



Maryland Grain Producers Association  
118 Dundee Ave, Chester, MD 21619  
Lindsay.mdag@gmail.com (p) 443-262-8491  
www.marylandgrain.com

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Senate Bill 902 - Wildlife – Protections and Highway Crossings

Committee: Education, Energy and Environment

MGPA Position: SUPPORT

The Maryland Grain Producers Association (MGPA) serves as the voice of grain farmers growing corn, wheat, barley and sorghum across the state. MGPA supports Senate Bill 902 which the identification and prioritization of threatened and endangered species whose habitat or movement corridors intersect with State highways; (2) the completion of a statewide deer population survey and related habitat maps to assist with identifying areas where wildlife crossings or wildlife-vehicle collision mitigation projects will reduce collisions between vehicles and deer; and (3) the design of new bridges, culverts, and State highways and the replacement or renovation of existing bridges and culverts.

The provision that MGPA is particularly interested in is the requirement that the Department of Natural Resources to conduct a comprehensive deer population survey. The National Agricultural Statistics Service estimated in 2012 that farmers experience over \$10 million in crop damage annually with 75% of that being attributed to deer. MGPA would argue that with the growing deer population in certain areas of the state and increased input costs, that dollar figure is much higher now. Maryland's deer population was estimated to be just over 200,000 white-tailed deer and 10,000 sika deer in 2022. The density of deer to suitable habitat in Maryland is high and therefore causes conflict with not only farmers and their crops but also vehicles and homeowners.

MGPA believes that additional tools and resources may be needed for farmers in certain areas of the state to manage the deer populations but we do not know where those hotspots are except for anecdotal evidence. DNR has not done an observed deer population study since 2013 but instead uses hunter harvest data to extrapolate the populations. We do not feel this is an accurate estimation as hunter harvest is impacted by participation and weather. This method also does not give us the regional specificity that would be needed to provide specific technical assistance to farmers in areas with extreme deer pressure.

We urge a favorable report on SB902.