

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2017 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 954 (Senator Eckardt)
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Talbot County - Deer Management Permit - Use of Rifles

This bill allows a person who is hunting under a deer management permit in Talbot County to use a rifle approved by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) if the person (1) holds a valid Maryland State Shooter Qualification Card and (2) is harvesting deer under the permit subject to the conditions set forth in the permit.

The bill takes effect June 1, 2017.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill does not materially affect State finances or operations.

Local Effect: The bill does not materially affect local finances or operations.

Small Business Effect: Minimal overall, but potential meaningful impact for farmers in Talbot County, as discussed below.

Analysis

Current Law/Background:

Hunting Seasons – Generally

In general, 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 muzzleloader season. Deer hunting with

archery equipment extends from early September through the end of January. Firearms season is two weeks in November and December starting the Saturday after Thanksgiving. There is also a two-day firearms season in January. There are two muzzleloader seasons: one in mid-October and a second in late December.

Deer Management Permits

Maryland landowners or agricultural lessees that are experiencing severe economic loss from deer to commercially grown crops (including row crops, truck crops, pasture, nursery stock, orchards, and certain tree plantings) may be eligible to receive a deer management permit. Deer management permits allow the permittee to remove deer from the designated property outside the established deer hunting seasons and/or deer bag limits. These permits are issued by the Wildlife and Heritage Service within DNR; there is no permit fee.

DNR advises that in 2015, a total of 1,665 deer management permits were issued statewide. Of the 32,000 deer that were authorized to be hunted under the permits, a total of 8,535 were taken. DNR also notes that over the past three years, the department has issued 40 to 46 deer management permits annually in Talbot County.

According to DNR, while regulated hunting is the most cost-effective deer population control mechanism available throughout the State, deer management permits are a valuable tool for farmers.

Department of Natural Resources' Shooter Qualification Card Program

DNR certifies and issues Maryland State Shooter Qualification Cards through the Shooter Qualification Program. Hunters who meet certain shooting qualification standards are certified and receive a card that is valid for one year. The card serves as “proof of proficiency” and enables a qualified hunter to be eligible to apply for many of the managed deer hunts held across Maryland. According to DNR, shooter qualification events are held at different times and locations throughout the year. Many of the organizations that host these events charge a fee. DNR issues press releases in the summer that announce the dates for the various qualifications and also posts a list of the participating clubs and locations on its website.

Small Business Effect: Allowing a person hunting under a deer management permit in Talbot County to use an approved rifle – under specified circumstances – may result in these hunters taking additional deer in the county. This has a potential meaningful economic impact on farmers in the county by reducing crop damage. Most farms are small businesses. In 2011, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Agricultural Statistics Service estimated that Maryland deer caused \$7.7 million in agricultural damage statewide. Based on past estimates of crop damage losses, DNR estimates that an individual deer

causes \$33.05 in agricultural damage annually. To the extent that the bill reduces crop damage, farmers benefit.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: HB 1203 (Delegates Mautz and Adams) - Environment and Transportation.

Information Source(s): Department of Natural Resources; Talbot County; U.S. Department of Agriculture; Department of Legislative Services

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md/lgc

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