



MARYLAND
HORSE
COUNCIL

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One Common Bond: The Horse
One Common Voice: The Horse Council

Dear Chairman Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and Members of the House Environment & Transportation Committee,

We know how incredibly busy you are as the Session rounds the halfway point. We beg your indulgence in considering the below information that we feel compelled to share in the aftermath of the hearing on the above bill last Friday.

First of all, it is important to note that **HB 1063 is really two bills in one**. Anyone listening to the hearing might think that the two issues were about 1) deer, and 2) waterfowl. But that is **not what this bill is fundamentally about. This two-in-one bill is a proposal to take control of the Sunday hunting issue away from the peoples' representatives and hand it to an agency that largely serves a single special interest group on this issue.**

The "two bills" are:

Section 1, takes effect 7/1/2026 -

- Natural Resources Article Section 10-206:

Allows DNR to permit shooting of deer on properties of at least 10 acres with deer damage to crops, forest, landscaping, etc., by creating "deer damage permits;" (in addition to DMPs). No shooting would be allowed within 25 yards (75 feet) of DNR designated equestrian trails. DNR would issue public maps of these areas.

- Natural Resources Article Section 10-410 (Sunday hunting):

no change except -

- Wicomico - adding 3:00 pm to sunset on all but one Sunday in the deer firearms season (that one Sunday already is all day)

- Kent & Montgomery - adding 3:00 pm to sunset on all but one Sunday in the deer firearms season (that one Sunday already is all day)

- Allows year-round Sunday hunting on "Deer Damage Permits" in addition to Deer Management (agricultural) Permits

- Generally allows Sunday hunting for migratory game birds

- Adds Sunday hunting for migratory Canada Geese, Atlantic Population) for certain classes of hunters

Section 2 creates a three year Pilot program (7/1/2027 - 6/30/2030), after which it "shall be abrogated and of no further force and effect." Calls for a report to the Legislature on or before December 1, 2029, "on the effectiveness of this Act on deer management and balancing stakeholder interests.."

Eliminates almost all of the existing statute, and substitutes:

(I) SUBJECT TO THE PROVISIONS OF THIS SECTION, THE DEPARTMENT SHALL ADOPT REGULATIONS ALLOWING PERSONS TO HUNT ON SUNDAYS DURING THE GAME BIRD AND GAME MAMMAL SEASONS.

This is the provision that transfers control to DNR.

(II) THE REGULATIONS ADOPTED UNDER THIS SUBSECTION SHALL AT A MINIMUM ALLOW SUNDAY HUNTING ON THE HOURS AND DAYS AUTHORIZED FOR SUNDAY HUNTING BY SPECIES, HUNTING SEASON, AND COUNTY ON JUNE 30, 2027.

In other words, there can't be less Sunday hunting than what was in effect on 6/30/2027.

Also creates blanket allowance of Sunday hunting on public land (except state parks).

Thus, Section 2 is the real meat of the bill, and it is fundamentally about who makes public policy decisions - the Legislators who represent all of their constituents, or DNR, which demonstrably represents the interests of just one constituency on this issue.

Key points -

1. This bill will not insulate the Legislature from future Sunday hunting bills. Citizens can always bring bills to change the system, or to challenge particular DNR policies. **In fact, if this bill results in unpopular DNR actions, the Legislature might see an even greater influx of bills.**

2. It was argued that "DNR already regulates the other six days, the seventh should be no different." But the Sunday hunting debate is not about wildlife management, it is about public policy regarding the effect on other users.

3. Testimony at the hearing repeatedly demonstrated how DNR consistently excludes the majority of non-hunting interests from its by-invitation hunting regulation meetings. This summer's "stakeholder meetings" being the most stark example. The first meeting was almost completely devoid of non-hunting interests; requests from others to join the meeting were denied. Those meetings were initiated at the request of Del. Boyce in a memo to Secretary Kurtz (copy attached) wherein Del. Boyce listed nine issues that she wanted discussed and resolved, including "policy inconsistencies," "pattern and practice discrepancies," "concerns of the equine community," and "information about hunting incidents or casualties in the past 30 years, or more, if applicable." **None of that was discussed as Del. Boyce intended, as is clear from the attached agenda for the first meeting. Instead, at that first meeting, Assistant Secretary Peditto rolled out his plan to remove jurisdiction over Sunday hunting from the Legislature and lodge it within DNR.**

In her testimony, Del. Boyce acknowledged that - "people feel they can't trust DNR." How does giving control of the hen house build trust in the foxes?

