



To: **The Honorable Marc Korman**
Chair, House Environment and Transportation Committee
House Office Building
Room 251
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: **House Bill 778 – Sunday Hunting – Migratory Game Birds**

Position: **Support**

Date: **February 21, 2024**

Dear Chairman Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Honorable Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, collectively representing the interests of Maryland’s 438,592 sportsmen and women, we respectfully urge you to support House Bill 778 (HB 778). This bill would authorize the Maryland Department of Natural Resources to allow for migratory game bird hunting during the open season on Sundays.

This legislation will provide equity for access and opportunity for the residents of Maryland seeking to hunt migratory game birds in the state. Allowing an additional day on the weekend will help recruit, retain, and reactivate (R3) waterfowl hunters who are constrained during the week. Sunday migratory game bird hunting is the single highest requested opportunity received through the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and has overwhelming, broad support across the state. Hunting will be limited to private lands, public waters, and Wildlife Management Areas (WMA’s) owned and managed by DNR. Hunting will not occur in state parks, Natural Resource Management Areas or other areas already closed to migratory game bird hunting.

Maryland already has had a successful track record of Sunday hunting for other game species since 2003 when it was first authorized, to the present. However, *the current framework for Sunday hunting has resulted in a confusing patchwork of various allowances* that does not include any provisions for hunting waterfowl or other migratory gamebirds. HB 778 will provide the DNR with the ability to allow for waterfowl and migratory game bird hunting where biologically and sociologically supported, to provide increased opportunity for Maryland’s sportsmen and women.

Access is a major limiting factor hindering participation in hunting, and restrictions on Sunday hunting provide a temporal-access barrier to youth and others that work or attend school throughout the week and are often involved in extra-curricular activities on Saturdays. The hunting conservation community strongly supports measures that increase access and opportunity for sportsmen and women, and we encourage you to support HB 778 to afford all families seven-day hunting opportunities for migratory gamebirds and waterfowl. Under the discretion

of the DNR, this legislation would significantly improve access for Maryland hunters and would help arrest the decline in hunting participation. The number of paid license holders in the state decreased by 33% from 1983 to 2023, and expanding access and opportunity would help stem the decline and provide increased certainty in conservation funding for the Maryland DNR.

Sportsmen and women are the primary funders of state-level conservation efforts in the state and are thus an important constituency that provides benefits for all Marylanders. In 2023 alone, Maryland’s sportsmen and women generated more than \$31.2 million dollars for conservation funding in Maryland through revenue derived from license sales and excise taxes on sporting-related goods in the unique “user pays – public benefits” structure known as the American System of Conservation Funding. This funding provides the lion’s share of funding for the Maryland DNR and supports the agency’s land acquisitions, wildlife and habitat management programs, and many other programs that benefit all citizens of the “Old Line State”.

Allowing public land Sunday hunting would also significantly benefit Maryland’s economy, particularly in rural areas, by increasing economic output and job creation. An additional day to hunt would mean more dollars spent by hunters in restaurants, hotels, gas stations and stores throughout the state. Maryland’s sportsmen and women are a significant economic force. In 2020, a study was conducted that revealed Marylanders contributed \$328,000,000 in retail sales, supported 4,100 jobs (\$157,000,000 in salaries and wages), paid \$29,000,000 in state and local taxes, and paid \$41,000,000 in federal taxes. This data is available online at: <https://sportsmensalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/2020-Economic-Impact-of-Hunting-and-Shooting-Technical-Report-V2.pdf>.

Additionally, increasing opportunities on Sundays will allow private landowners, farmers, and others to diversify their income sources by allowing an additional day of hunting on their land, thereby helping to provide a capital influx into rural economies that were hardest hit by the recent recession. Creating additional opportunities will also encourage out-of-state hunting-related tourism and further bolster rural economies throughout the state.

