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House Bill 497 - Hunting - Nonresident Sika Deer Stamp - Fee Alteration

Committee: Environment & Transportation

MGPA Position: Support with Amendments

The Maryland Grain Producers Association (MGPA) serves as the voice of grain farmers growing corn, wheat, barley and sorghum across the state. MGPA supports House Bill 497 which would increase the cost of a sika deer stamp for non-resident hunters.

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 sika and whitetailed 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. Sika deer are particularly destructive as they are a swamp species that roots for food. Therefore, when they forage in an agricultural crop field, they can destroy entire fields overnight.

Wild sika deer are only found on the Delmarva Peninsula. These deer are part of many different lists for challenges hunters take on to harvest game species in North America. Some of the other game species on this list are Moose, Elk and Mule Deer. A non-resident tag for a Moose in Maine will cost a Marylander \$585 on top of the \$116 non-resident hunting license fee. A non-resident permit for an Elk in Colorado is \$651 and a non-resident mule deer tag in New Mexico is \$481. Maryland has a hunting resource that hunters are more than willing to travel and pay to hunt and our sika stamp for non-residents could be substantially increased.

In the past, the Department of Natural Resources would allocate \$100-150k per year to venison donation programs. During that time, Farmers and Hunters Feeding the Hungry was processing 4,500 deer for the Maryland Food Bank and local food pantries. Several years ago, DNR indicated they couldn't use those funds as match for Federal Pittman-Robertson Act dollars and stopped the funding the program. Since then, FHFH has been processing 1,000-1,500 deer using primarily farmer donations.

The number one impediment we hear from farmers to harvesting more deer under crop damage permits is that they do not have an outlet for processing and donation once their own freezer is full.

MGPA supports HB497 with the following amendments:

- Increase the fee to \$250 for non-resident sika deer stamps
- Direct \$50 from every non-resident sika deer stamp sold to venison donation programs

In 2023, DNR sold over 3,000 non-resident sika deer stamps. This increase funding would generate \$750,000 in revenue with \$600,000 being matched 3-1 by Pittman-Robertson Act Funding and \$150,000 going toward venison donation.

MGPA respectfully requests your favorable with amendments report on House Bill 497.