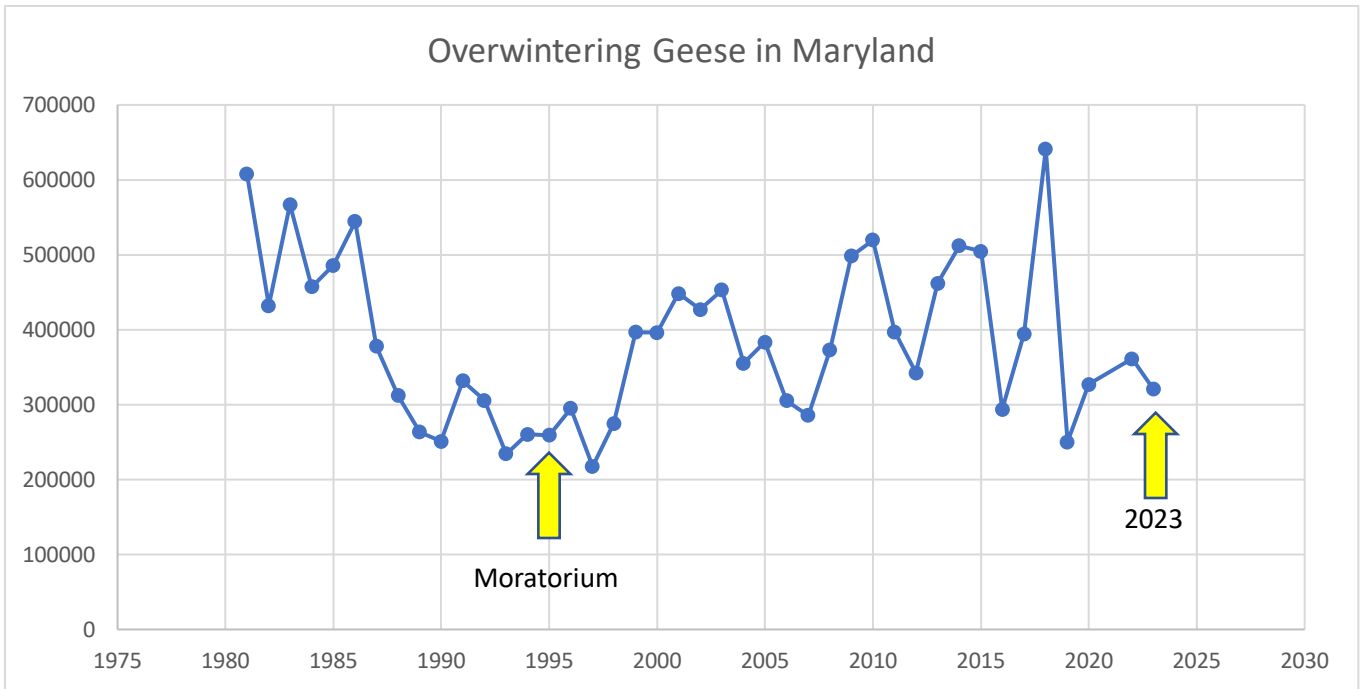
Decisions about hunting seasons and bag-limits should be based on science and what is best for the species, not purely hunter opportunity and desire.

Proponents are saying to “follow the science.” We ask that you review the science below which we believe does not support the increased hunting pressure Sunday hunting would create.



Source: US Fish and Wildlife Service. “Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey.” 2023  
<https://www.fws.gov/project/waterfowl-breeding-population-and-habitat-survey>

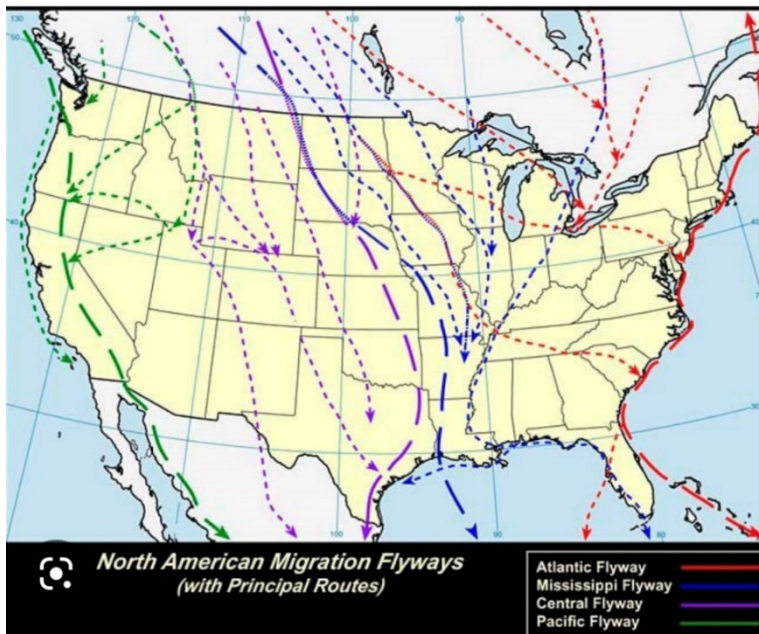
A good measure of the Canada Goose population is breeding pairs in the Ungava Bay and Punirnitug region. The graph above shows number of breeding pairs from US Fish and Wildlife Service. When the moratorium on goose hunting in Maryland went into effect in 1995, the number was 29,000 breeding pairs. The last time an actual flown survey was conducted in 2019, the number was 120,000 breeding pairs. No survey was conducted in 2020 and 2021. In 2022, a new integrated population model was used to estimate breeding pairs. This is NOT an actual observation or comparable to previous years' data. Peer reviewed science in the Journal of Methods in Ecology and Evolution states that “the reliability of parameter estimates remains underexamined, particularly when models include parameters that are not identifiable from one data source.” One year of data from this model should not be used to argue that the number of breeding pairs supports increased hunting.



