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Date: February 21, 2024

House Bill 778 - Natural Resources - Sunday Hunting - Migratory Game Birds

Committee: Environment & Transportation

MGPA Position: OPPOSE

The Maryland Grain Producers Association (MGPA) serves as the voice of grain farmers growing corn, wheat, barley and sorghum across the state. MGPA opposes House Bill 778 which would authorize Sunday waterfowl hunting in the state.

Many grain farmers in Maryland receive supplemental income from hunters leasing their farms for waterfowl hunting. The primary concern is that given their observations of the migratory waterfowl populations and hunter preference for weekend hunting, this could lead to over harvest and ultimately another moratorium on Canada Goose hunting in Maryland. In 1995, Maryland Department of Natural Resources shut down Maryland's \$40M a year goose hunting season after the population of nesting pairs in Canada fell to an all-time low of 29,000. The decline was largely blamed on overhunting. During this time, farmers did not receive the supplemental income of waterfowl leases and it took many, many years to build back up to the lease prices they were receiving. Additionally, Maryland has never rebuilt the waterfowl population to pre-moratorium levels.

Based on not only the farmer observations of the waterfowl population but also hunter preference for Saturday hunting, MGPA is concerned adding Sunday waterfowl hunting will lead to overhunting and ultimately a moratorium and significant loss of income.

The 2023 migratory Canada Goose season was increased to 2 birds and 45 days after being 1 bird since 2019. DNR's proposed 2024 season and limit is already going back down to 30 days because the population could not sustain the additional 15 days. It does not make sense to add another high hunting pressure weekend day to the season at the same time as the overall season is being reduced.

MGPA understands that this may sound contradictory coming from an organization that often asks for additional Sunday hunting opportunities for whitetail and sika deer. The difference is population control versus population preservation. There is an overabundance of deer in Maryland and therefore adding an additional weekend day for hunting since more people hunt on weekends makes sense for population control. Adding an additional weekend hunting day for migratory waterfowl that are not in abundance by that same logic, makes no sense.

MGPA respectfully asks that you protect the resource from overhunting and our farmers from potential loss of income in already tight financial times and vote no on Sunday waterfowl hunting.