

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

Senate Bill 643

(Senator Bailey)

Education, Energy, and the Environment

Rules and Executive Nominations

Natural Resources - Hunting - Management

This bill allows for the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to authorize the reduction of the deer population on any single, contiguous property of at least 10 acres where it has documented deer damage. The bill also (1) modifies Sunday hunting time restrictions in specified counties; (2) authorizes DNR to allow Sunday hunting during the deer bow hunting season in Baltimore City; and (3) for a three-year period, beginning July 1, 2027, and ending June 30, 2030, repeals the existing, county-specific Sunday hunting authorizations and requires DNR to adopt regulations allowing for Sunday hunting during the game bird and game mammal seasons – at a minimum allowing for Sunday hunting in the manner authorized by statute on June 30, 2027. DNR must establish procedures for counties to request changes to the regulations. The department must also report annually, from 2027 through 2029, on the impact of the bill. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2026, with the exception of the provisions that repeal existing, county-specific Sunday hunting authorizations and require DNR to adopt Sunday hunting regulations, which take effect July 1, 2027, and terminate June 30, 2030.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill does not directly affect State finances. DNR can implement the bill with existing resources.

Local Effect: The bill does not directly affect local government finances.

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

Analysis

Bill Summary:

Authorization of Deer Population Reduction

The bill establishes that DNR may authorize the reduction of the deer population on any single, contiguous property of at least 10 acres where the department has documented deer damage. “Deer damage” includes (1) widespread damage caused by deer, including the elimination of forest understory, tree regeneration, and native plants and (2) the destruction of agricultural crops caused by deer.

The method of reducing the deer population (1) is at DNR’s discretion and (2) may include the issuance of a permit to a property owner, or the property owner’s employee, lessee, or agent, to shoot deer on the property on Sundays. However, a permit (1) may not authorize hunting on Sundays in Baltimore City or Baltimore, Howard, or Prince George’s counties and (2) must prohibit deer hunting on Sundays during deer firearms season within 150 yards of a DNR trail designated for bicycling, hiking, equestrian use, or other active or passive recreational use. DNR may allow a person issued a permit to shoot deer on any Sunday throughout the year in accordance with the terms of the permit, except in Baltimore City and Baltimore, Howard, and Prince George’s counties. DNR must map areas of the State to which a permit may apply and make the maps readily available to the public.

Sunday Hunting

The bill allows – in Kent and Talbot counties – for additional time to hunt deer on each Sunday during the deer firearms season aside from the one Sunday designated by DNR during the deer firearms season in those counties when time restrictions do not apply. The bill allows for hunting from 3:00 p.m. until sunset on those Sundays, in addition to the existing allowed time period from 30 minutes before sunrise until 10:30 a.m.

In Wicomico County, the bill (1) repeals the time restrictions for Sunday hunting on private property and (2) allows for additional time to hunt deer on public land on each Sunday during the deer firearms season aside from the first Sunday of the deer firearms season (when time restrictions do not apply), allowing for hunting from 3:00 p.m. until sunset on those Sundays, in addition to the existing allowed time period from 30 minutes before sunrise until 10:30 a.m.

The bill also authorizes DNR to allow a person to hunt deer on each Sunday of the deer bow hunting season in Baltimore City.

Under provisions that take effect July 1, 2027, and terminate June 30, 2030, the bill repeals the various existing, county-specific authorizations for Sunday hunting and instead requires (1) that DNR adopt regulations allowing persons to hunt on Sundays during the game bird and game mammal seasons and (2) that the regulations adopted must 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. The bill clarifies, however, that the bill may not be construed to authorize DNR to allow Sunday hunting in Baltimore, Howard, or Prince George's counties, aside from certain, limited existing authorizations.

For the three-year period when Sunday hunting is governed by DNR regulations, DNR must establish standard procedures for a county to request changes to the Sunday hunting regulations applicable to the county. At a minimum, the procedures must (1) require the county to submit a letter in support of the proposed changes from the county's legislative body, county executive, or local delegation to the General Assembly and (2) provide for consultation with local stakeholders, including nonhunters. DNR must publish guidelines describing the procedures on its website.

Reports on the Impact of the Bill

By December 1 of each year, from 2027 through 2029, DNR must submit a report to the Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment and the House Environment and Transportation Committee on the impact of the bill on deer management in the State, the safety of hunters and other individuals who engage in outdoor recreation, and the balancing of stakeholder interests.

The reports must include (1) a summary of any Sunday hunting regulations adopted during the reporting period; (2) data regarding hunting-related accidents; (3) summaries of complaints received from any source regarding conflicts between hunters and other individuals engaging in outdoor recreation; and (4) any recommendations from DNR on strategies to improve safety or decrease conflicts.

