

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

Position: OPPOSED

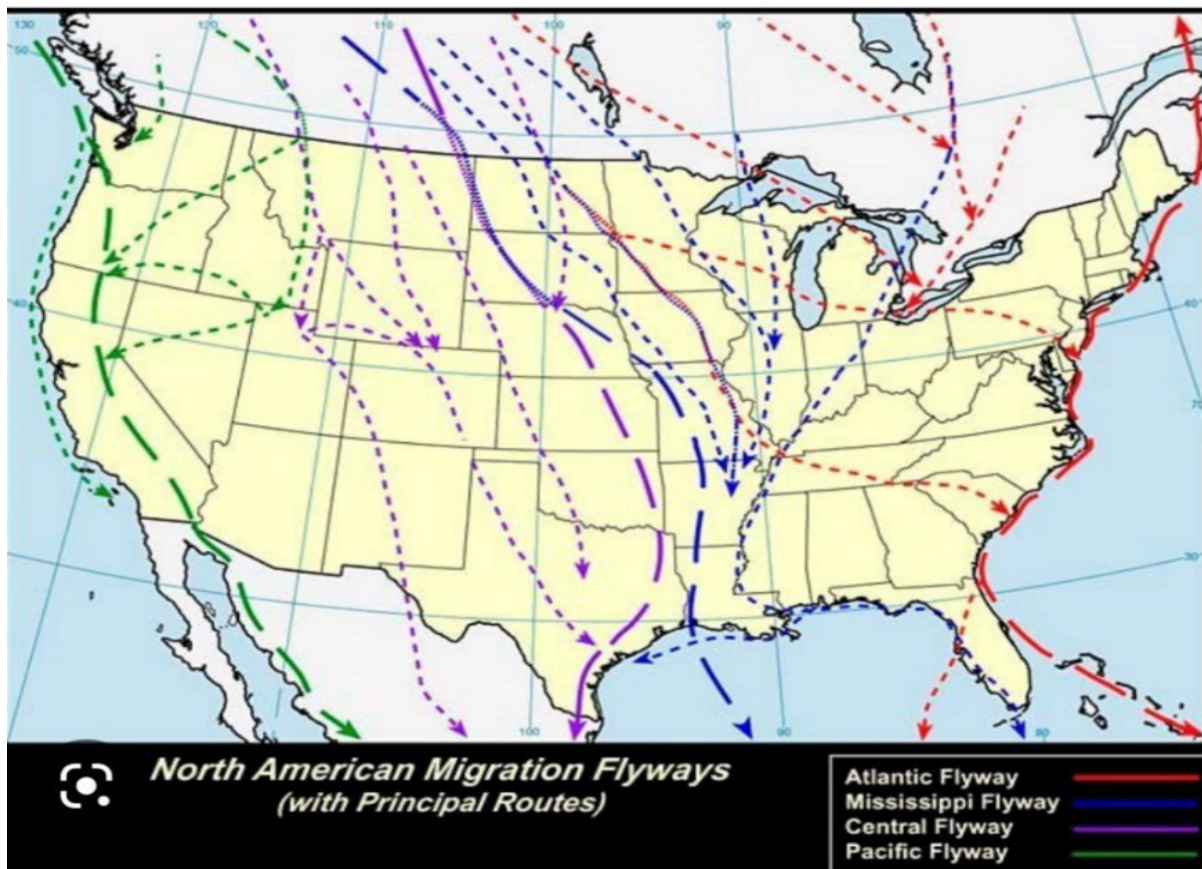
Committee: Environment & Transportation

February 21, 2024

My name is Jared Thompson and I am here in opposition to House Bill 778. I am the president of the Maryland Wildlife and Heritage Association, started in 2023 because the resource deserves a voice too. I am a lifelong resident of Maryland's eastern shore, avid hunter and waterfowl conservationist. I have a degree in Wildlife and Fisheries Biology and worked for the Department of Natural Resources for 8 years managing habitat and conducting waterfowl surveys.

