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THE HONORABLE BRIAN J. FELDMAN
Chair, Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee
HONORABLE MEMBERS

**RE: SUPPORT FOR SENATE BILL 272 (Prince George's County - Natural Resources -
Sunday Deer Hunting and Archery Hunting Safety Zones)**

February 4, 2025

The HUNTERS OF MARYLAND, LLC represent the interests of Maryland's hunting community at both the State and local level. Few realize that hunters underwrite 100% of all wildlife management/research costs through their purchase of hunting license fees/equipment. For the record, hunters do so willingly b/c of **American System of Conservation Funding**, a user-pay model celebrating its 86th Anniversary which also underscores the noble story of hunters as America's original conservationists.

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It's true that Maryland's deer population has stabilized these last few years at around 230,000; but they are still everywhere despite good faith efforts to decrease the population. Deer have become so abundant in Maryland that legal, aggressive efforts are underway to harvest them from sharpshooting at night to allowing permitted farmers to harvest them all year 'round to affording hunters liberal bag limits. For example, in DNR's designated *Suburban Deer Management Zone* – Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Howard, Montgomery and Prince George's counties – archery hunters are legally authorized to harvest an "unlimited number of antlerless deer".

Senate Bill 272 is not about Sunday hunting in Prince George's County with firearms. Instead, it's about allowing archery Sunday deer hunting there only and on private lands with a 50-yard archery safety hunting zone.

According to DNR, modern archery hunters play a critical role toward managing Maryland's deer population. In suburban communities, archery deer hunting is one of the most important components of a successful deer management strategy and plays a key role in mitigating deer damage to crops, vehicles, and suburban landscapes...archery deer hunters take more than 33% of the total deer harvest across Maryland.

Envisioned with enactment of Senate Bill 272 is a safe, practical and common-sense approach to strengthening the management of the deer population in Prince George's County.

ATTACHMENT

Maryland's hunting community acknowledges that Sunday deer hunting is controversial. Opposition to Sunday deer hunting was on full display when the 2003 General Assembly reversed a Sunday hunting prohibition dating back to 1723, albeit for 2 days within 12 counties only, aka Chapter 170, Acts of 2003.

Today, Sunday deer hunting is permitted in all but 3 counties in Maryland...Baltimore, Howard and Prince George's. Clearly, the other counties ultimately realized the socioeconomic importance of thinning Maryland's deer population estimated at around 230,000.

Efforts to authorize the same in Prince George's County in 2021 and 2023 failed, respectively: (1) House Bill 615 in 2021; and (2) Senate Bill 155 in 2023.

If enacted, Senate Bill 272 would authorize Sunday archery deer hunting (NOT FIREARMS) on private property only in Prince George's County. The bill would also reduce the archery hunting safety zone from 150 yards to 50 yards, thus joining the following counties: Allegany County, Calvert County, Carroll County, Cecil County, Frederick County, Garrett County, Harford County, Montgomery County, St. Mary's County, Washington County, Worcester County, or Wicomico County,

Death by vehicle collision...

Most of us have witnessed the gut-wrenching sight of dead and dying deer on Maryland's roadways caused by frightening vehicle collisions. Notably: (1) there are an estimated 30,000 deer struck annually on Maryland's roadways; (2) between 2013-2022, 11 people were reportedly killed in deer-related crashes in Maryland; (3) In 2015, a reported 796 deer carcasses were found on roads in Prince George's County; (3) State Farm estimates the odds of hitting a deer in Maryland are 1 in 116 where, in 2023, the average claim for an animal strike in Maryland was \$5,957.

Then there's Lyme Disease....

From 2017 to 2022, the incidence of Lyme disease in Maryland increased from 30.5 to 32.9 cases per 100,000 people. Deer don't cause Lyme disease; but, are a source of blood for ticks and help spread tick populations. If left untreated, Lyme disease can cause permanent damage to the heart, joints, and nervous system. Complications include joint disease, heart inflammation, and neurologic disease.

Economic crop losses incurred by landowners...

The average crop loss from deer in Maryland is around \$50 per acre per farm. With almost 1.1 million acres of cropland in Maryland, this could amount to nearly \$60 million in annual losses.

Then there's the impact of forest regeneration...

