



Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Josh Kurtz, Secretary
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

March 4, 2025

BILL NUMBER: Senate Bill 736 – First Reader

SHORT TITLE: Natural Resources – Wildlife Damage Prevention and Reimbursement Fund – Establishment

DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: OPPOSE

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION

The Department opposes SB 736 because it creates a mandatory program to reimburse landowners for wildlife damage, and to award grants related to preventing wildlife damage, but it does not provide for an adequate or reliable funding source. It also requires the Department to devote staffing to investigate all damage claims to confirm the damage was caused by wildlife. The Department currently does not have the staff or dedicated funding available to fill these roles.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Department currently has a compensation program for black bear damage that, since 2015, has sold a total of 585 black bear conservation stamps at a cost of \$5.00 each. When combined with donations, the black bear fund in recent years has generated, on average, less than \$3,000 annually to distribute to farmers claiming crop damage from bears. As a result, only a very small percentage of each bear damage claim submitted is reimbursed, and farmers are left unsatisfied with the program. This issue would be significantly inflated for the proposed SB 736 program, given damage attributed to deer and other wildlife is much greater than damage from bears in Western Maryland.

It is estimated that deer, geese, and other wildlife covered by this bill cause over \$10 million in damage annually in Maryland. A Deer Conservation Stamp and related donations would likely generate less than \$7,500 annually for the Department to put towards the damage fund. Even if \$50,000 of dedicated funding were secured through the budget process, the amount would be a magnitude less than what is needed and expected for adequate funding.

BILL EXPLANATION

SB 736 requires the Department to create a Wildlife Damage Prevention and Reimbursement Fund. Money from this fund would be used to pay for wildlife damage claims and to award grants to individuals or groups that would seek to prevent wildlife damage.