

IMPORTANT NOTICE

The Maryland Wildlife Advisory Commission

**Will Meet at 10:30 AM
On Wed., January 21, 2026
Department of Natural Resources
Google Meet**

Meeting Agenda:

Annual Election of the Chair and Vice-Chair (Group Discussion)

Approval for January 21, 2026, Meeting Agenda

Approval of November 19, 2025, Meeting Minutes

2026-2028 Hunting Regulations Concepts Update (Associate Director Brian Eyler and Staff)

Proposed Migratory Game Bird Seasons and Bag Limits (Game Bird Section Leader Josh Homyack and Waterfowl Project Leader Kayla Harvey)

2026 Legislative Session Update (Associate Director Brian Eyler)

Recruitment, Retention, Reactivation (R3) Program Update (Associate Director Chris Markin)

Maryland Farm Bureau Update (Tyler Hough)

Natural Resources Police Update (Captain Shawn Garren)

Hunter Safety Education Program Update (NRP Hunter Safety Supervisor Bill Dixon)

Old Business:

- **Sunday Hunting Discussion – (Group Discussion)**
- **Non-Lead Hunting Ammunition – (Group Discussion)**

New Business:

- **September 16, 2026, Field Day Ideas – Group Discussion**

Public Comment:

Adjourn

NOTE: Free Parking will be available on the Navy Stadium Parking Lot, which is the third entrance on right off of Taylor Avenue.

**The Proposed Schedule for the 2026 Meetings
Of the Wildlife Advisory Commission is as follows:**

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| January 21st | Google Meet |
| February 18th | Google Meet |
| March 18th | In-Person Meeting at Tawes State Office Building |
| April 15th | Google Meet |
| May 20th | No Meeting |
| June 17th | Google Meet |
| July 15th | No Meeting |
| August 19th | Google Meet |
| September 16th | Field Trip |
| October 21st | Google Meet |
| November 18th | In-Person Meeting at Tawes State Office Building |
| December 16th | No Meeting |

***PLEASE NOTE THAT MEETING DATES ARE HELD
ON THE THIRD WEDNESDAY OF EACH MONTH***

Note: Unless notified otherwise, all meetings will be held via Google Meet. When meeting in person, they will be held in the C-4 Conference Room of the Department of Natural Resources—Tawes State Office Building beginning at 10:30 a.m. Available parking is located at the Navy Stadium Parking Lot.

NOTE: Free Parking will be available on the Navy Stadium Parking Lot, which is the third entrance on right off of Taylor Avenue.

THE MARYLAND WILDLIFE ADVISORY COMMISSION MINUTES

JANUARY 21, 2026

Chair Wagner called the meeting to order at 10:31 a.m. This meeting was held by teleconference. Chair Wagner requested a roll call from individuals on by teleconference. Unfortunately, due to Google Meet's anonymous caller system, it was impossible to identify every participant.

Annual Election for the Chair and Vice Chair

- Commissioner Smith moved to retain Carl Wagner as Chair and Joe Schroyer as Vice Chair.
- Commissioner Rasche seconded.
- All in favor. Motion Passed.
- Carl Wagner will remain Chair, and Joe Schroyer will remain Vice-Chair of the Wildlife Advisory Commission.

Approval of January 21, 2026, Meeting Agenda

- Chair Wagner added one thing to the new business, which was the proposed budget cuts to Program Open Space, to see if the Commission can help.
- Motion:
 1. Commissioner Parks moved to accept the agenda for the January 21, 2026, Wildlife Advisory Commission meeting with the addition.
 2. Commissioner Kullberg seconded.
 3. All in favor. Motion passed.

Approval of November 19, 2025, Meeting Minutes

- Motion:
 1. Commissioner Schroyer moved to approve the November 19, 2025, meeting minutes.
 2. Commissioner Parks seconded.
 3. All in favor. Motion passed.

2026-2028 Hunting Regulation Concepts – Associate Director Brian Eyler

Associate Director Eyler presented the concepts for 2026-2028 hunting regulations in a PowerPoint.

