



February 28, 2025

TO: The Maryland Senate Education, Energy & the Environment Committee

BILL: SB 634 "Hunting – Nonlead Ammunition, Fox Chasing, and Deer Management"

POSITION: Unfavorable

The Maryland Association for Wildlife Conservation is the umbrella organization for all the foxchasing groups in Maryland.

MAWC is not opposed to the elimination of the exemption of foxchasing in the definition of hunting; in fact, MAWC welcomes the opportunity to be included in Maryland's "Right to Hunt" statutes.

However, all of the Maryland statutes pertaining to hunting are based on the premise *of an individual with a weapon*; foxchasing is predicated on a pack of hounds managed by a team of people followed by a group of spectators. Undoubtedly, there will be unintended consequences and complications when *those in an unarmed group activity are treated the same as an armed individual*. (Please see page 2 for a more detailed explanation.)

For this reason, we respectfully oppose HB741/SB634, as more in-depth research into existing statutes needs to be conducted **prior to codifying** foxchasing in the definition of hunting, so that we can be more artful in how we weave foxchasing into the existing hunting statutes and the subsequent regulations.

MAWC welcomes the opportunity to work with the sponsors to do a more thorough examination of the statutes and the related regulations, with the objective to re-introduce a better bill in a future legislative session.

Sincerely,

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“HUNTING” and “FOXCHASING”

OBJECTIVES

In the hunting of deer, duck, goose, rabbit and other game, the hunter, using a weapon, seeks to “reduce ...(the) bird or mammal to personal possession.”

In the chasing of fox with a pack of hounds, the team seeks only to find and pursue, not to “reduce to personal possession.”

METHODS

In the hunting of deer, duck, goose, rabbit and other game, while the hunter may be in a social group (such as duck blinds), each hunter is autonomous. A hunter may have a dog or two to aid him in hunting, but the dog(s) are responsive to its respective owner/handler. *Thus Maryland statutes regarding hunting are about the individual.*

In the chasing of fox with a pack of hounds, it takes a team of people to manage and hunt a pack of hounds. As in any team, each individual has a specific role or job. To use football as the analogy, in foxchasing there are the coaches who oversee the training of the hounds and the hunting strategies, there is the quarterback that makes the specific calls for the specific plays during the game, and there are the other members of the team to assist the quarterback in the play.

Once foxchasing is no longer exempted from the definition of hunting, it becomes regulated by ALL the hunting statutes, and it becomes the ONLY hunting activity in the statutes in which it takes a team of people and a pack of hounds to execute the hunting activity – and the statutes are not designed for “team hunting.” Thus we need to more carefully examine all the statutes as well as the regulations before eliminating foxchasing’s exemption from the definition of hunting.

Once foxchasing is no longer exempted from the definition of hunting, it also becomes the ONLY hunting activity mentioned in the statutes in which those responsible for the hunting are mounted on horseback. Thus we need to more carefully examine all the statutes as well as the regulations before eliminating foxchasing’s exemption from the definition of hunting.

AUDIENCE/SPECTATORS

As noted above, hunting of hunting of deer, duck, goose, rabbit and other game tends to be a solitary activity, with maybe a few fellow hunters for company.

In the chasing of fox with a pack of hounds, quite often (but not always) there is an audience of spectators (of all ages) trailing behind, some mounted on horseback, some on foot, some on the roads in vehicles, watching the hounds (and their handlers) do their job – and hoping to catch a view of a fox.

Once foxchasing is no longer exempted from the definition of hunting, it becomes the ONLY hunting activity in the statutes in which mounted and unmounted spectators are following and observing those who are actually doing the hunting. Thus we need to more carefully examine all the statutes as well as the regulations before eliminating foxchasing’s exemption from the definition of hunting.