

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
 First Reader

Senate Bill 634 (Senator Lewis Young, *et al.*)
 Education, Energy, and the Environment

Hunting - Nonlead Ammunition, Fox Chasing, and Deer Management

This bill establishes a Deer Management Assistance Program within the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to educate and assist farmers with deer management and hunting on private land and requires a permanent, classified position to administer the program. The bill also (1) requires 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 beginning July 1, 2026), and (2) requires a person who participates in unarmed fox chasing to possess a resident or nonresident full season hunting license. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2025.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Special fund revenues increase by approximately \$80,600 beginning in FY 2026 and federal fund revenues increase beginning in FY 2027 by an indeterminate amount, as discussed below. Special/federal fund expenditures increase by \$121,500 in FY 2026. Future years reflect annualization and ongoing operating expenses. **This bill establishes a mandated appropriation beginning in FY 2027.**

(in dollars)	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030
SF Revenue	\$80,600	\$80,600	\$80,600	\$80,600	\$80,600
FF Revenue	\$0	-	-	-	-
SF/FF Exp.	\$121,500	\$84,400	\$87,900	\$91,500	\$95,000
Net Effect	(\$40,900)	-/(-)	-/(-)	-/(-)	-/(-)

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

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

Analysis

Bill Summary:

Deer Management Assistance Program

The bill establishes a Deer Management Assistance Program within DNR to educate and assist farmers with deer management and hunting on private land. By July 1, 2026, the Department of Budget and Management must increase the number of full-time employees in the department by one permanent, classified position to administer the program.

Nonlead Ammunition

By July 1, 2029, DNR must require the use of nonlead ammunition for the hunting of all game species. The department must adopt regulations to carry out the requirement, including regulations that phase in the requirement by requiring the use of nonlead ammunition:

- for hunting pen-raised birds on regulated shooting areas, by July 1, 2026;
- for hunting upland game birds, by July 1, 2027;
- for hunting webless migratory game bird species and wild turkey, by July 1, 2028; and
- for muzzleloaders, rifles, and shotguns used for hunting deer and 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.

Hunting License Requirement for Unarmed Fox Chasing

The bill requires any person who participates in unarmed fox chasing to possess a resident or nonresident full season hunting license, though exempts such persons from the requirement that a person obtain a certificate of competency in firearms and hunter safety before obtaining a hunting license.

Current Law:

Deer Management Permits

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. 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.

Regulation of the Means or Weapons for Hunting Designated Wildlife

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.

Hunting License Requirement

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.

“Hunt” means to pursue, capture, catch, kill, gig, trap, shoot, or attempt to pursue, capture, catch, kill, gig, trap, or shoot, or in any manner reduce any bird or mammal to personal possession. “Hunt” excludes the sport of fox chasing.

Unarmed Fox Chasing – Furbearer Permit

With certain exceptions, a Maryland resident or nonresident must have a furbearer permit to hunt, chase, or trap any furbearer in the State or participate in the unarmed chasing of foxes and raccoons in the State.

State Revenues: Special fund revenues to the State Wildlife Management and Protection Fund (WMPF) within DNR increase by approximately \$80,625 beginning in fiscal 2026 due to an increase in hunting licenses sold (to those who participate in unarmed fox chases). This estimate assumes:

- approximately 1,500 individuals participate in unarmed fox chasing and purchase a hunting license (an estimate provided by DNR based on furbearer permits issued); and

- approximately 85% of those licenses are sold to residents (\$35 fee) and 15% are sold to nonresidents (\$160 fee).

In addition, federal fund revenues are expected to increase beginning in fiscal 2027 from federal matching grant funding for conservation related work. DNR advises that federal funding is awarded at a 1:3 ratio; for every \$1 that DNR’s Wildlife and Heritage Services (WHS) receives directly in increased 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 the increase in fee revenues in fiscal 2026 drives an increase in federal funds in fiscal 2027. Accordingly, based on the estimated increase in fee revenue resulting from the bill, depending on the extent to which revenue is spent on eligible conservation work and qualifies for federal matching grant funding, federal fund revenues increase by up to \$241,875 annually beginning in fiscal 2027.

This analysis assumes sufficient nonlead ammunition is available as the nonlead ammunition requirement is phased in, and the requirement does not affect the level of hunting in the State.

State Expenditures: Special/federal fund expenditures increase by \$121,548 beginning in fiscal 2026, which accounts for a 90-day start-up delay. This estimate reflects the cost of hiring one full time Natural Resources Biologist to administer the Deer Management Assistance Program pursuant to the bill. While the bill requires that the number of full-time employees in DNR be increased by one permanent, classified position by July 1, 2026, this estimate assumes the position starts in fiscal 2026, on October 1, 2025 (after a 90-day start-up delay), since the bill and the program are part of State law beginning July 1, 2025. The estimate includes a salary, fringe benefits, one-time start-up costs (including the purchase of one vehicle), and ongoing operating expenses.

DNR indicates that some of the activities under the program are likely eligible to be supported by federal funding but not all of the activities. Cost not able to be supported by federal funding are assumed to be supported by special funds (WMPF).

Position	1.0
Salary and Fringe Benefits	\$56,754
Operating Expenses	<u>64,794</u>
Total FY 2026 State Expenditures	\$121,548

Future year expenditures reflect a full salary with annual increases and employee turnover as well as annual increases in ongoing operating expenses.

DNR advises that while the bill requires the number of full-time employees in the department to be increased by one permanent, classified position to administer the program, it indicates it needs five staff total in order to run the program statewide (one supervisor and one staff for each of DNR's four management regions), to (1) visit farmers and landowners who are experiencing deer damage; (2) assist them with creating deer management plans; and (3) educate them on how to better manage deer populations. If DNR hires that amount of staff, expenditures associated with those positions total \$617,531 in fiscal 2026 (accounting for salaries, fringe benefits, vehicles, and other costs).

DNR can manage the phase-in of nonlead ammunition with existing resources.

Small Business Effect: Small business farmers may meaningfully benefit from assistance under the Deer Management Assistance Program.

Additional Information

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

Designated Cross File: HB 741 (Delegate Allen, *et al.*) - Environment and Transportation.

Information Source(s): Department of Budget and Management; Department of Natural Resources; Department of Legislative Services

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