

**Department of Legislative Services**  
Maryland General Assembly  
2026 Session

**FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE**  
**First Reader**

Senate Bill 181 (Senator Lewis Young)  
Education, Energy, and the Environment

---

**Hunting - Lead and Lead-Based Ammunition - Phase-Out**

---

This bill requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to phase in a requirement that nonlead ammunition be used for hunting of all game species, by July 1, 2029 (with the phase-in period beginning July 1, 2027), subject to a requirement that the department authorize the use of lead ammunition for muzzleloaders, handguns, rifles, and shotguns if nonlead ammunition is not commercially available for the specific weapon. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.**

---

**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** Special fund and federal fund revenues may decrease in future years, as discussed below. Expenditures are not directly affected.

**Local Effect:** None.

**Small Business Effect:** Potential meaningful.

---

**Analysis**

**Bill Summary:** By July 1, 2029, DNR must require the use of nonlead ammunition for the hunting of all game species, subject to a requirement that the department authorize the use of lead ammunition for muzzleloaders, handguns, rifles, and shotguns if nonlead ammunition is not commercially available for the specific weapon. The department must adopt regulations to carry out these requirements, including regulations that phase in the nonlead ammunition requirement by requiring the use of nonlead ammunition:

- for hunting pen-raised birds on regulated shooting areas, by July 1, 2027;
- for hunting upland game birds, webless migratory game birds, and wild turkey, by July 1, 2028;

- for muzzleloaders, rifles, and shotguns used for hunting deer, by July 1, 2029; and
- for hunting any other game species, by July 1, 2029.

“Nonlead ammunition” includes (1) ammunition in which there is less than 1% lead content and (2) any federally approved nontoxic ammunition.

### **Current Law:**

#### *Hunting in Maryland – Generally*

With certain exceptions, a person must have a Maryland resident or nonresident hunting license to hunt or attempt to hunt all legal game birds and mammals during the appropriate season in the State. In general, a person must obtain a certificate of competency in firearms and hunter safety before obtaining a hunting license by successfully completing a course of instruction in conservation and in competency and safety in the handling of firearms. In addition to a hunting license, a stamp is required for a hunter to use certain types of equipment or hunt certain kinds of game.

More information on hunting licenses and stamps can be found in the Department of Legislative Services’ [Maryland Fishing and Hunting Licenses, Permits, and Stamps](#) report.

#### *Department of Natural Resources Regulation of Means or Weapons for Hunting*

DNR must prescribe by regulation the means or weapons for hunting designated wildlife and set forth any restrictions relating to weapons used to hunt designated wildlife, including the amount and size of ammunition for designated game birds or mammals.

**State Revenues:** To the extent the phase-in of nonlead ammunition requirements under the bill reduces the number of hunting licenses sold in the State, special fund revenues (hunting license and stamp fee revenues deposited in the Wildlife Management and Protection Fund), and federal fund revenues (federal wildlife conservation grant funding that is based on the amount of hunting license fee and stamp revenue DNR spends on conservation-related work), decrease.

The extent of any reduction in revenues cannot be reliably estimated. DNR indicates that (1) the extent to which nonlead ammunition will be consistently available to hunters, and the extent to which they will adapt to using it, is uncertain, particularly once the nonlead requirement becomes broadly applicable (by July 1, 2029), and (2) any reduction in special and federal fund revenue may be more likely to result from a reduction in nonresident hunting license sales (which generate more revenue than resident license sales due to higher fees) if nonresident hunters choose to hunt in another state (including their home state) as a result of the nonlead ammunition requirement.

During the 2024-2025 license year, the department sold approximately 80,800 resident hunting licenses and 29,400 nonresident hunting licenses, generating approximately \$2.2 million and \$3.4 million in special fund revenues, respectively (not including stamp fee revenues).

DNR advises that federal wildlife conservation grant funding is awarded at a 1:3 ratio; for every \$1 that DNR's Wildlife and Heritage Services (WHS) receives in fee revenue and spends on eligible conservation-related work, WHS receives \$3 in federal grant funding through the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act. DNR applies for the federal grant funding at the end of each fiscal year, so any decrease in fee revenues in a given fiscal year results in a decrease in federal fund revenues in the following fiscal year.

**Small Business Effect:** Small businesses affected by hunting in the State – including (1) those that provide ammunition or other goods or services to hunters and (2) farmers subject to wildlife crop damage mitigated by hunting – may be meaningfully impacted by the bill if it results in a reduction in the level of hunting in the State.

The 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) indicated that the average hunter in the State spent \$49 per hunting day on trip-related expenditures (food and lodging, transportation, and other trip costs) in 2011, and hunters in the State spent \$50.2 million total on trip-related expenditures and \$264 million on hunting overall in 2011 (including trip-related, equipment, and any other expenditures). While FWS's more recent surveys, in 2016 and 2022, have not included state-specific spending/cost information, if it is assumed that hunting spending/costs in Maryland increased by a similar or greater amount between 2011 and 2022 compared to the increase in national spending/costs during that period, hunters spent at least \$67 per hunting day on trip-related expenditures in 2022.

---

### **Additional Information**

**Recent Prior Introductions:** Similar legislation has been introduced within the last three years. See SB 634 and HB 741 of 2025 and SB 983 and HB 1473 of 2024.

**Designated Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Department of Natural Resources; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - January 30, 2026  
caw/sdk

---

Analysis by: Beatrice F. Amoateng

Direct Inquiries to:  
(410) 946-5510  
(301) 970-5510