Source: Maryland Department of Natural Resources Mid-Winter Waterfowl Survey.

While the mid-winter survey is not always indicative of overall waterfowl population, it is a snapshot of the birds over-wintering in Maryland and therefore being hunted in the state. According to DNR, “teams counted about 632,200 waterfowl, which was higher than the 563,800 birds observed in 2022 but lower than the most recent five-year average of 682,520 birds.” Canada Geese observed was nearly half of what it was in 2018 and only 60,000 more than in 1995 when the moratorium went into effect. Total Canada Geese observed in 2023 was 320,800 which was the second lowest number since the goose hunting moratorium was lifted in 2000.

**Stating that Virginia or other states with waterfowl harvest did not observe increased harvest is irrelevant to Maryland.**

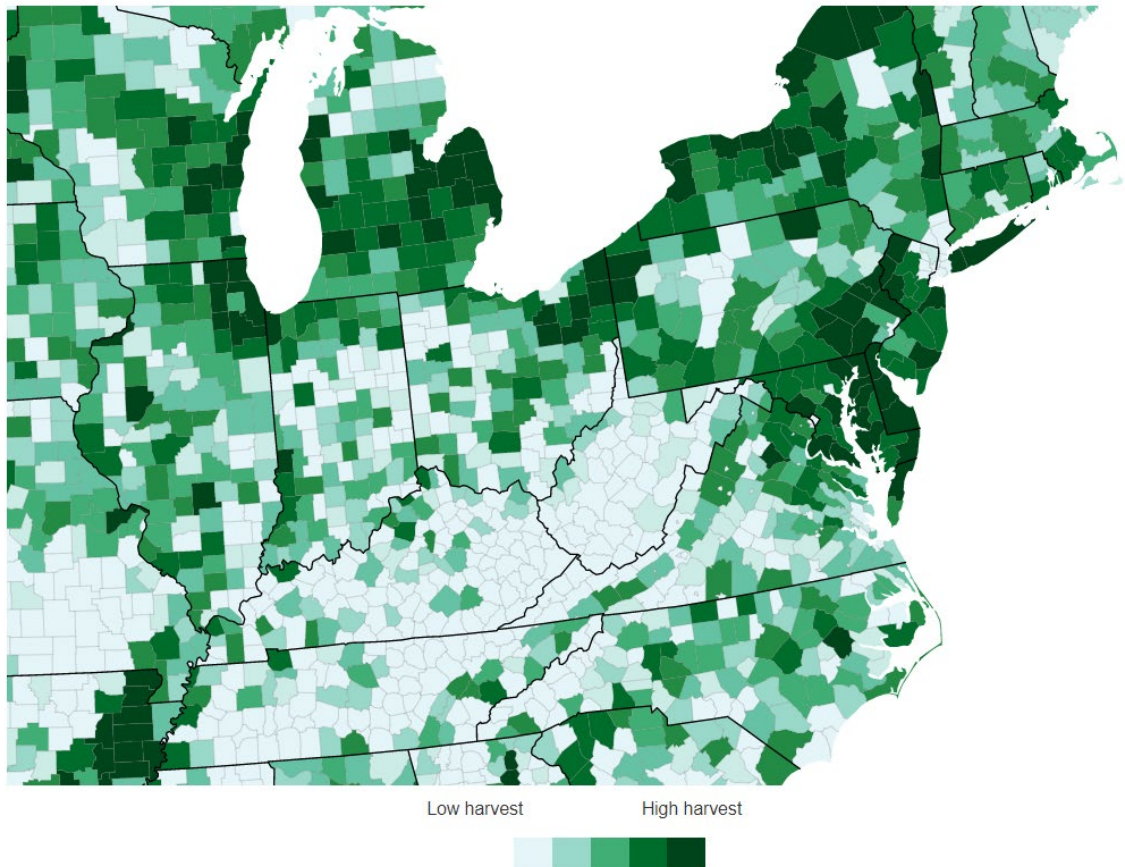


Maryland is unique when it comes to waterfowl. As you can see from the solid red line at the right of the map; the principal migration route for Canada Geese in the Atlantic Flyway converges on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. The principal migration route does not even go through inland Virginia.

