



February 8, 2024

OFFICERS

Chair
Carl F. Wagner
Vice-Chair
Joe L. Schroyer

COMMISSIONERS

D. Matthew Cole
Thurmond "TJ" Jenkins
Steven W. Keithley
Kathryn Kullberg
J. Jeremy Parks
Kaitlin L. Rossignuolo
Ryan D. Showalter
Michael Smith

Maryland House of Delegates
Environment and Transportation Committee
251 House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support Migratory Game Bird Hunting
House Bill 778

Dear Environment and Transportation Committee:

The Maryland Wildlife Advisory Commission (WAC) is a ten-member body appointed by Governor Moore and former Governor Hogan that is charged with advising the Department of Natural Resources on matters of State wildlife policy. Please accept this letter as confirmation of the WAC's support for authorizing hunting on Sundays for ducks and geese. Maryland's prohibition on Sunday waterfowl hunting lingers as a vestige of outdated and mostly repealed "Blue Laws". Nearly every state and province in North America now permits hunting recreation on Sundays. The time has come to afford everyone an equitable and fair opportunity to experience the fields and marshes of Maryland in the same manner as occurs in Virginia, and as soon to be authorized in Delaware - two states who share Maryland's duck and goose population management structure under the Federal flyway framework. No science supports the continuation of this archaic prohibition. Indeed, some of the most productive waterfowl populations in the country exist in states where hunting on Sundays has been allowed for decades. This is a matter of recreational access, equity, and fairness.

"Today many families face busy schedules with long work weeks and weekend extracurricular activities for children on Saturdays. For hunters that see the importance of keeping the tradition of hunting alive for future generations, limiting the time available to hunt alone or with their families is a burden on their goal of promoting tradition. Even for those that would choose not to hunt on Sundays, lifting the government restriction grants all the option to enjoy this activity without artificial schedules imposed. Sportsmen and women understand the value of being free to choose if and when to hunt during the hunting season, just as Americans are free to decide to participate in other recreational activities such as fishing or boating on Sundays."¹

Notably, due to employment or education responsibilities and schedules, many Maryland waterfowl hunters are only able to enjoy this activity on Saturdays. Permitting the hunting of waterfowl on Sundays will not extend hunting seasons or increase the total number of

¹ National Shooting Sports Foundation, Fast Facts – Restrictions on Sunday Hunting (2018).

hunting days, but it will, practically, double the number of days available to many sportsmen and women throughout the State.

Some opposition to Sunday waterfowl hunting assert unfounded concerns about safety. However, this activity currently occurs on Monday to Saturday — with no apparent issues of safety between legal waterfowl hunters and non-hunters. In fact, House Bill 778 only authorizes Sunday waterfowl hunting on private lands or waters where there is a private right to do so. Denying a person the right to hunt on their land because someone who doesn't own that land sees it as potentially disturbing them is contrary to our modern system of private property rights. Would we stand up a law that makes it illegal to run a grain dryer on a Sunday? Pick corn or other small grains with heavy equipment and the attendant noise and disturbances there? Diesel engines from our friends who work the water for crabs and oysters and blue catfish are loud - should they be barred on Sundays too? Even the animal rights community presents no objection on this issue; rather, it is the small vocal minority of individuals who hunt on their own farms for profit and want to preserve their ability to keep others from doing the same.

But that's simply unfair and without equity in a State that is so grounded in those two principles. Most of the opponents to this Bill are owners or participants on commercial or private regulated shooting areas. These are properties where anyone can pay to hunt pen-reared mallard ducks any day from September to April - INCLUDING SUNDAYS. Correct—to date, the most vocal opposition to permitting the hunting of wild waterfowl on private property on Sundays is presented by individuals who are already doing the same thing but shooting released or pen-reared ducks on their private and 'for fee' farms. So why would these individuals oppose correcting this outdated Blue Law if they are already afforded the privilege of doing the thing? Perhaps because most hunters prefer the pursuit of wild waterfowl over released mallards, which is more work for the guides and outfitters without the same return in revenues for the effort. This widens the recreational access gap between commercial and private club operators and their clients and the 'entry level hunter' who is simply looking for a chance to expand his or her interest and opportunities in this great outdoors pursuit that pre-dates nearly every other outdoor activity in Maryland ... all of which are permitted on Sundays.

It is also worth considering the potential religious disparity borne of this prohibition. Simply, if a person who has their day-of-rest on a Saturday is therefore barred by their faith from hunting on Saturday, how do they ever hunt on a weekend day if Sundays are barred by State law?

In the end, the WAC has spent many years supporting this administration and others in their efforts to ensure the future of hunting and the outdoor stewardship ethic borne of that community of enthusiasts. Unfortunately, there remains a gap in access, opportunity, and the ability to simply get 'out there' when today's busy lifestyle affords the new or newer hunter the chance. Single parents, students, younger employees and citizens of all demographics are rising up to experience the wild outdoors experiences that are available in our country. Being afforded the option to work around full calendars and schedules by opening up a few hours on a Sunday is a critical piece of that recruiting puzzle. Unfortunately, Maryland remains more restrictive than most other states. If there's any question as to the interest in the hunting community to see this change finally come about - consider that a valid study conducted just a few years ago established that more than 75% of all survey participants in Maryland said that they want (arguably they need) the option to hunt waterfowl on Sundays. Doing so will keep them in the community of hunters and therefore, buying licenses. It is worth remembering that hunting license sales and the 3:1 Federal match borne of those special funds are the SINGLE primary source of funding for all wildlife conservation and management in Maryland - including thousands of plants, animals, and habitats that are never hunted or otherwise consumed by humans. We need hunters to keep hunting - Sunday waterfowl hunting is the next and arguably last big change we can embrace to ensure that tradition and funding source continues into the future.

Sincerely,

Signature Page

<hr/> <i>D. Matthew Cole</i> (Signature) <hr/> D. Matthew Cole – Worcester County	<hr/> February 8, 2024 <hr/> Date
<hr/> <i>Thurmond “TJ” Jenkins</i> (Signature) <hr/> Thurmond “TJ” Jenkins – Caroline County	<hr/> February 8, 2024 <hr/> Date
<hr/> <i>Steven W. Keithley</i> (Signature) <hr/> Steven W. Keithley – Calvert County	<hr/> February 8, 2024 <hr/> Date
<hr/> <i>J. Jeremy Parks</i> (Signature) <hr/> J. Jeremy Parks – Anne Arundel County	<hr/> February 8, 2024 <hr/> Date
<hr/> <i>Kaitlin L. Rossignuolo</i> (Signature) <hr/> Kaitlin L. Rossignuolo – Allegany County	<hr/> February 8, 2024 <hr/> Date
<hr/> <i>Joe L. Schroyer</i> (Signature) <hr/> Joe L. Schroyer – Garrett County	<hr/> February 8, 2024 <hr/> Date
<hr/> <i>Ryan D. Showalter</i> (Signature) <hr/> Ryan D. Showalter – Talbot County	<hr/> February 8, 2024 <hr/> Date
<hr/> <i>Michael Smith</i> (Signature) <hr/> Michael Smith – Montgomery County	<hr/> February 8, 2024 <hr/> Date
<hr/> <i>Carl F. Wagner</i> (Signature) <hr/> Carl F. Wagner – Anne Arundel County	<hr/> February 8, 2024 <hr/> Date

cc: Chair, Delegate Marc Korman
Vice Chair, Delegate Regina T. Boyce
Natural Resources, Agriculture & Open Space Subcommittee Members