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House Bill 481 - Natural Resources - Antlerless Deer Hunting Programs - Authorization

Committee: Environment & Transportation

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 House Bill 481 which would allow the Department of Natural Resources to allow for an existing antlerless deer hunting program in the month of January organized for the purpose of crop damage reduction.

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. Responsible hunting and utilization of depredation permits are ways we can help control deer over-population.

Another program started by the agriculture community is the Lower Shore Doe Harvest Challenges. County Farm Bureaus and grain producers host a 3-day doe harvest challenge and each antlerless deer checked in enters the hunter into a drawing. If the hunter chooses to donate the deer, it is processed free of charge (paid for my farmers and agribusinesses) and donated to the Maryland Food Banks and local food pantries.

House Bill 863 was passed in 2020 which prohibited "killing contests" for fur-bearing animals. During the 2020 session, Maryland Grain Producers Association worked with the bill sponsor to clarify and were assured that this did not impact white-tailed deer and therefore would not prohibit the doe harvest contests.

However, over the last few years, the contests have been scrutinized by the Department of Natural Resources as a violation to Section 10-404 which prohibits the sale, exchange or barter of wild game and we are hoping for official clarification to allow them to continue. MGPA worked with the sponsor to move the language to the correct section of the code last year. We also worked with the opposition to the original bill last year and were able to bring them to a "no position" stance. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources did not take a position on this bill last year. The bill in this posture passed committee in both chambers last year, made it to a 3<sup>rd</sup> reader calendar for final passage and narrowly missed passage as time ran out on Sine Die.

MGPA respectfully requests your favorable report on House Bill 481.