## Waterfowl harvest by county

Click on a county for more information, double click or mouse scroll to zoom

Duck Rankings **Goose Rankings**



\*Source: US Fish and Wildlife Service: NATIONAL MIGRATORY BIRD HARVEST SURVEY

<https://fws.gov/harvestsurvey/harvest-vis>

Reporting that Virginia waterfowl harvest did not increase with the addition of Sunday hunting is irrelevant to Maryland. Maryland's Eastern Shore has 6 counties in the top 25 for Canada Goose Harvest out of 3,115 counties nationwide. Virginia does not even have one county in the top 125.

The ten-year average number of goose hunters for Maryland is 10,000 more than Virginia and Maryland hunters harvest 3 more geese per week on average than Virginia.

### **Maryland has**

16,300 duck hunters  
24,400 goose hunters

### **Maryland ranks**

31<sup>st</sup> in duck harvest  
4<sup>th</sup> in goose harvest

### **The average hunter harvests**

7 ducks in 5 days afield  
7 geese in 5 days afield

### **Virginia has**

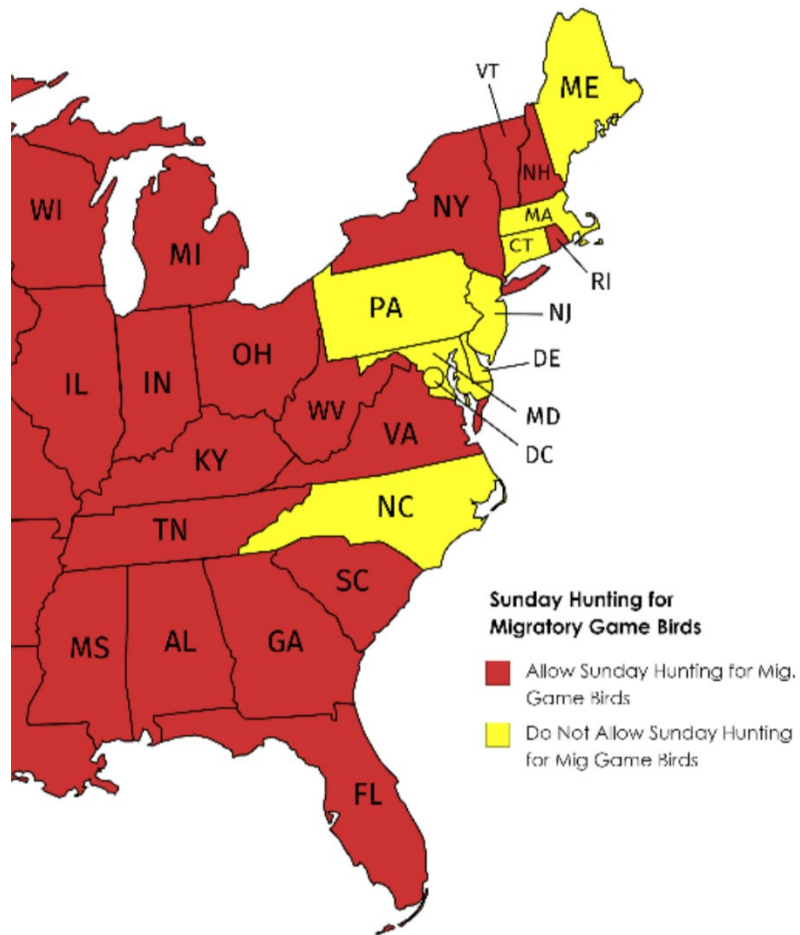
16,300 duck hunters  
14,100 goose hunters

### **Virginia ranks**

28<sup>th</sup> in duck harvest  
20<sup>th</sup> in goose harvest

### **The average hunter harvests**

8 ducks in 5 days afield  
4 geese in 5 days afield



Many other Atlantic Flyway states do not allow Sunday waterfowl hunting either because the flyway is unique with the least amount of waterfowl and most densely concentrated habitat and more hunters.

We ask you please remove Sunday waterfowl hunting from House Bill 983.

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 Kent County  
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Chris Sherman - Barneck Outfitters  
 Talbot & Dorchester Counties  
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Danny Harris- Spittin Feathers Guide Service  
 Queen Annes & Kent Counties  
 410-490-1137

Tommy & Jason Dodd- Dodd's Hunting Service  
 Queen Annes County

410-739-5281

Logan Hammon- Harrisons Outfitter Service  
Talbot & Dorchester Counties

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Guides: Danny Harrison (410-714-2200), Austin Spurry (410-829-3071), Travis Hammon (410-924-1823)

Andrew Aus- Maverick Charters LLC

Queen Annes County

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Mike Foster - We Got 'Em Guide Service

Queen Annes & Kent Counties

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Queen Annes County

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Bert Blades

Blades Guide Service- Talbot & Dorchester Counties – 410-924-1961