Current Law:

Sunday Hunting

Hunting game birds or mammals on Sundays is generally prohibited in the State, with specified exceptions. For an overview of Sunday hunting laws in the State, please see the **Appendix – Sunday Hunting in Maryland**.

Deer Management Permit

Maryland landowners or agricultural lessees who are experiencing severe economic loss to commercially grown crops (including row crops, truck crops, pasture, nursery stock, orchards, and certain tree plantings) or significant ecological damage to certain native plant communities due to deer may apply to receive a deer management permit from DNR. A deer management permit is issued after an investigation of the damage by DNR's Wildlife and Heritage Service (WHS) and a decision of what actions must be taken, if any, to reduce the deer population, considering the (1) nature, extent, and severity of damage; (2) type of damage; (3) time of year; and (4) deer population surveys and estimates. The permit must describe the hunting device to be used and the number and type of deer to be taken.

The permit allows permit holders or their agents, known as "designated shooters," to remove deer from the designated property outside the established deer hunting seasons and deer bag limits, subject to permit conditions imposed by DNR, including on any Sunday throughout the year. Both a permit holder and all designated shooters are required to carry a copy of the permit signed by both the permit holder and designated shooter while attempting to take a deer under the terms of the permit. A deer management permit is valid for a period not to exceed one year and is free.

Deer Cooperator License/Permit

WHS may also issue deer cooperator licenses that allow a licensee to conduct deer removal and handling operations. The agricultural deer cooperator license is valid only on agricultural lands actively farmed for commercial crops (a general deer cooperator license is valid on other lands). An applicant must pay a \$100 fee, and the license expires one year from the date it is issued. An applicant for a license must be the owner or lessee of the land, or their employee, and must meet certain requirements, including successful completion of a written examination and a shooting proficiency test. In addition to licensees, certified shooters may operate under a deer cooperator license to assist with operations if they meet certain requirements, including successful completion of a shooting proficiency test.

A licensee must submit an operational plan to WHS 45 days before an operation in order to be issued an agricultural deer cooperator operational permit to implement the plan. The operational plan must contain various, detailed information and approvals, including evidence of community support for the operation and a letter of authorization from the county office of law permitting the discharge of weapons at night.

Small Business Effect: Authorizing additional Sunday hunting may have a meaningful positive economic impact on certain types of businesses. 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.

In addition to businesses directly affected by hunting, to the extent the bill's Sunday hunting provisions result in a decrease in the deer population, the bill may also affect several other types of businesses, such as farms (due to a reduction in crop damage) and businesses that own or repair vehicles (due to a reduction in deer-vehicle collisions).

The bill's provisions allowing DNR to authorize the reduction of the deer population on any single, contiguous property of at least 10 acres where the department has documented deer damage may also benefit small business landowners experiencing economic loss from deer damage.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: HB 1063 (Delegate Boyce, *et al.*) - Environment and Transportation.

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

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 27, 2026
js/sdk Third Reader - April 13, 2026
Revised - Amendment(s) - April 13, 2026
Revised - Clarification - April 13, 2026

Analysis by: Beatrice F. Amoateng

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

Appendix – Sunday Hunting in Maryland

Sunday Hunting, Generally

Hunting game birds or mammals on Sundays is generally prohibited, with specified exceptions. Chapter 95 of 2020 reorganized and clarified statutory provisions related to Sunday hunting in the State. Chapter 95 also (1) explicitly stated that a person may not hunt on public lands within the State park system on a Sunday and (2) authorized the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to set all of the seasons for Sunday hunting.

Game Birds and Mammals on Private Property and Public Land

DNR may allow Sunday hunting for any game bird or mammal, except migratory game birds, in Allegany, Cecil, Garrett, St. Mary's, and Washington counties during the open season for these animals on private property and public land designated for Sunday hunting by DNR.

DNR may allow Sunday deer hunting in Frederick County from the first Sunday in October through the second Sunday in January of the following year on private property and public land designated for Sunday hunting by DNR.

DNR may allow Sunday hunting for any game bird or mammal, except migratory game birds, in Dorchester County during the open season for these animals on private property. DNR also may allow Sunday turkey hunting in Dorchester County during the spring turkey hunting season on public land designated for hunting by DNR. In general, Sunday hunting may only occur from 30 minutes before sunrise until 10:30 a.m. However, the time restriction does not apply (1) on each Sunday of the deer hunting seasons from the first Sunday in October through the second Sunday in January, inclusive, or (2) on each Sunday of the spring turkey hunting season.

