

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2009 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
 Revised

Senate Bill 944 (Senator Dyson, *et al.*)

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Environmental Matters

Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's Counties - Deer Hunting

This bill requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to establish a program to train rifle shooters to hunt deer during daylight hours to control the deer population in Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's counties. The bill adds a deer hunting season specific to Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's counties and allows additional hunting of deer in those counties with a shotgun under a "deer damage permit."

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Total special fund expenditures increase by \$60,100 in FY 2010. Future year expenditures reflect annualization and inflation.

(in dollars)	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
SF Expenditure	60,100	54,900	57,300	59,800	62,500
Net Effect	(\$60,100)	(\$54,900)	(\$57,300)	(\$59,800)	(\$62,500)

Note:() = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate effect

Local Effect: None. The bill is not expected to affect local operations or finances.

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

Analysis

Bill Summary: A person may hunt deer with a shotgun approved by DNR from January through March in Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's counties.

A “deer damage permit” is issued by DNR to an agricultural landowner or lessee who is experiencing severe crop damage from deer and which allows the holder of the permit to hunt deer outside of deer hunting season under conditions set forth in the permit. DNR is prohibited from requiring a holder a deer damage permit in Calvert, Charles, or St. Mary’s counties to apply for renewal more than once every three years.

A person who holds a deer damage permit in Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary’s counties may use a shotgun approved by DNR to (1) hunt deer throughout deer season in the locations and under the conditions set forth in the permit; and (2) hunt deer on State agricultural crop land located in Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary’s counties to the same extent as the person is authorized under the deer damage permit to hunt on private land in those counties.

Priority for participation in the tri-county rifle shooter program must be given to applicants who hold a deer damage permit.

Current Law: There are three seasons to hunt deer in the State: (1) bow hunting season; (2) firearms season; and (3) muzzle loader season.

DNR currently issues a deer management permit to landowners so that they may harvest a certain number of deer outside of the regular deer hunting seasons in order to mitigate crop damage. There is no fee associated with this permit.

Background: Because white-tailed deer thrive in habitat that is composed of woods and openings, and because hunter access in those areas is limited, suburban development has provided excellent deer habitat in the State, resulting in an escalation of deer populations in suburban areas. Higher populations of deer can lead to a greater number of negative interactions with suburban residents such as deer-vehicle collisions and vegetation damage.

According to DNR, regulated hunting remains the most cost-effective deer population control mechanism available throughout most of the State. However, DNR advises that it will lose the ability to manage deer populations in a scientific manner in the three counties affected by the bill because almost all control of deer harvests will be eliminated with the establishment of an additional three months of shotgun deer hunting.

State Fiscal Effect: DNR advises that existing programs and staff are funded with a mix of general funds, special funds, and matching federal Wildlife Restoration funds. However, similar positions are funded with special funds. As a result, DNR’s total special fund expenditures increase by \$60,137 in fiscal 2010, which accounts for the bill’s October 1, 2009 effective date. This estimate reflects the cost of hiring one natural resources technician to assist with the rifle shooter training program required by the bill

and with the issuance of deer damage permits. It includes a salary, fringe benefits, one-time start-up costs, and ongoing operating expenses.

Position	1
Salary and Fringe Benefits	\$32,883
Automobile Operations	19,509
Operating Expenses	<u>7,745</u>
Total FY 2010 State Expenditures	\$60,137

Future year expenditures reflect a full salary with 4.4% annual increases, 3% employee turnover, and 1% annual increases in ongoing operating expenses.

DNR advises that, because the bill does not authorize a fee for the new deer damage permit, a fee will not be collected. This is consistent with the existing deer management permits issued to landowners. In addition, DNR may not be eligible for federal matching funds for the activities under the bill as training for wildlife damage mitigation activities is specifically excluded from receiving funds from the federal Wildlife Restoration Program.

Small Business Effect: By providing for additional deer hunting in Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's counties, the bill may result in an increase in revenues for small businesses. According to DNR, it is estimated that more than \$100 million was spent by deer hunters in the State on food, lodging, equipment, and transportation in 2006. In addition to businesses affected by hunting, the bill may also affect several other types of businesses. Most farms, for example, are small businesses. DNR indicates that a 2007 survey of farmers estimated that deer caused nearly \$7.6 million in agricultural damage in Maryland (equating to \$33 for each deer in the population at that time). To the extent that the bill reduces crop damage, farmers benefit. The bill may also affect vehicle owners and businesses involved in the repair of vehicles. DNR estimates that the total number of deer-vehicle collisions each year is between 20,000 and 30,000, with each collision resulting in an average of \$2,600 to \$2,800 in damage. Property owners and businesses may also be affected to the extent that the bill reduces damage to ornamental shrubs and gardens.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Charles County, Department of Natural Resources, Department of Legislative Services

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