

HB1067 (2026) Unfavorable Report
Sean Beck

Small Game Hunting

While big game hunting has become the focus of the hunting world, small game hunting is still a popular pass-time for outdoorsmen. The shotgun is a popular choice for some hunters, but others, such as myself, opt instead to use a rifle when pursuing game such as the Eastern cottontail or squirrel. A variety of calibers exist for the purpose but ask most hunters their caliber of choice for small game and you inevitably will hear 22 long-rifle. In the last decade three separate “non-toxic” options were offered for the 22lr: CCI Copper-22, Norma EcoSpeed, and Winchester Varmint LF Tin. Two of these offerings used copper and the third used tin in place of lead for the projectile. Each of these three offerings suffered from accuracy issues, ultimately leading to their removal from the market. Each of the manufacturers subsequently attempted to reintroduce the rounds only to once again discontinue them. Using a non-lead metal for the 22lr projectile forces the projectile to be low in weight compared to standard lead offerings, leading to significantly higher velocities and lower accuracy due to the lower density in the projectile. Each of the three “non-toxic” offerings shot in excess of 1600fps, much faster than the subsonic offerings most small game hunters opt to use which top out at 1000fps. Particularly when firing at squirrels in a tree, these higher velocity projectiles are unsafe should the hunter miss. A higher velocity projectile can travel much farther than one of a lower velocity. These projectiles being harder than lead also resulted in problems with expansion upon impact with a target game animal. Body shots on vitals of rabbits and squirrels with non-expanding projectiles can result in targets crawling away to hide, making them unrecoverable and wasted. Expanding lead projectiles solve this problem. Under the text of this bill small game hunters like myself would be forced to use these ineffective options whenever these companies or others decide to make them available.

Limitations of Copper Ammunition

Copper projectiles can provide reliable expansion and lethality when fired through bottleneck cartridge centerfire rifles at high velocities. The required velocity for expansion varies based on the caliber and weight of the bullet. 11 of Maryland’s 23 counties allow for the use of these high velocity bottleneck cartridges for deer hunting, but 12 do not. The other 12 counties, those being the suburban counties with the highest numbers of whitetail deer, allow for straight-wall cartridge rifles which operate at much lower velocities than their bottleneck counterparts. There are fewer caliber choices for this type of rifle and availability of copper ammunition for the various caliber choices is low. Two of the more popular options do have copper projectiles made for them by major bullet manufacturers,

but those bullets are only used in loadings offered by small boutique ammunition manufacturers. This lead ammunition ban would directly affect the deer harvest in Maryland's most deer-affected counties.

Availability

Upon checking five different gun stores in my general area, I was unable to find copper ammunition for sale, particularly in the straight-wall caliber I am required to use to hunt in Howard County. I currently use a copper loading for my 350 Legend rifle sold online by a small (emphasis on small) manufacturer located in Michigan. He sells direct-to-consumer rather than offering his options through local stores.

There is a bill named the "Comprehensive Community Safety Funding Act" currently under consideration in both the Maryland House and Senate. This bill would impose an excise tax on the sale of firearms, firearm accessories, and ammunition in the state. When other states, such as New York, Illinois, or California, have put restrictions or extra taxes on ammunition sales in place smaller online retailers have opted to not sell to those states. Given that non-lead straight-wall caliber offerings come exclusively from these small online retailers, Maryland deer hunters in 12 of our counties would be prevented entirely from harvesting deer with a rifle.

Effects on Deer Harvest

The negative effects caused by an over-abundance of deer have been explained thoroughly in this committee over the course of many years. Lacking any natural predator in an area the deer herd can grow unencumbered. It is our duty to take the place of the missing predators to properly manage and conserve our environment. Each year MD DNR publishes the Big Game Report which highlights data about the prior season's deer harvest broken down by county. Using combined numbers from the 2024-2025 report (https://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/Documents/maryland-Big-Game-Report_2024-25.pdf) for the 12 suburban management zone counties during the 2 week firearm season, junior deer hunt, and January firearm season, 13,523 deer harvests occurred. This ban would directly affect those 13,523 deer harvests in counties that already do not harvest enough deer to adequately manage the herd. This number ignores harvests in the areas around Ocean City and Frederick which are also subject to straight-wall cartridge restrictions.

Eagles

Maryland DNR issued a report in 2025 entitled "A Soaring Success: Maryland's Bald Eagle Population Recovery." Due to the efforts of MD biologists our bald eagle population is thriving. In this report DNR lists pesticides such as DDT and habitat loss as the drivers of the species' decline across the US and particularly in Maryland. There are no scientific

studies which demonstrate or even list lead exposure from hunting as a concern for Maryland's bald eagles.

California banned lead hunting ammunition under AB 821 in 2007 in what it defined as the "California Condor Zone" under the guise of protecting California Condors from lead exposure. California's Department of Fish and Wildlife determined they experienced an approximately 99% hunter compliance rate with the lead ammunition ban in the California Condor Zone. Despite this ban and the near perfect adoption rate of non-lead ammunition, blood lead level surveys of condors in 2009-2012 showed an either static or increased level of lead exposure for the birds. This combination of factors clearly indicates that hunter's lead-based ammunition is not the driving cause of lead exposure in scavenging raptors such as condors.

[\(https://web.archive.org/web/20161221183049/http://www.huntfortruth.org/legal/state-regulations/california/\)](https://web.archive.org/web/20161221183049/http://www.huntfortruth.org/legal/state-regulations/california/)

This bill chooses to ignore the plethora of other routes of exposure to lead faced by raptors like eagles, most notably through pesticides, paint, and other soluble lead contaminants. Instead, it seeks to complicate and restrict access to hunting under the guise of protecting wildlife. One of the bill's main proponents who authored California's version of this bill stated in the past, "We are going to use the ballot box and the democratic process to stop all hunting in the United States... We will take it species by species until all hunting is stopped in California. Then we will take it state by state." This bill is an anti-hunting bill at its core, using deceitful tactics to accomplish the end goal of the bill's author.

I urge the committee to have an unfavorable report of this bill.