[ATTACHMENT A]

- The River Otter Proposal to make the two bag limits consistent received little comment, and staff will move that proposal forward for public comment.
- The Fisher and Long-tailed Weasel Proposal to align and raise the bag limits for fishers received very few comments, and staff will move this proposal forward for public comment.
- The Gray Fox Proposal was modified based on the feedback. The original proposal would have required an electronic check-in and a jaw submission to collect age and sex data. Due to concerns about compliance and the cumbersome nature of the jaw submission, the proposal was modified to remove the jaw submission requirement. The check-in part remains, and a voluntary citizen science outreach effort will be used to gather information. A five-year sunset clause is being added.
- The Sika Deer Antler Point Restriction Proposal is moving forward for public comment. Staff received a few negative comments from the stakeholders.
- The Straight-Walled Cartridge Proposal will move forward for public comment. The proposal, if it passes, would allow hunters with a disability pass to use straight-walled cartridge rifles while hunting in a vehicle during the muzzleloader season.
- The Deer & Black Bear Proposal related to the rifle energy requirement amendment. The proposal amendment to a rifle energy will either have to generate 1,200 foot-pounds or be a minimum of .30 caliber. The clarification that .30 caliber is the same as 7.62 millimeter will be added. Staff will move this proposal forward to public comment.
- The Infinite Grace Period for Black Bear Lottery Preference Points Proposal will move forward to

public comment. Staff received very few comments.

- The Drones Proposal produced good discussion at the stakeholder meeting. A call-in requirement to the Natural Resources Police (NRP) will be added before tracking a deer with a drone, similar to the use of blood-tracking dogs. Staff will move the drones' proposal forward for public comment.
- Chair Wagner noticed the lack of questions from the stakeholders' meeting. Normally, staff are bombarded with comments and questions.
- Discussion ensued related to the black bear youth hunt concept sent by the Maryland Black Bear Association (MBBA) to the Department.
 1. Vice Chair Schroyer noted that the President of the Maryland Black Bear Association (MBBA) was disappointed that their recommendation for a youth hunt concept was not brought forward for public comment at the external stakeholder meeting and put the blame on the Wildlife Advisory Commission for not moving that concept forward. Vice Chair Schroyer tried to explain to the President of the Maryland Black Association that black bears are highly controversial and that change will not occur quickly.
 2. Chair Wagner agreed to reinforce to the President of MBBA that the WHS is in the middle of a study and there will be no regulation changes in bag limits or special use seasons until the study has been completed.
 3. Game Mammal Section Leader Jonathan Trudeau explained that the MBBA representative was not in attendance at the stakeholder meeting, and that the WHS's position is not to make big changes in the middle of the black bear population study.
- Q&A Section
 1. Commissioner Smith asked if staff located the definition of vehicles.
 - a. Staff had a consensus that it would be whatever the definition of a vehicle is, and it would be more than automobiles. It would include side-by-side vehicles as well.
 2. Commissioner Kullberg asked if the Commission was invited and involved in the stakeholders meeting.
 - a. Yes, the Commission was sent an invitation to attend.
 - b. Commissioner Kullberg should have received an invitation on December 17, 2025, with the meeting details.
 - c. There were around 35 in attendance, along with 10 virtual attendees.
 3. Chair Wagner asked Commissioner Kullberg if she had any additional comments.
 - a. Commissioner Kullberg had no comments on the proposals.
 4. Commissioner Herrera expressed understanding of the public response to the gray fox jawbone requirement. Commissioner Herrera also noted that Josh Tabora did a great job explaining it and taking feedback well. Commissioner Herrera asked whether there is anything in the works to conduct more large-scale or professional monitoring of the gray fox population, as staff do with black bears, or whether staff are comfortable with citizen science reporting and data collection from that source.
 - a. Biologist Josh Tabora replied that staff discussed the cause-specific mortality pilot study, and staff decided to wait to reassess where to go with this concept. Once staff have more information about region-specific gray fox trends, they can drill into more specific parts of the state where gray foxes are more likely to be fragmented or isolated.
 - b. Staff are confident that gray foxes are doing well in the western region of the state. Staff are specifically interested in the peninsula areas of the state and southern Maryland. Hopefully, staff will be able to get a preliminary idea of how some of our more isolated, quote-unquote, vulpes are doing and drill into that more specifically in the future by using the gray fox concept.
 5. Chair Wagner noticed the lack of questions from the stakeholders' meeting. Normally, staff are bombarded with comments and questions.