The neighboring states of Delaware, Virginia, and West Virginia have recently authorized state-wide Sunday hunting and have reported great success, with no increase in conflicts among user groups, safety incidents, or detrimental impacts to their wildlife populations. Please find a supportive letter attached from the Virginia Department of Game and Fisheries, which detail their experiences following the authorization of statewide Sunday hunting in recent years. Additionally, please find the attached resolution from the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, stating: “there is no evidence that suggests vital rates of waterfowl populations would be negatively impacted due to hunting of migratory birds on Sunday;”

In closing, we ask that you consider the successful track record of seven-day hunting in Maryland, the economic and conservation funding benefits to the state, and the importance of increasing opportunities for youth and families to spend time together hunting and thereby protect family traditions and Maryland’s hunting heritage.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,

Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation
Delta Waterfowl
Hunters of Maryland
Maryland Sportsmen’s Foundation
Safari Club International
Sportsmen’s Alliance

CC: The Honorable Regina T. Boyce (Vice Chair)
The Honorable Jackie Addison
The Honorable Nick Allen

The Honorable Terry Baker
The Honorable Barrie S. Ciliberti
The Honorable Debra Davis
The Honorable Linda Foley
The Honorable Michele Guyton
The Honorable Anne Healey
The Honorable Marvin E. Holmes, Jr.
The Honorable Jay Jacobs
The Honorable Mary A. Lehman
The Honorable Jeffrie E. Long, Jr.
The Honorable Sara Love
The Honorable Todd B. Morgan
The Honorable Ryan Nawrocki
The Honorable Charles J. Otto
The Honorable Sheila Ruth
The Honorable Dana Stein
The Honorable Vaughn Stewart
The Honorable Jen Terrasa
The Honorable Natalie Ziegler

Attachments:

2016 Virginia Sunday Hunting Letter
2018 North Carolina Resolution Regarding the Hunting of Migratory Game Birds on Sunday



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Game and Inland Fisheries

Molly J. Ward
Secretary of Natural Resources

Bob Duncan
Executive Director

April 15, 2016

Bee Frederick
Southeastern States Manager
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
624 S. Perry Street
Montgomery, AL 36104

Dear Mr. Frederick:

As you are aware, in 2014 the Virginia General Assembly passed Senate Bill 154 and House Bill 1237, which permitted Sunday hunting under certain circumstances. With a few exceptions, Sunday hunting is now permitted for waterfowl and is also allowed for other species by private landowners, their families, or anyone with written permission from the landowner. Hunting of deer or bear with dogs while using a weapon is not permitted on Sundays, and certain limitations pertaining to areas near places of worship and other restrictions were also included in the legislation.

You have inquired as to the results of the implementation of the new Sunday hunting allowances in Virginia, as we have now had it in place for nearly two years. I can report to you that hunting on Sundays has gone well statewide. The Department elected to largely leave hunting seasons in place as they existed previously, and simply allow Sunday hunting as directed by the legislation. Bag limits were likewise left in place as they existed before.

Sunday hunting has not had a detrimental impact upon our deer herd. So far, average deer harvests for Sundays more closely approximate the averages for weekdays, and are far less than Saturdays (approximately 50% of the average Saturday during both archery and muzzleloader seasons, and roughly 20% of the average Saturday during general firearms season). While some had feared that the addition of another day of hunting to the week could lead to an unacceptably high deer harvest, that has not been our experience. Turkey harvests on Sundays have also closely approximated weekday averages.

Another concern of some related to Sunday hunting had been whether it might pose an undue burden upon our law enforcement officers. Again, to date, those fears have not been realized. Similar to harvest statistics, the number of hunting-related calls to our law enforcement dispatch on Sunday's number similarly to the average weekday, increasing only a modest

Bee Frederick
Southeastern States Manager
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
April 15, 2016
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amount over the number of calls that were received on Sundays before hunting was allowed. Hunting-related arrests trend similarly.

In sum, I can say that Virginia's experience so far with Sunday hunting is that of additional opportunities for sportsmen and women in the field without unacceptable impacts upon our wildlife resources, notable increases in citizen complaints, or other serious law enforcement concerns. We look forward to the coming seasons and to our hunters continuing to have this additional day available to them.

