

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2010 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Revised

House Bill 502

(Delegate Bohanan, *et al.*)

Environmental Matters

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

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

This bill authorizes Sunday deer hunting on private property in Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's counties from the first Sunday in October through the second Sunday in January of the following year. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) may not require a holder of a deer management permit in Calvert, Charles, or St. Mary's counties to renew the permit more than once every three years. A holder of a valid deer management permit may hunt deer with a shotgun on private property in St. Mary's County during the months of September and October. It is the General Assembly's intent that DNR evaluate potential deer hunting opportunities on DNR-managed lands in Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's counties to minimize the impact of crop damage caused by deer on agricultural lands and maintain a local deer population appropriate for the natural environment.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2010, and provisions authorizing deer hunting with a shotgun in St. Mary's County terminate December 31, 2010.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill's changes can be handled with existing budgeted resources. DNR can comply with the evaluation requirement; however, limited staff resources will be diverted from other responsibilities.

Local Effect: The bill is not expected to materially affect local operations or finances.

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

Analysis

Current Law: DNR establishes the open season to hunt forest and upland game birds and mammals by regulation each year. DNR may adopt regulations to enlarge, extend, restrict, or prohibit hunting wildlife. There are three seasons to hunt deer in Maryland: deer bow hunting season; deer firearms season; and deer muzzle loader season.

With specified exceptions, hunting game birds or mammals on Sundays is generally prohibited. Among the exceptions, in Dorchester, Frederick, St. Mary's, Somerset, Washington, Wicomico, and Worcester counties, a person may hunt deer on private property with a bow and arrow during open season on the last three Sundays in October and the second Sunday in November.

In addition, DNR may allow deer hunting on private property on the first Sunday of the bow hunting season in November and the first Sunday of the deer firearms season. This provision, however, does not apply in Baltimore, Carroll, Howard, and Prince George's counties and in Baltimore City.

DNR currently issues deer management permits to individuals so that they may harvest a certain number of deer outside of the regular deer hunting seasons in order to mitigate severe 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.

Small Business Effect: Authorizing additional deer hunting in Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's counties 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 2008 survey of farmers estimated that deer caused nearly \$7.7 million in agricultural damage in Maryland (equating to \$33.50 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: SB 944 of 2009 passed in the Senate but received no further action from the House Environmental Matters Committee.

Cross File: SB 259 (Senator Dyson, *et al.*) - Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs.

Information Source(s): Charles and St. Mary's counties, Department of Natural Resources, Department of Legislative Services

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