Waterfowl Project Leader Kayla Harvey and Game Bird Section Leader Josh Homyack presented the Proposed Migratory Game Bird Hunting Seasons for 2026-2027. [ATTACHMENT B]

- The Migratory Game Bird Advisory Committee supported the proposed seasons and bag limits.
- LTA represented the long-term average.
- The snow goose population estimate comes from a survey that is done on the St. Lawrence River in the springtime, when the geese are staging for their migration back north to the nesting grounds well above the Arctic Circle.
 1. Due to the snow geese's declining population over a few poor nesting years and likely from highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), the flyway states decided to take the conservation order season off the table for now, at least until the 2026 spring population estimate is reviewed. The season will rely on the regular snow goose hunting season.
 2. The regular season runs from October 1 to March 10 and lasts 107 days, with a 25-bird daily bag limit and no possession limit. It was decided to suspend the conservation order season until the results of the 2026 spring snow goose population estimate are available, and to use only our regular snow goose hunting season. These eases hunting pressure on snow geese slightly, indicating that staff are paying attention and that the decision has been reviewed.
 3. The proposed conservation order season, if implemented, would be relatively short, from March 11, 2027, to April 10, 2027.
 4. The conservation order season is not technically a hunting season. It is authorized under a different part of the federal code of regulations. The flyway can turn it on and off at will. It does not have to fit as firmly within the federal frameworks as the true hunting seasons do.
 5. Staff will keep a watch on this as it unfolds.
- The resident Canada goose has new goose zones and bag limits, which are due to the legislation that required the southern portion of the resident goose zone (Late Southern Maryland Goose Zone) to have the same bag limit as the Atlantic Population (AP) zone when the AP zone is open. The Late Western Goose Zone will have the traditional bag limits of five birds.
- Q&A Section
 1. Chair Wagner asked if the resident Canada goose zone restriction during the AP season in those two counties had a sunset.
 - a. It is a five-year sunset.
 - b. Chair Wagner went on the record to say that he received numerous complaints from people who told him that hunting in those areas that they were unhappy with the legislation that was passed last year.
 2. Chair Wagner asked if staff have received feedback from typical goose hunters about the first split of the goose season ending on Friday, November 27, because the deer season starts on Saturday, November 28.
 - a. That Saturday is actually in law that the only two species a person can hunt on that Saturday are deer and sea ducks.
 - b. Staff have received comments both ways on that Thanksgiving week; there have been comments that those were wasted hunting days, and people would like to see them pushed later, and we heard from people who miss that season. Staff have received many comments about Thanksgiving week in general, but not specifically about that Saturday.
 - c. Chair Wagner heard complaints at the stakeholder meeting that people wanted that Saturday back for youth hunters who are out of school.

2026 Legislative Session Update – Associate Director Brian Eyler

Associate Director Eyler presented the 2026 Legislative Session Summary Update. [ATTACHMENT C]

- There are five bills that Wildlife and Heritage Service staff monitor.
- The Commission members can track the bills online at the Maryland General Assembly website at <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/>.
- Chair Wagner explained that the Commission normally discusses and debates each bill, taking a “for or against” position or remaining neutral, and may make no comment. The Commission may vote to

write a letter to the committees either in favor of or against a bill that has been introduced. At this time, none of the bills are cross-filed, so Chair Wagner suggested that the Commission wait until they are cross-filed and enter the second round before taking a stand on them in an advisory role.

- Chair Wagner informed the Commission that it will have a detailed discussion on the 2026 Legislative Session Summary at the February 18, 2025, meeting.
- Q&A Section:
 1. Commissioner Rasche asked whether the Natural Resources Police (NRP) reviewed SB0181, Hunting – Lead and Lead-Based Ammunition – Phase Out, and what kind of enforcement problem it would cause if this bill passed.
 - a. WHS and NRP have discussed this in the past, and it will be very difficult to enforce what is lead ammunition and what is not, unless it is a soft-tip lead bullet, which an officer will be able to tell. There will be instances when it is difficult to tell the difference.
 - b. Chair Wagner pointed out that the bill has not been modified. It was five or four years, and now it is down to two years, which will be a scramble for DNR to even implement it in two years.
 - c. Commissioner Kullberg mentioned that it was worth a conversation for the Commission to support the bill. Last year, it was discussed during the 2025 Legislative Session. It would be great for the Commission to get ahead of it and show the legislatures that Maryland's a progressive state, given the political will and desire for this legislation to pass. Commissioner Kullberg said that it is worth continuing the discussion and possibly submitting a letter of support.
 - d. Chair Wagner replied that he would not disagree with Commissioner Kullberg that the Commission definitely needs to have some conversation, because of the new members of the Commission.

Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation (R3) Program Update – Associate Director Chris Markin

- Director Stonesifer announced that the Wildlife and Heritage Service was asked by the Secretary to take over the administration of the hunter education program, which WHS accepted. Obviously, there is a lot to figure out. Staff have always enjoyed working with the hunter safety staff.
- Associate Director Chris Markin noted the success of mentored deer hunts and announced the upcoming Youth/Veteran/Military Waterfowl hunt, emphasizing the need for more hunting locations.
- The first DNR-sponsored NASP tournament is a local event. This year, staff learned there's a need for more local tournaments; not all schools are willing to host one in the NASP realm. Therefore, DNR decided to host more youth involved in NASP.
- Associate Director Markin and Chair Wagner have been working on the youth/veteran/military waterfowl hunt, which has seen increased interest, which is a great thing. We are working to build that hunt to accommodate more applicants. Staff cut it off just under 300 applications for that hunt. The hunt is scheduled for February 7.
- Chair Wagner mentioned that there is a great need to get more locations for these hunts. Chair Wagner remembered that Commissioner Parks participated in it last year. Chair Wagner called for anyone on the call who has a goose or duck blind that can accommodate a few people. Please reach out; we really need a lot of space. There is a need for at least 100 spots statewide.
- Chair Wagner noted one other thing under this agenda item that groups are starting to reach out to Chris Markin and the R3 Program, for example, one that is dear to Chair Wagner's heart is the Naval Academy Sportsman's Club; around seven or eight were able to hunt on the early youth/veteran/military waterfowl hunt, which were all to shoot their birds.
- Commissioner Parks gave kudos to Chris Markin and R3 staff on their events. Also, Commissioner Parks mentioned that he is away from the hunt this year, but is trying to find someone to go in his place so that a person can use his location. It is a remarkable event and an opportunity to be out there, spend time, and share with young people and some of their parents who have never been to a blind site. Therefore, if possible, please consider reaching out.
- Q&A Section

1. Chair Wagner asked Director Stonesifer about the status of the hires for the R3 positions that are still vacant.
 - a. Director Stonesifer informed the Commission that the positions are still frozen, and staff can slowly submit, sort of one at a time, to request a hiring freeze exemption. WHS is addressing some of our critical needs, and hopefully, it will be able to move forward with some of the R3 positions.

Maryland Farm Bureau Update (MFB)

- MFB Director Hough was not in attendance.
- Commissioner Rasche mentioned that MFB is reviewing and waiting for the bills to be processed.
- Commissioner Rasche had nothing to report on behalf of the MFB.

Natural Resources Police Update (NRP) – Lieutenant Brian Miller gave an update.

- Lieutenant Miller reported that NRP reported 1289 incidents, issued 76 citations, and 153 warnings in December.
- Lieutenant Miller announced a Midnight Shift Pilot Program in the Western Region.

Hunter Safety Education Program Update

- Chair Wagner decided to let this topic go since it will be part of the R3 Update.

Old Business

- Sunday Hunting Discussion—Chair Wagner asked Assistant Secretary Peditto if there was an update.
 1. Assistant Secretary Peditto indicated that he did not have an update, per se. At the last Commission meeting, the MFB Director Hough indicated that the MFB Wildlife Committee would meet to revisit the policy question at the MFB Convention in December. Assistant Secretary Peditto asked Commissioner Rasche if the MFB had developed a policy on Sunday hunting.
 - a. Commissioner Rasche did not have an update on Assistant Secretary Peditto's question about MFB's policy on Sunday hunting.
 - b. The deer part was easy to discuss, and everybody was online on the board as far as getting more Sunday hunting.
 - c. The problem is Sunday hunting on the goose side because the Western Shore is predominantly resident geese, and the Eastern Shore is predominantly migratory geese. There were some differences of opinion: some individuals on the Eastern Shore do not want any Sundays for goose hunting, while individuals on the Western Shore who hunt resident geese would like more days. Therefore, it was divided between the two groups.
 2. Assistant Secretary Peditto noted it appears that there is no knowledge of where the MFB will decide on a potential bill that includes Sunday hunting, because both birds are migratory Canada geese by law. Therefore, Assistant Secretary Peditto asked Commissioner Rasche if he knew how MFB would navigate that.
 - a. Commissioner Rasche said no. There is a need for more discussion. If needed, the MFB wildlife committee will hold another meeting.
 - b. There is no wildlife committee meeting in the works. Commissioner Rasche added that if there is greater interest or pressure on the MFB to issue a comment or position on it, the MFB will ultimately have to do so.
 3. Assistant Secretary Peditto thanked Commissioner Rasche for his comments.
 4. Chair Wagner hoped that the MFB would support the Sunday hunting bill in its entirety. It's a good bill. The majority of hunters, around 75%, want to hunt waterfowl on Sunday. The bill has addressed many of the concerns they had, and we spent a lot of time and effort engaging with all stakeholders and their objections and desires for this bill. It would be very disappointing if we did not get full support from the MFB.
 5. Commissioner Rasche agreed with Chair Wagner's comments. The pushback came from some

hunters on the Eastern Shore.

