

February 26, 2025

HB 6544 – Year-Round hunting, including Sundays, in Wicomico County
Position: OPPOSED

Dear Representative Korman and members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee:

This bill will infringe on the ability of a great portion of the non-hunting public to enjoy the outdoors. Over the last 20 years, hunters have lobbied to increase the number of days on which they can hunt, and now they want to hunt every single day of the year. This bill would lift the 10:30 am cutoff for hunters which was put in place on the few Sundays that had until then remained hunting-free.

Many horse owners do not have horse trailers and must rely on a network of private trails that traverse their farms on which to ride. Others may have trailers but need a place to ride, and public areas that can accommodate horses are rare. Whether on private land or in a park, Sunday is the only day to be certain that there isn't a hunter on the other side of a property's borderline. Riding is a family activity. We often have children on ponies and teenagers riding who may not have the control and judgement that can be expected of an adult.

Wicomico's population increased 4.9% between 2010 and 2020. Hunting accidents and confrontations are bound to increase due to pressure on access to finite public and private outdoor spaces, and especially since these areas are increasing intertwined.

Wicomico Demonstration Forest, located between Salisbury and Ocean City, is one of the diminishing number of places that horseback riders can enjoy a "real" trail ride, that is, more than a few miles in length. There are at least 7 licensed boarding stables in the Salisbury vicinity as well as other horse owners who keep their horses at private farms. Although I live in Talbot County, I enjoy riding in Wicomico, as have my friends who live in other counties.

Doctors in 34 states are praising the health benefits of being outside in nature, even handing out "green prescriptions". Outdoor activities should be encouraged! Unfortunately, some people are uncomfortable recreating outdoors when they hear gunshots and hear about hunting accidents.

According to the 2016 US Fish and Wildlife Census, Wildlife Watchers (photographers, bird watchers, hikers, bikers) make up 83% of the population. Comparing expenditures, this report puts Wildlife Watchers as the biggest spenders -- 75.9 billion, followed by fishermen who spend 46.1 billion, and followed by hunters who spend the least, 26.2 billion. Why should we cater to hunters who add the least to our bottom line, and only make up 3% of Maryland's population?

Sincerely,
Joyce Bell
wbell2@washcoll.edu