



February 12, 2024

Chairman Marc Korman
Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251 | House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Vice-Chair Regina Boyce
Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251 | House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: House Bill 778 (Hornberger) - *Natural Resources - Sunday Hunting - Migratory Game Birds*

Position: SUPPORT

Chairman Korman,

On behalf Delta Waterfowl members both in Maryland and across the United States, I am writing to enthusiastically **SUPPORT** House Bill 778 - legislation that will provide access and opportunity equity to tens of thousands of sportsmen and women in Maryland by repealing the antiquated blue law preventing waterfowl hunting on Sundays.

As background, Delta Waterfowl is a leading conservation organization founded at the famed Delta Marsh in Manitoba, Canada, with its United States Headquarters in Bismarck, North Dakota. We have members and supporters all across North America, including thousands in Maryland, who represent waterfowl hunters in all arenas. Delta Waterfowl works to produce ducks through intensive management programs and conservation of breeding duck habitat while also providing vital waterfowl research, and promoting and protecting the continuing tradition of waterfowl hunting in North America.

Access and Opportunity Equity for All

Sportsmen and women across the country often cite "lack of time" as one of the number one reasons they stop hunting. Many hunters are prevented from introducing new or novice hunters to the great outdoors because they are competing against work, organized sports and other activities on Saturdays, which is currently their only opportunity to hunt outside of the typical work and school week. Allowing an extra day to access the outdoors will provide equity and also help recruit and retain and reactivate (R3) a robust hunter population that is needed to provide critical funding for the overall conservation efforts in Maryland.

Currently, Maryland waterfowl hunters are one of the only user groups actively discriminated against from participating in their activity of choice seven days a week, including on land they own or lease. It's important to stress this legislation does not open up any new lands to hunting. Hunting will be limited to private lands, public waters, and Wildlife Management Areas (WMA's) owned and managed by DNR. It



will not occur in state parks, Natural Resource Management Areas or other areas already closed to migratory game bird hunting.

With the massive investments being made in R3 all over the country, including in the state of Maryland and specifically with the Maryland Department of Natural Resource in recent years, allowing the DNR to utilize Sunday hunting as a tool and resource will help expand hunting opportunities to a whole new constituent base.

Sunday Hunting has Overwhelming Support

The concept of Sunday hunting has broad support across the country, including right here in Maryland. Currently more than 40 states offer Sunday hunting for their sportsmen and women across the country. The remaining states where it is still prohibited are primarily concentrated on the east coast – or the Atlantic Flyway – and are deeply rooted in centuries old blue laws and apathy on the part of legislators to change them despite its popularity.

More than 75% of waterfowl hunters across the state surveyed by the DNR indicated they support Sunday hunting, and expanding hunting opportunities to Sundays is the single most requested policy change by hunters during the DNR's regulation setting process and scoping period.

In recent years, several neighboring states have begun the process of deliberating and repealing these prohibitions, and to date, there has been zero negative consequences on the resource and no user-conflict for the states that have enacted this change.

Just last month, Delaware's General Assembly moved a bill to allow Sunday hunting for game birds (*Delaware House Bill 271 – Rep. Carson, et. al.*) through their House without a single recorded no vote, and without any public opposition. This legislation is primed to move through the Delaware Senate and put signed into law when lawmakers return to Dover in March.

Additionally, lawmakers in Pennsylvania have renewed their efforts to further expand Sunday hunting opportunities for their citizens when Representative Mandy Steele sent an All House Colleague memo on January 31st announcing she will introduce legislation to repeal their prohibitions stating “[*moreover, some states that have recently lifted their Sunday hunting bans have reported no adverse impact on their game populations.*”

Sunday hunting is also supported by some of the countries most respected conservation and hunting organizations. In addition to Delta Waterfowl, support for Sunday hunting can be found from the Maryland Wildlife Advisory Commission, Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, Ducks Unlimited, Safari Club International, National Shooting Sports Foundation, and many more. These groups represent thousands of sportsmen and women across the United States and in Maryland.



Sunday Hunting Has No Impact on Waterfowl Populations

The small cohort of Sunday hunting opponents will routinely cite fears of negatively impacting waterfowl populations with the legalization of Sunday hunting. It's important to stress that there is zero scientific or biological data to support that allowing for Sunday hunting will negatively impact waterfowl populations.

Waterfowl are constantly introduced to stressors during their life-cycle. From the time they are hatched, to the time they make their migration south, they run the risk predation, disease, and a number of other factors that play a role in their overall population levels. However, hunting is widely considered to play a very small role in the overall impact on waterfowl populations.

According to several peer-reviewed studies, nesting success and survival of adult female mallards during the breeding season account for the largest variation in population levels. Survival OUTSIDE of the breeding season – which would include hunting seasons - only accounted for 9% variation in population levels.

In Virginia following the legalization of Sunday hunting for waterfowl, the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources estimated that there was “no measurable impact” on waterfowl populations with the additional day of hunting – adding that “[duck] harvest on Sundays was comparable to duck harvest occurring on Mondays-Thursdays and about 1/3 that of Saturdays.”

House Bill 778 Supports Local Decision Making

Recognizing that some counties in Maryland may still not support the idea of Sunday hunting within their jurisdiction, this legislation would allow for those existing counties in code to remain opted out. While Delta Waterfowl is supportive of local decision making, it's important to stress that counties opting out does NOT preclude them from opting back into the option of Sunday hunting in the future if they choose to. This type of flexibility would allow those counties wishing to provide further opportunities to their residents the ability to do so.

In Closing

In closing, this commonsense legislation which has universal broad support will allow the sportsmen and women of Maryland to participate in the rich tradition of waterfowl hunting seven days a week during the established seasons. We look forward to working with the bill sponsors, members of the General Assembly and the conservation community and request your support.

Respectfully,

Cyrus Hunter Baird
Senior Director of Government Affairs
Delta Waterfowl Foundation