6. Chair Wagner asked Commissioner Rasche for his help with the MFB, because it would be greatly appreciated.
- Non-Lead Ammunition Discussion – Chair Wagner indicated it is a wait-and-see if the Non-Lead Ammunition Bill gets cross-filed.
- Chair Wagner agreed to keep Sunday Hunting and Non-Lead Ammunition under Old Business for next month's meeting.

New Business

- Budget Cuts to Program Open Space – Chair Wagner informed the Commission and staff about letters to the Budget and Taxation Committee from various organizations seeking relief from the cuts to Program Open Space and the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bay Trust Fund. Chair Wagner requested information on how the cuts affect WHS and what the Commission can do, if necessary, to help WHS.
 1. The State-side of Open Space Fund is one of the largest funds that we administer at the Department, and it includes a local side provision where local jurisdictions and counties receive a portion of that money for their local parks and recreation facilities.
 2. The State-side provision has around 150 million, and that funding is born of a portion of the transfer tax for every real estate transaction that occurs in Maryland. Historically, staff in the conservation field have sort of worried about this as a potential target for helping satisfy upside-down budget needs. The fund has dodged that bullet most years since its establishment.
 3. This may be the advanced work of the Program Open Space advocates, anticipating what the legislature might have to do this year to deal with the \$1.67 billion deficit that exists. So, the State-side Open Space is important to the Wildlife Advisory Commission because it is where the vast majority of the money used to acquire and protect Open Space, including State Parks, State Forest, and Wildlife Management Areas, comes from. Collectively, we spend 50 to 60 million annually from that fund to acquire new land and make it available to wildlife enthusiasts, birders, hikers, and others.
 4. The recommendation to the Commission is to monitor it because none of us knows what the Governor's budget will include. The Department has some insight, but staff will not know until the budget bill is introduced. Once the budget bill is introduced, everything will be in play during the 2026 Legislative Session as the budget committees on both sides navigate the budget-balancing exercise.
 5. Chair Wagner thanked Assistant Secretary Peditto for the great synopsis. The Commission will monitor the Program Open Space budget cuts during the Legislative Session.
- WAC's September 16, 2026, Field Day Ideas –
 1. Director Stonesifer indicated that if the members of the Commission have any idea of something they would like to do, staff will do their best to make it happen. Otherwise, staff will discuss internally and see what they can come up with for that appropriate time of year.
 2. Commissioner Rossignuolo suggested visiting Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge for Sika deer.
 3. Chair Wagner thought that Commissioner Rossignuolo's recommendation was a great idea to see the facility and the Sika Deer Program.
 4. Director Stonesifer agreed to reach out to the staff at Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge (NWF), since we work closely with them. Obviously, it is a land that WHS does not manage, but the Blackwater NWF is a good partner.
- Reptile and Amphibian Regulation Concepts – Commissioner Kullberg asked about an update on eliminating the collection or possession of native and non-native herps that was presented at the October meeting.
 1. Director Stonesifer outlined that those concepts are on a separate track because of the complexities that are involved. Staff are moving through that process at a slightly slower pace than with the other regulation proposals.

2. The Commission will be hearing more about those concepts in the coming meetings. Those concepts are not part of the game season regulations, which are due in April.
3. Chair Wagner requested that the Reptile and Amphibian Regulation Concepts be added under Old Business to keep things on track.

Public Comment –

- Mr. Duggan summarized his background and expressed gratitude for the opportunity to join, listen, and learn from the meeting. He also appreciated the efforts of the Commission and staff.
- There were no other public comments.
- The public may contact the Members of the Commission at wac.dnr@maryland.gov.

Adjournment

- The meeting was adjourned at 12:05 p.m.
The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 18, 2026, and will be held via Google Meet at 10:30 am.