DNR may allow Sunday hunting for any game bird or mammal, except migratory game birds, in Calvert, Caroline, Charles, and Queen Anne's counties during the open season for these animals on private property. In general, Sunday hunting may only occur from 30 minutes before sunrise until 10:30 a.m. However, the time restriction does not apply (1) on each Sunday of the deer firearms season; (2) on the last three Sundays in October and the first two Sundays in November during the deer bow hunting season; and (3) on each Sunday of the spring turkey hunting season.

DNR may allow Sunday hunting for any game bird or mammal, except migratory game birds, in Somerset County during the open season for these animals on private property and public land leased to a hunt club. In general, Sunday hunting may only occur from 30 minutes before sunrise until 10:30 a.m. However, the time restriction does not apply (1) on each Sunday of the deer firearms season and (2) on the last three Sundays in October and the first two Sundays in November during the deer bow hunting season.

DNR may allow Sunday hunting for any game bird or mammal, except migratory game birds, in Wicomico County during the open season for these animals on private property and public land designated for hunting by DNR. In general, Sunday hunting may only occur from 30 minutes before sunrise until 10:30 a.m. However, the time restriction does not apply (1) on the first Sunday of the deer firearms season and (2) on the last three Sundays in October and the first two Sundays in November during the deer bow hunting season.

DNR may allow Sunday hunting for any game bird or mammal, except migratory game birds, in Worcester County during the open season for these animals on private property and public land designated for hunting by DNR. In general, Sunday hunting may only occur from 30 minutes before sunrise until 10:30 a.m. However, the time restriction does not apply (1) on each Sunday of the deer firearms season and (2) on the last three Sundays in October and the first two Sundays in November during the deer bow hunting season.

Deer on Private Property

All Seasons: DNR may allow Sunday deer hunting on private property (1) in Carroll County in all deer hunting seasons from the first Sunday in October through the second Sunday in January of the following year; (2) in Kent County on each Sunday in all deer hunting seasons from 30 minutes before sunrise until 10:30 a.m. (however, the time restriction does not apply to a participant in the junior deer hunt, on one Sunday in the deer firearms season as designated by DNR, and on each Sunday during the deer bow hunting season and the deer muzzle loader season); (3) in Montgomery County on each Sunday in all deer hunting seasons from 30 minutes before sunrise until 10:30 a.m. (however, the time restriction does not apply to a participant in the junior deer hunt, and on one Sunday in the deer firearms season and the deer bow hunting season as designated by DNR); and (4) in Talbot County on each Sunday in all deer hunting seasons from 30 minutes before sunrise until 10:30 a.m. (however, the time restriction does not apply to a participant in the junior deer hunt, on one Sunday in the deer firearms season as designated by DNR, and on the last three Sundays in October and the first two Sundays in November during the deer bow hunting season).

Firearms Season: DNR may allow Sunday deer hunting on private property (1) in Harford County on each Sunday of the deer firearms season and (2) in Anne Arundel County on the first Sunday of the deer firearms season.

Bow Season: DNR may allow Sunday deer hunting on private property (1) in Harford County on the last three Sundays in October and the first two Sundays in November of the deer bow season and (2) in Anne Arundel County on the first Sunday in November of the deer bow season.

Turkey on Private Property

DNR may allow Sunday turkey hunting on private property on Sundays during the spring turkey hunting season in Carroll and Kent counties and from 30 minutes before sunrise until 10:30 a.m. in Talbot County.

Miscellaneous

Junior Hunt: DNR may allow a person who is age 16 or younger and is participating in a junior hunt to hunt on a Sunday.

Traditional Sunday Hunting: DNR may allow the following persons to hunt game birds and mammals on a Sunday: (1) a person using State-certified raptors to hunt game birds or mammals during open season for these animals; (2) an unarmed person participating in an organized fox chase; and (3) a person using a regulated shooting ground to hunt pen-reared game birds or tower-released flighted mallard ducks.

Deer Management Permit Holders: DNR may allow a person with a deer management permit to shoot deer on any Sunday throughout the year in accordance with the terms of the permit.

Express Prohibitions

In general, a person may not hunt on a Sunday in Baltimore City or Baltimore, Howard, or Prince George's counties. This prohibition in these counties does not apply to the above-described acts of traditional Sunday hunting. In addition, a person with a deer management permit may shoot deer under the permit on a Sunday in these counties. Further, a person may not hunt migratory game birds on a Sunday, and a person may not hunt on public land within the State park system on a Sunday.

Background on Deer Hunting in Maryland

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. This has resulted in growing 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. Deer also cause agricultural damage.