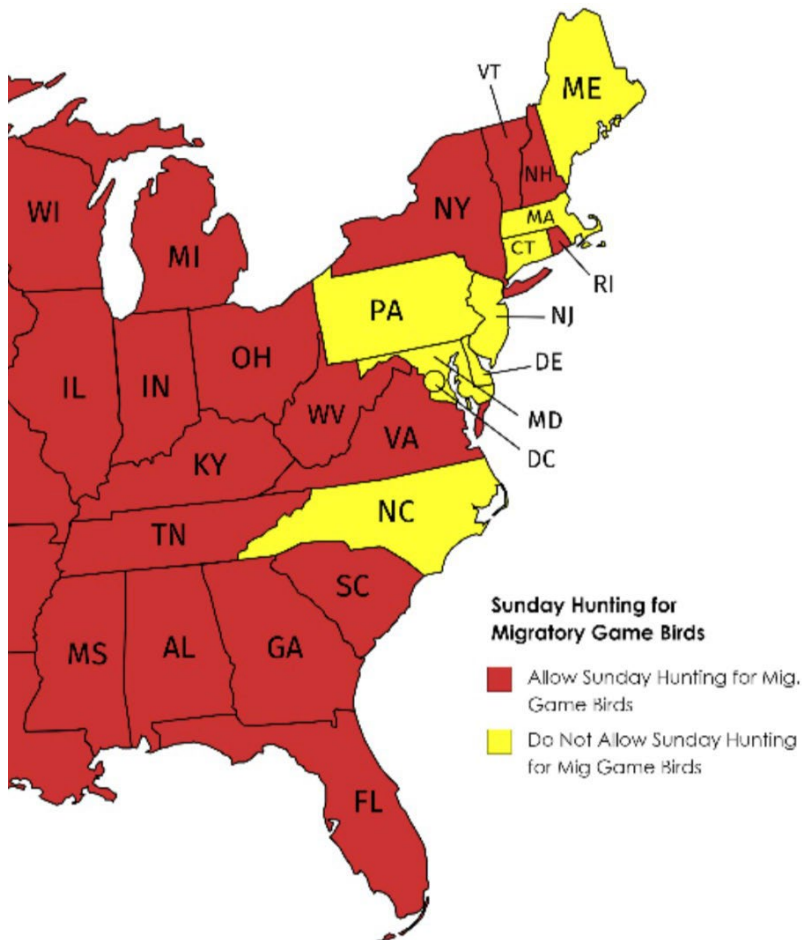
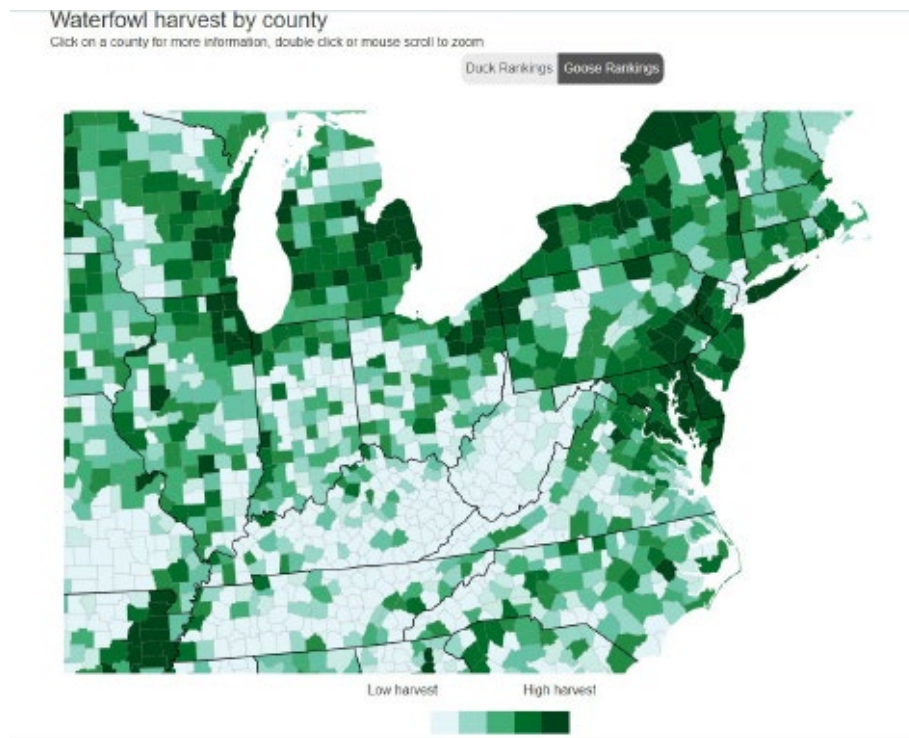
I firmly believe that seasons and bag limits need to be made based on science and what is best for the species. Decisions based on hunter preference alone are irresponsible. The day man's wants come before wildlife's needs is the day conservation dies.

The Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries along with the food and farmland make Maryland a unique haven for waterfowl.



Maryland is unique when it comes to waterfowl. As you can see from the solid red line at the right of the map; the principal migration route for Canada Geese in the Atlantic Flyway converges on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

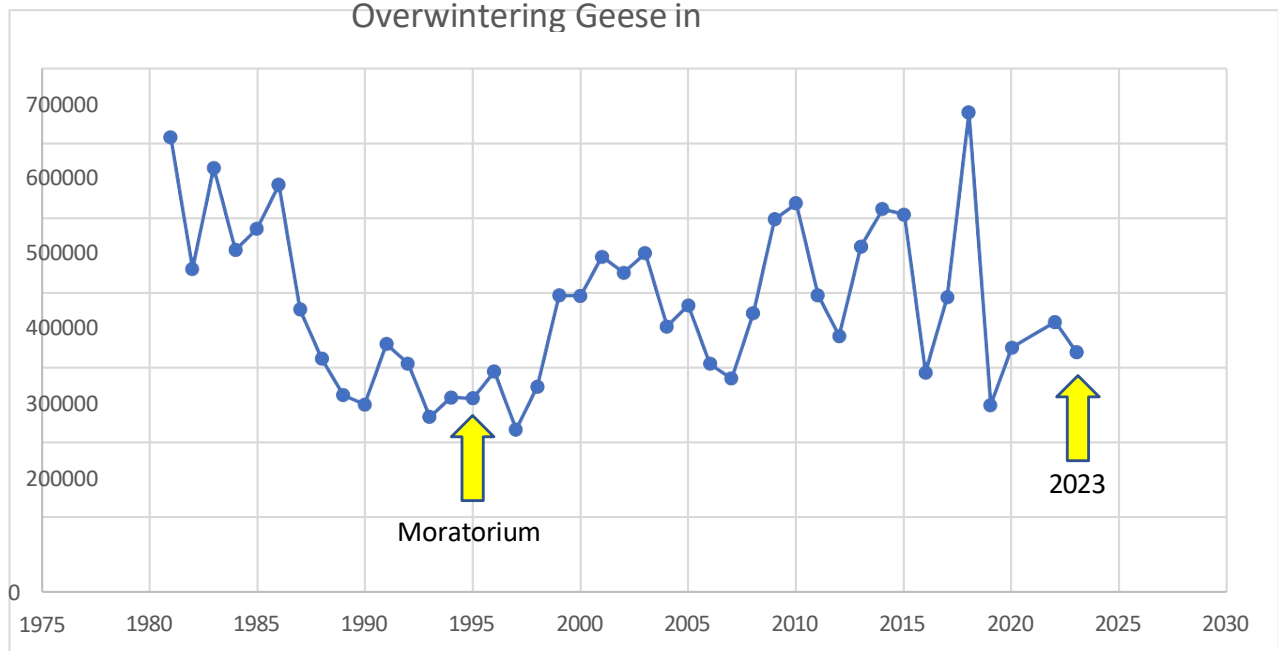
The [US Fish and Wildlife Service harvest report](#) shows Maryland's eastern shore has five counties in the top 25 for goose harvest. Kent is 3<sup>rd</sup>, Queen Anne's is 6<sup>th</sup>, Talbot 11<sup>th</sup>, Cecil 21<sup>st</sup> and Dorchester 22<sup>nd</sup> out of 3,115 counties nationwide. The claim that other states did not appreciably increase waterfowl harvest when adding Sunday's is irrelevant because no other state is the same as Maryland.