4. It is important not to lose track of the fact that it is just not safe for members of the general public to be out in the woods with armed hunters. Legislation pending in this Session, SB 545/HB 716, which would require written permission for surveyors to enter private land during deer firearms season, is an acknowledgement of that very fact. During the House hearing, the Sponsor stated that "every year there are accidental deaths from hunting," and "you can't have people walking around in the woods" . . . "the safety factor is a big thing." The Hunting Accident Report submitted with our written testimony clearly demonstrates that.

5. The proponents urge passage of the bill (implicitly acknowledging that passage of the bill will inevitably result in more Sunday hunting, despite overwhelming opposition in the general public) **because they claim that Sunday hunting is among the best tools to reduce the deer population.** That claim is belied by the facts. In 2003, Gov. Ehrlich signed the bill allowing

the first Sunday hunting in Maryland - on two Sundays in the entire deer season. **For the 2004 - 2005 season, the deer harvest was 93,868.** In ensuing years, more and more Sundays were added to the calendar. **By this past season, 16 of Maryland's 23 counties had Sunday hunting on 21 out of the 22 total allowable days, and two counties had 15 Sundays. Yet the total deer harvest was 71,649, a decline of almost 25%.**

A few additional points:

- 1) When several of the Committee members raised concerns about the effect of the bill on their own jurisdictions, they were told that counties can opt out. Where is that in the bill?
- 2) As Asst. Secretary Peditto acknowledged at the hearing, this bill does not just apply to private land.
- 3) Most horse people are not rich. According to the MD Department of Planning, the median Maryland household income in 2024 was \$102,905 "Median income" means that half of households are above that number, and half are below. Yet, according to the 2023 Maryland Economic Impact Report, 67% of Maryland horse people have household incomes below that line.

We respectfully suggest that, if the goal is really to simplify the regulatory scheme, and to provide genuine equity to all users of outdoor resources, that goal can be achieved by this amendment:

1. Delete everything in HB 1063

2. Add:

10-410 (a) -

- (1) Except as provided in paragraphs (2) through (5) of this subsection a person may hunt any game bird or mammal on Sundays from one half hour before sunrise until 10:30 am..
- (2) Notwithstanding any other provision of this subtitle, the Department may allow a person with a deer management permit issued under § 10–206 of this title to shoot deer on any Sunday throughout the year in accordance with the terms of the permit.
- (3) The Department may allow a person using a State certified raptor to hunt game birds or mammals on each Sunday during the open season for the game birds or mammals.
- (4) The Department may allow an unarmed person participating in an organized fox chase to chase foxes on Sunday.
- (5) The Department may allow a person shooting pen-reared game birds or tower-released flighted mallard ducks to hunt on Sunday at a regulated shooting ground in accordance with § 10–906 of this title.

(6) The Department may allow a person who is 16 years old or younger to hunt on Sunday if participating in a junior hunt established by the Department in accordance with this subtitle.

(7) Except as provided in paragraphs (3) through (5) of this subsection and subject to paragraph (2) of this subsection, a person may not hunt on Sunday in:

- (i) Baltimore City;
- (ii) Baltimore County;
- (iii) Howard County; or
- (iv) Prince George's County.

(8) A person may not hunt migratory game birds on Sunday.

(9) A person may not hunt on public land within the State park system on Sunday.

(10) (i) The Department may not allow a person to hunt on public land designated for hunting by the Department on Sunday except in:

1. Allegany County;
2. Cecil County;
3. Garrett County;
4. St. Mary's County;
5. Washington County;
6. Dorchester County;;
7. Frederick County;
8. Somerset County;
9. Worcester County; and
10. Wicomico County.

(ii) Hunting on public land under subparagraph (i) of this paragraph is allowed from 30 minutes before sunrise until 10:30 a.m.

This short provision would replace the entire Sunday hunting section of the statute.

We remain happy to discuss any of these ideas.

Respectfully,



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Respectfully submitted,

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