Sincerely,



Robert W. Duncan
Executive Director

RWD/RJB



Resolution Regarding the Hunting of Migratory Birds on Sunday in North Carolina

Whereas, North Carolina has a rich and storied history of hunting migratory birds, including numerous species of ducks and geese, swans, mourning doves, woodcock, rails, and other webless species; and

Whereas, these hunting traditions and those who pursue them are as varied from the coast to the mountains as the species and habitats in which they occur; and

Whereas, hunting on Sunday with a firearm was prohibited in North Carolina beginning in 1869; and

Whereas, hunting on Sunday with a firearm on private lands was legalized, with some restrictions, on October 1, 2015, except for hunting of migratory birds; and

Whereas, North Carolina Session Law 2017-182, enacted in 2017, granted the Wildlife Resources Commission authority to promulgate rules legalizing hunting on Sunday for wild animals (including migratory birds) and upland game birds; and

Whereas, the hunting of migratory birds on Sunday remains prohibited unless authorized by proclamation or rules of the Wildlife Resources Commission, subject to the following limitations:

- (1) Hunting on Sunday between 9:30 AM. and 12:30 P.M. is prohibited, except on controlled hunting preserves licensed pursuant to G.S. 113-273(g),
- (2) Hunting on Sunday within 500 yards of a place of religious worship, as defined by G.S. 14-54.1(b), or any accessory structure thereof, is prohibited, and

Whereas, Session Law 2017-182 also directed the Commission to "complete a study that includes, but is not limited to, examining biological and resource management impacts, economic impacts, and social impacts associated with hunting migratory birds on Sunday;" and

Whereas, changes in hunting pressure and other human-induced disturbance can affect behavior patterns of ducks during the migration and wintering periods; and

Whereas, associated changes in duck distribution may locally impact hunter success; however, there is no evidence that suggests vital rates of waterfowl populations would be negatively impacted due to hunting migratory birds on Sunday; and

Whereas, based on results from Responsive Management, Inc. there is both substantial support and opposition to hunting migratory birds on Sunday within the hunting community and opinions differ among hunting and non-hunting publics; and

Whereas, issues associated with hunting migratory birds on Sunday are inter-relatedly biological, social, economic, and political; and require evaluation and melding with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service rules and policies; and

Whereas, differences among constituents vary between locales and among groups; and

Whereas, further examination would be required to determine specific economic impacts at local scales or to specific hunter groups; and

Whereas, beginning in 1997, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has allowed states to use compensatory days if Sunday hunting for migratory birds was not allowed by state law thereby "compensating" states by not requiring they count Sundays as waterfowl hunting days during the annual season selection process; and

Whereas, the Service has proposed compensatory days for webless species starting with the 2018-19 hunting seasons; and

Whereas, in accordance with federal rules, once a state lifts a ban on Sunday hunting of migratory birds, the state loses its eligibility for compensatory days in the future should it reinstitute a ban.

Now, therefore, be it resolved, that the Wildlife Resources Commission is committed to managing our public trust migratory bird resources judiciously, sustainably, and optimally for our citizens, including balancing protection of longstanding cultural values and expansion of hunting opportunities, and therefore directs staff to:

- collaborate with natural resource economists to more fully examine relevant economic aspects associated with hunting migratory birds on Sunday;
- review all available human dimensions survey data from stakeholders in North Carolina to determine if regulatory changes other than legalizing hunting on Sunday are desired;
- evaluate impacts of compensatory days on the attitudes and opinions of migratory bird hunters who pursue webless species;
- evaluate potential season zoning options as possible tradeoffs to conflicting desires of hunters across the state; and
- report all findings back to the Wildlife Resources Commission.

Approved, this the 28th day of February 2018, in an official meeting by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission.


John T. Coley IV, Chairman


Gordon Myers, Executive Director