



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

March 10, 2026

BILL NUMBER: SENATE BILL 643 - FIRST READER

SHORT TITLE: NATURAL RESOURCES – HUNTING – MANAGEMENT

DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: SUPPORT

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION

The Department of Natural Resources is supportive of SB 643 and its balanced approach to addressing Sunday hunting. The bill is the result of months-long stakeholder engagement.

It is well documented that deer overpopulation is a concern in certain areas of Maryland. These problems are most evident in and around urban and suburban areas. Current law limits DNR authority for management alternatives to the issuance of agricultural Deer Management Permits (“crop damage permits”) and Deer Cooperator Permits (“sharpshooting permits”). SB 643 would allow DNR to offer a new deer damage abatement alternative. The new program authorizes permits for properties of 10 acres or more, without requiring a commercial agricultural component. This will be an important addition to the existing deer management options, especially in the suburban open space interface where deer densities are highest.

Additionally, the bill creates more recreational Sunday hunting opportunities, which offer dual benefits. First, it aids in managing the state's deer population by increasing the available time for hunters to harvest deer during the hunting seasons. Second, it serves as a critical hunter recruitment tool, by effectively doubling the weekend hunting time and helping to keep hunters engaged and active in the field.

A strong hunter population is needed to manage conflicts with species like white-tailed deer, sika deer, and resident geese. Hunting license sales and matching federal Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration grants provide funding to manage all wildlife, including plants and animals. In the 1980s, DNR was selling approximately 180,000 to 190,000 hunting licenses per year. Today, the agency sells about 110,000 hunting licenses. In response to surveys, hunters have said lack of access to land, the lack of time to go hunting, and the lack of mentors for new hunters have caused this decline in licensed hunters. Adding more time to hunt on Sundays is seen as a way to provide more time for hunting and additional time for mentors to train new hunters.

While this bill expands hunting opportunities, it also considers local discretion and enhances safety protocols, such as establishing setbacks for hunting near certain trails. The department will continue to respect the requests of local leaders and work with counties, as is standard practice with all hunting regulations, as we consider the issue of hunting on Sundays.

Contact: Lydia McPherson, Director, Legislative and Constituent Services
lydia.mcpherson1@maryland.gov ♦ 410-260-8113 (office) ♦ 443-875-7785 (cell)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

History: Sunday hunting prohibitions date to Colonial era “blue laws” of the 1700s. Over time, most states have removed these restrictions and allow hunting on Sunday. Approximately 40 states currently allow unrestricted Sunday hunting. Neighboring states, including Virginia, Delaware, West Virginia, and most recently Pennsylvania, have all adopted Sunday hunting opportunities in recent years. Presently, 20 of 23 counties in Maryland allow some Sunday hunting for certain game species.

Safety: Hunting accidents and conflicts with non-hunters in the state are extremely rare. During the 2023-2024 hunting season, Maryland hunters spent an estimated 750,000 days afield, and DNR recorded 20 hunting accidents, with 15 being self-inflicted, and no fatalities. Most were falls from tree stands. One of the accidents occurred on a Sunday that season. This low accident rate has been stable for years, thanks to our hunter safety education program and responsible hunters.

Atlantic Population Canada Geese Seasons: 43 states currently allow Sunday hunting for migratory game birds. Offering migratory game bird hunting on Sundays in Maryland would not shorten the season, but would instead change the days these species are open to hunting. The included calendar chart shows an example of possible Atlantic Population Canada Geese seasons structured with Sunday hunting. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the governing authority over all migratory game bird hunting in the United States, has expressed no concerns about hunting these species on Sunday.

BILL EXPLANATION

SB 643 would create four new provisions for hunting and wildlife management in Maryland. First, it would authorize the Department (DNR) to create a new deer damage abatement program where deer damage remains a problem for landowners and farmers who own or manage ten (10) acres of more of land; it would also authorize safe sharing of Sunday hunting hours during deer firearm season in certain counties; it would create a hunting program to recruit, retain and re-engage hunters during a particular migratory game bird hunting season; and on a future date-certain would give DNR the authority to set Sunday hunting days as currently occurs for all other days of the weeks in the DNR authority.

Atlantic Population Canada Geese
Draft 45 Day Season Structure

November 2026							November 2026 (Sunday Hunting)						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sat	Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30						29	30					

December 2026							December 2026 (Sunday Hunting)						
Su n	Mo n	Tu e	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sat
		1	2	3	4	5			1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31			27	28	29	30	31		

January 2027							January 2027 (Sunday Hunting)						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sat	Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sat
					1	2						1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31							31						