



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

February 19, 2025

BILL NUMBER: HOUSE BILL 741

SHORT TITLE: HUNTING – NONLEAD AMMUNITION, FOX CHASING, AND DEER MANAGEMENT

DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION

The Department of Natural Resources supports HB 741 with amendments because it enables the Department to better gauge interest and participation in unarmed fox chasing so that informed management decisions can be made regarding this activity. It also will provide additional funding to the Department, through hunting license sales to these individuals, that can be used for wildlife management in Maryland, including the Deer Management Assistance Program referenced below.

The Department also supports HB 741 with amendments because it creates a Deer Management Assistance Program within the Department that will enable DNR to offer better services to farmers and landowners experiencing deer damage. The legislation, as written, provides one staff position for this new program.

Lastly, the Department supports HB 741 because it provides a timely phase-in strategy for the prohibition on using lead ammunition for hunting all game species. Non-lead ammunition is not consistently available in all calibers, so having adequate time for hunters to adjust to this requirement is needed. Likewise, manufacturers need time to develop and produce this ammunition in calibers and quantities sufficient to support all hunting opportunities.

The Department respectfully requests two amendments to HB 741 as noted below. Amendment No. 1 makes technical, conforming changes to the purpose and function paragraphs which correspond to the proposed changes in Amendment No. 2. Amendment No. 2 increases the number of staff positions for the Deer Management Assistance Program from one individual to five individuals. This program will be statewide, and one staff member will be inadequate to address the number of landowners currently impacted by deer damage. This amendment also alters Natural Resources § 10-301 to be consistent with the new requirement that unarmed fox chasers purchase a hunting license. Lastly, it amends the phase-in time for non-lead ammunition for muzzleloaders, rifles, and shotguns used for hunting deer and any other game species not specified in subsections (a) through (c) of that section of the bill to be July 1, 2032 to give manufacturers more time to produce the requisite types of ammunition, and hunters more time to acquire and adapt to this ammunition.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Unarmed Fox Chasing

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HB 741 requires anyone who participates in unarmed fox chasing to purchase a hunting license. It is estimated that approximately 1,500 additional hunting licenses could be sold because of this change. Assuming an 85% resident and 15% non-resident composition for the sales, this change would generate approximately \$80,625 in special funds and potentially \$241,875 in leveraged federal funds from the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Grant Program from which the Department has historically received funding.

Deer Management Assistance Program

Deer damage is a significant issue in Maryland and may cause over \$10 million annually for farmers and landowners. Hunting remains the most effective way to manage deer on these properties, with deer hunters annually taking over 75,000 deer statewide. Unfortunately, many properties are either not hunted or could employ hunting in a more effective manner. Oftentimes, female deer are not targeted efficiently, and the deer population is left unchecked. A Deer Management Assistance Program that is adequately staffed would enable the Department to better educate landowners and farmers about the proper techniques for managing deer and assist them with developing sound management plans to address deer problems.

Non-Lead Hunting Ammunition

Currently, only California has a complete ban on lead ammunition for hunting. However, many federal properties and other localized areas have lead hunting ammunition prohibitions for certain game species. Federally, lead shot was banned for all waterfowl hunting beginning in 1987. In Maryland, lead poisoning from hunting ammunition has been documented in raptors, including bald eagles, but populations of these species remain strong.

It is estimated that 50,000 or more hunters could be impacted by a lead ammunition ban in the state. Presently, the primary concerns with requiring non-lead hunting ammunition for all hunting in Maryland are the lack of consistent availability of many calibers and the increased cost of this type of ammunition. Likewise, some calibers are less effective and not as accurate as heavier lead versions. Ethically, hunters want to use the most effective ammunition possible to avoid potential wounding losses of game.

BILL EXPLANATION

HB 741 alters the definition of hunting to include fox chasing. Active participants in this type of hunting would be required to purchase a hunting license. The legislation also creates a Deer Management Assistance Program and provides for one staff position. This program will assist landowners with managing deer to reduce damage. Lastly, the bill requires the phaseout of all lead-based ammunition used while hunting. The phaseout begins with the 2026-2027 hunting season, with all hunting ammunition required to be non-lead by the 2029-2030 season.

BY:

(To be offered in the Environment and Transportation Committee)

AMENDMENTS TO HOUSE BILL 741

(First Reading File Bill)

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 1, in line 7, after “Program;” insert “requiring a hunting license for fox chasing;” in line 19, strike “10–101(k)” and substitute “10–101(k), 10–101(c)(1)(ii) through (iv).”.

AMENDMENT NO. 2

On page 2, in line 19, strike “ONE” and substitute “FIVE”; in the same line strike “POSITION” and substitute “POSITIONS”; and after line 20, insert:

“10–301.

(c) (1) Except as provided in paragraph (2) of this subsection, the following persons are not required to obtain a hunter's license, bow and arrow stamp, black powder stamp, bonus antlered deer stamp, or sika deer stamp:

(ii) Any resident serving in the armed forces of the United States while on leave in the State, during the resident's leave period, if, while hunting, the resident possesses a copy of the resident's official leave order; AND

(iii) Any person serving in the armed forces of the United States who has a service-connected disability, if, while hunting, the person possesses valid military identification[; and

(iv) Any unarmed person participating in an organized foxhunt].”.

On page 4, in line 14, strike “2029” and substitute “2032”.