Despite Maryland's nationally acclaimed efforts to plant 5 million trees, it is important to remember that tree saplings are also on their menu...not just corn and soybeans. They can cause significant damage to young trees, including stripping them of buds and new growth, and even damaging the trunk and bark. *It'd be curious to know how many trees planted by the State, et al, have been destroyed.*



Public Support for Hunting: A 2018 Maryland Public Opinion Survey found that: (1) 67% of Maryland residents support deer hunting and 92% of landowners support it; (2) 77% of residents, 95% of landowners and 99% of hunters agree that deer

should be hunted to maintain a healthy population; (3) 56% of landowners favor Sunday deer hunting while 33% oppose; (4) 45% of residents favor Sunday deer hunting while 29% oppose; (5) 49% of residents support archery Sunday deer hunting while 33% oppose; and (6) 72% of hunters wanted more days of Sunday deer hunting.

https://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/Documents/2018_DeerPublicOpinionSurvey.pdf

2020 DNR Report on Deer Management

The following are two verbatim excerpts from a 2023 Report by Maryland's DNR entitled, *Maryland Deer Management: Strategies to Address Population and Damage Concerns*."

[https://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/Exec/DNR/SB327Ch543HB983Ch544\(2\)\(2023\).pdf](https://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/Exec/DNR/SB327Ch543HB983Ch544(2)(2023).pdf)

POPULATION STATUS

Maryland's statewide white-tailed deer population currently remains stable. The department uses a population reconstruction model to estimate deer population size based on the total annual deer harvest and biological data collected by staff at deer processors during the hunting season. The population increased from an estimated 135,000 deer in 1988 to a high of nearly 300,000 individuals in 2002 before declining to an estimated low of 200,000 in 2014. For the past two decades the population has remained between 200,000 and 250,000 deer. Liberal seasons and bag limits enacted for antlerless deer have successfully stabilized and/or reduced deer populations in many areas. However, in areas with limited access for hunting, the deer population often remains higher than desired.

SUNDAY HUNTING ON STATE AND PRIVATE LANDS

Sunday hunting is an important tool for deer management, but its use is restricted in Maryland. Deer hunters harvest 6,000 – 8,000 deer annually on the Sundays that are open for hunting. Many hunters only have the weekends to hunt and adding Sundays can double the amount of time that they have to pursue deer during the season. Affording hunters more prime-time opportunities to take deer is a simple solution to increasing the number of deer taken in Maryland.

Currently, Sunday hunting is allowed in 20 of 23 counties on private land (Baltimore, Howard, and Prince George's counties prohibit all Sunday hunting). Only eight counties permit Sunday hunting on public lands and those areas are limited to state forests and wildlife management areas. Sunday hunting is currently prohibited on state park lands according to Maryland law. The number of Sundays open for hunting during the season varies from county to county. Of the 22 Sundays that fall within the regulated hunting season, Anne Arundel County only allows deer hunting on three Sundays while some counties allow hunting on up to 21 Sundays during the season.

Along with limiting what Sundays are open for deer hunting, some counties also require deer hunters to end hunting at 10:30 am. A total of 11 counties currently has these restrictions. This cutoff can impede hunter success since evening hours often can be more productive for deer hunting. Likewise, other Sunday morning activities, such as church, may prevent hunters from being able to participate.

Limiting the number of Sundays and restricting the hours available to hunt on these days traditionally have been instituted to afford other user groups the ability to use lands they otherwise feel uncomfortable on while hunting is occurring. However, deer hunting is a demonstrably safe activity, and numerous other states offer season-long Sunday hunting opportunities with little to no user group

conflicts. Likewise, these conflicts appear to be rare in Maryland during Monday – Saturday when hunting and other recreational activities are occurring at the same time. For private lands, Sunday hunting in theory should only impact other user groups if the landowner decides to allow hunting on that day.

Private Property Rights

Private property rights are crucial for hunting because they allow landowners to manage their land specifically for wildlife, control hunting access, and regulate the hunting pressure on their property ultimately leading to a more consistent and quality hunting experience for those who gain permission to hunt on their land; this is especially important as a large portion of huntable land in many regions is privately owned, making access to private land vital for hunters.

Working Families

Those with a regular 9-5 job often struggle finding ways to hunt. On Sundays, there are generally no pressing demands other than spending quality time with one's family...and ideal time for hunting, especially with kids. Hunting teaches them about determination, ethics, responsibility, self-reliance, patience and respect for wildlife conservation.

Economic Contributions by Hunters

Hunting supports thousands of jobs, both rural and urban, across Maryland.

\$266 million spent annually...

88,000 people hunt in Maryland each year.

Of those hunters, 19,000 are from out of state.

Maryland hunters spend \$50 million on trip-related expenditures.

Hunters in Maryland spend \$128 million on hunting equipment.

Each hunter spends an average of \$3,000 a year in Maryland.