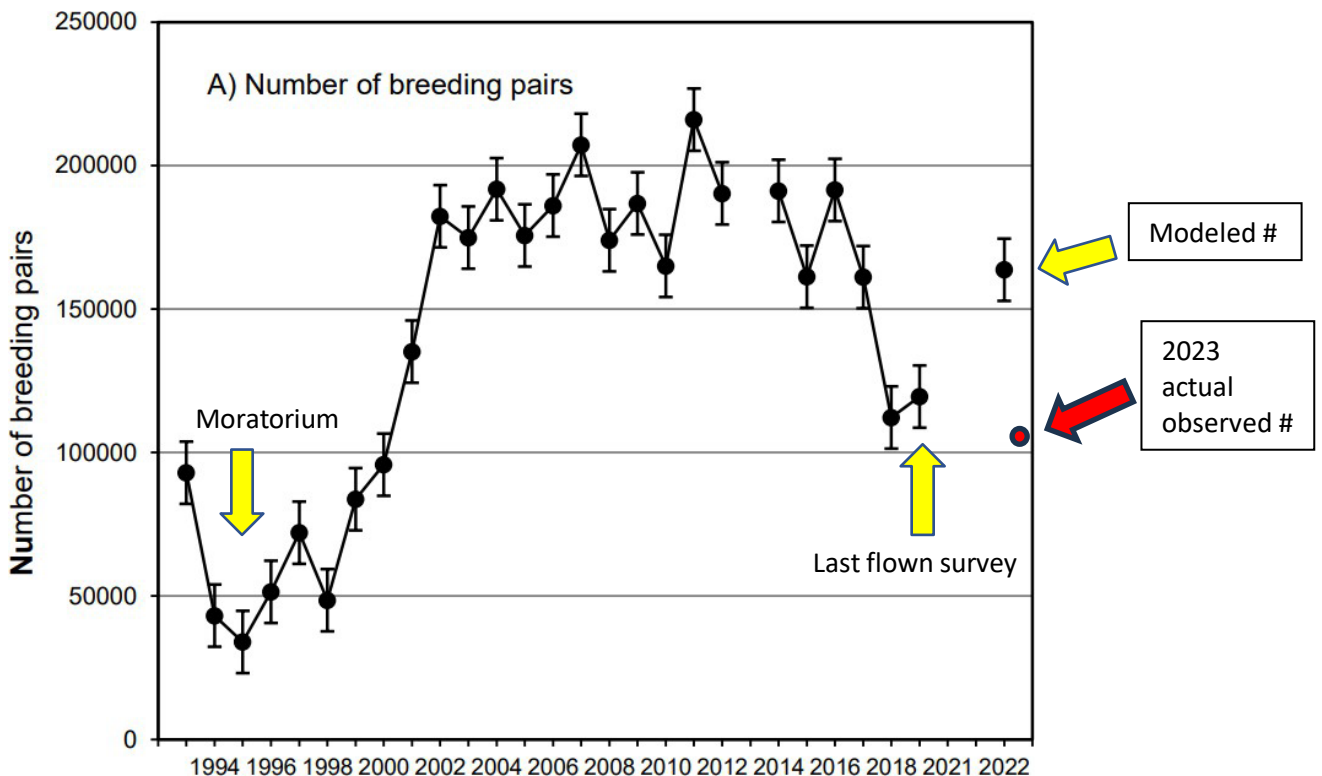
Many other Atlantic Flyway states do not allow Sunday waterfowl hunting either because the flyway is unique with the least amount of waterfowl and most densely concentrated habitat and number of hunters.

While DNR claims that the over winter Canada Goose population in Maryland was higher than the five-year average, just last year that number was 320,000 which is the second lowest count since the goose hunting moratorium and duck numbers were down across the board.

<https://news.maryland.gov/dnr/2024/02/02/midwinter-2024-waterfowl-survey-results-released/>



Seasons and bag limits are based on the federal framework set by breeding pair numbers. When the moratorium was instituted in 1995, US Fish and Wildlife stated they were trying to rebuild the breeding pair population to 300,000. In 2023, the [actual observed breeding pair population](#) according to US Fish and Wildlife was 115,328. The integrated population model used to set the bag limits in 2023 was found to be a 57% overestimate from the 2023 observed aerial breeding pair survey.



The season and bag limit was increased to 2 geese and 45 days in 2023 after being 1 goose and 30 days since 2019. The 2024 proposed season is already being reduced to 30 days. Why would we add a weekend day when the population cannot even sustain the 45 day hunting season?

Managing the migratory waterfowl population in Maryland is a complex and moving target. Adding Sunday waterfowl hunting is not something we can or should just try and see. The consequences could be irreversible and that is not a chance I am willing to take.

The argument of youth opportunity while understandable, is short sighted. I would rather be able to take my children and grandchildren hunting into the future, than hunt one extra day now. Please put the resource first and vote no on Sunday waterfowl hunting. Thank you.

