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House Bill 1511 - Natural Resources - Wildlife Damage Prevention and Reimbursement Fund - Establishment

Committee: Education, Energy and the Environment

MGPA Position: SUPPORT

The Maryland Grain Producers Association (MGPA) serves as the voice of grain farmers growing corn, wheat, barley and sorghum across the state. MGPA supports House Bill 1511 which would establish the Wildlife Damage Prevention and Reimbursement Fund. The Wildlife Damage Prevention and Reimbursement Fund would authorize the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to provide (1) reimbursement for damage caused by deer, geese, and other wildlife to crops and other agricultural products and (2) grants for projects to prevent damage caused by deer, geese, or other wildlife.

Previous surveys done by the National Agricultural Statistics Service in 2012 estimated that Maryland farmers experience over \$10 million in crop damage annually with 77% of that being attributed to deer. MGPA members' experience would say that number is likely much higher. Reports from farmers in 2024 reflected approximately \$200 per acre loss from deer. Maryland's deer population was estimated to be just over 200,000 white-tailed deer and 10,000 sika deer in 2022. The density of deer to suitable habitat in Maryland is high and therefore causes conflict with not only farmers and their crops but also vehicles and homeowners.

This fund would not only provide reimbursement for damage under certain circumstances but also grants for practices that seek to avoid crop damage from wildlife. These prevention methods could be deterrents that can be applied to crops, organized herd reduction (sharpshooting), or fencing.

This bill serves as a starting point and is not a required allocation. The fiscal note reflects a significant expenditure whereas the bill includes "may allocate up to \$50,000" in addition to the sale of the deer conservation stamp. While \$50,000 may not be meaningful to addressing the magnitude of damage, we see this as a recognition of the problem and starting point for potential solutions.

MGPA respectfully requests your favorable report on House Bill 1511.