Hunting in Maryland supports over 4,500 jobs.

Hunters generate \$32 million in state and local taxes.

\$401 million ripple effect.

<https://huntingworksformd.com/economic-data/>

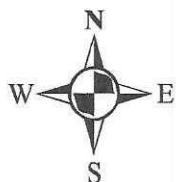


PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY DEER VEHICLE COLLISION DATA 2015

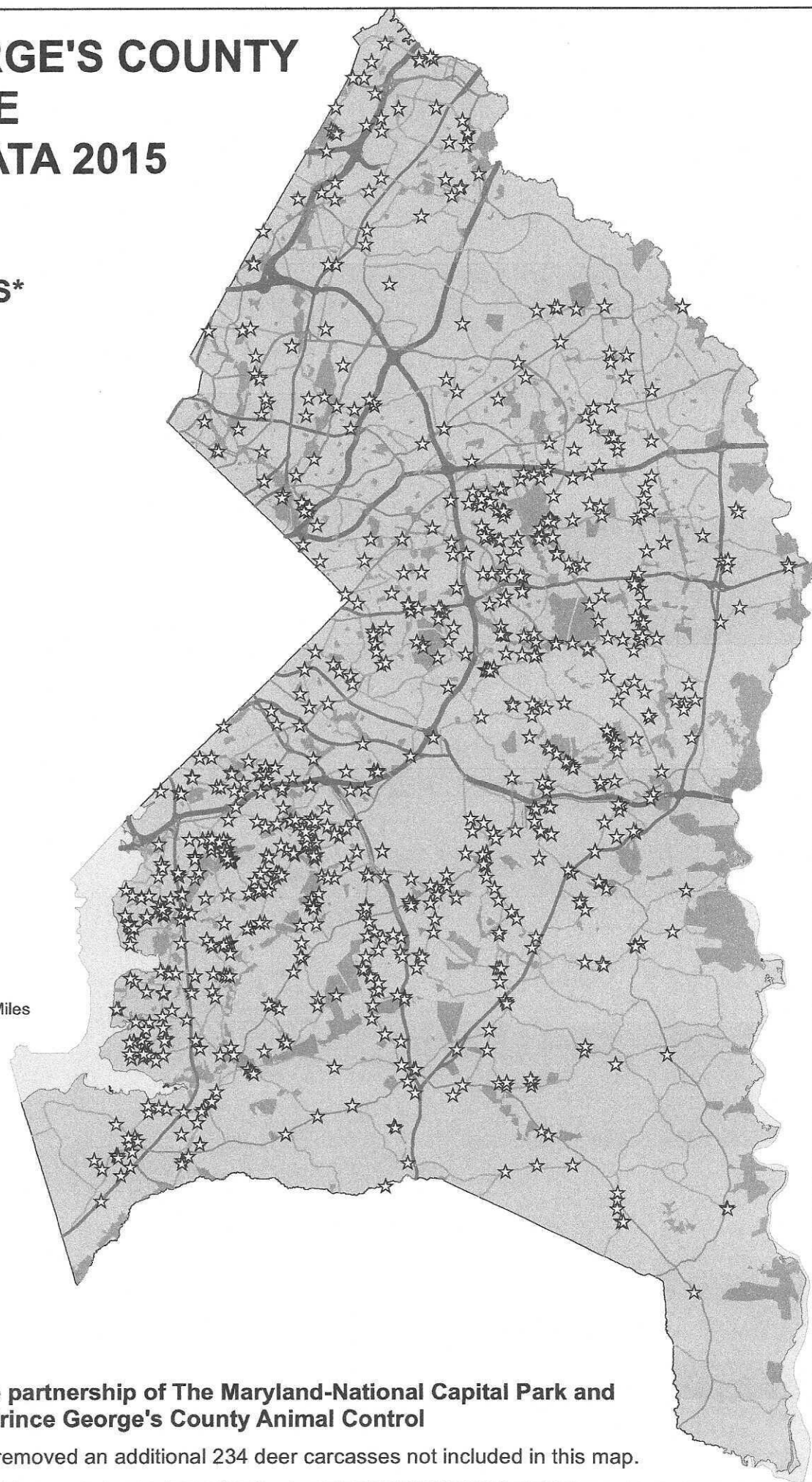
TOTAL CARCASSES*
796

Legend

- ☆ Deer Vehicle Collision
- M-NCPPC Property



0 2 4 8 Miles



Data gathered through the partnership of The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission & Prince George's County Animal Control

*State Highway Administration removed an additional 234 deer carcasses not included in this map.