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House Bill 741 - Hunting – Nonlead Ammunition, Fox Chasing, and Deer Management

Committee: Environment and Transportation

MGPA Position: Support with Amendments

The Maryland Grain Producers Association (MGPA) serves as the voice of grain farmers growing corn, wheat, barley and sorghum across the state. House Bill 741 requires the establishment of the Deer Management Assistance Program in the Department of Natural Resources and also requires the phasing-out of lead ammunition.

Maryland farmers were estimated to experience \$10M in crop damage in the last survey done in 2012. I would argue that losses far exceeded that in 2024 as many grain farmers reported losing 20%+ of their crop to deer damage. The establishment of a Deer Management Assistance program is very needed and appreciated.

The amendments we would request relate to the lead ammunition phase out requirement by 2029. Lead ammunition is a readily available, effective and cost efficient option for both hunting deer and harvesting them on crop damage permits. Non-lead ammunition capable of humanely killing a deer can be as much as 20% more expensive than lead ammunition. This adds to the rising cost of ammunition overall which has increased just over 20% since 2019. Ammunition in general has not been as readily available in recent years due to manufacturing challenges post-COVID and the non-lead options can be harder to find. We understand the concerns around consumption of carcasses by non-target species; however, Maryland has a want and waste law which requires the retrieval of deer that are harvested and if disposed of carefully after the meat is harvested can avoid lead contamination.

We would ask for either the removal of the lead ammunition ban, extension of the transition period or the ability of the Department of Natural Resources to make a regulatory decision as to when it is feasible to phase out the lead ammunition.