Attendance

| | |
|----------|---|
| Members: | D. Herrera, K. Kullberg, J. Parks, W. Rasche, K. Rossignuolo, J. Schroyer, M. Smith, and C. Wagner |
| Absent: | J. Bowman and E. Cohen |
| Guest: | E. Gulbrandsen and K. Thompson |
| Staff: | B. Davis, G. Brewer, C. Coriell, H. Devine, B. Eyler, C. Felker, K. Fleming, K. Harvey, J. Homyack, K. Lamp, B. Long, C. Markin, B. Miller, J. Moulis, P. Peditto, T. Spencer, K. Stonesifer, J. Tabora, J. Trudeau, and R. Walls |

Management Concepts: 2026-27 and 2027-28 Hunting Seasons



Maryland Department of Natural Resources

Wildlife and Heritage Service

Regulatory Process

- ✓ The Game Program meets and develops Management Concepts.
 - August 21, 2025
- ✓ Presents Management Concepts to Wildlife Advisory Committee.
 - October 15, 2025
- ✓ Presents Concepts to a meeting of Internal Stakeholders.
 - December 10, 2025
-  ✓ Presents Concepts to a meeting of External Stakeholders.
 - January 14, 2026
- ✓ Concepts are refined further and developed into Proposals and are placed online for public comment.
 - February 2026
- ✓ Comment period closes and Proposals are finalized and presented to the Wildlife Advisory Commission for a final vote.
 - March 18, 2026
- ✓ Final Proposals are forwarded to the Maryland Register for additional comment and regulations become final.

**REVIEW INPUT AND ADD/DROP/MODIFY
AT EVERY STEP**

River Otter

Management Concept:

Align the otter bag limit in both non-coastal zones. The bag limit will be 2 otters per day (total of 2 per season) for Allegany*, Carroll, Frederick, Garrett*, Howard, Montgomery, and Washington counties combined.

Rationale/Goal: Aligning the bag limits in the non-coastal zones simplifies bag limit restrictions for trappers and only increases the daily and season bag limit in Allegany and Garrett counties by 1. Current trapping participation levels make population harm a non-concern.

Status: Move forward to public comment period

Fisher and Long-tailed weasel



Management Concept:

Align the fisher and long-tailed weasel bag limits and season dates. The bag limit will increase from 2 fishers to 4 fishers per season and the season will run from November 1st - February 1st. The long-tailed weasel season and bag limit will mirror fisher.

Rationale/Goal: Long-tailed weasel trapping season currently mirrors that of coyote, a species they share little in common with. Long-tailed weasel are more similar to fisher and trapping methods for the two species are more similar. Additionally, there is currently no bag limit on long-tailed weasel, despite regional concern for the species. Establishing a bag limit ensures the protection of the species.

Research has shown that the fisher population in western Maryland is robust enough to sustain additional harvest. Current fisher trapping participation is relatively low. Increased bag limits may increase participation.

Status: Move forward to public comment period

Gray Fox

Management Concept:

Create an electronic check in process for gray fox and implement a jaw submission requirement. All trappers and hunters who harvest a gray fox between November 1st and February 28th must check in their harvest and submit a lower jaw to the Wildlife & Heritage Service.

Rationale/Goal: Gray fox are suspected to be in decline across their range. Tagging harvested animals will help to supplement current harvest monitoring mechanisms more thoroughly by providing age/sex data for the species. Virginia has implemented an electronic check in process for gray fox as well for similar reasons.

Status: Amend to remove jaw submission requirement, add 5 year sunset, and move forward to public comment period

Sika Deer

Management Concept:

Institute an antler point restriction (APR) for sika deer. Hunters may harvest one antlered sika deer within the yearly bag limit that does not meet the requirement of having at least two points on one antler. Any additional antlered sika deer taken within the yearly bag limit must meet the minimum point restriction.

Rationale/Goal: Further align sika deer management with the same quality deer management principles used to manage white-tailed deer. The APR would promote the harvest of mature sika deer, improving the age structure of the population. Additionally, an APR would promote an increased antlerless harvest, improving overall herd management by stabilizing the sex ratio.

Status: Move forward to public comment period

Deer

Management Concept:

Allow the use of straight-walled cartridge rifles during the muzzleloader seasons for those hunters with a Universal Disability Pass that are hunting from a vehicle.

Rationale/Goal: Loading a muzzleloader can be difficult and dangerous in a vehicle. Allowing straight walled cartridge rifles is safer and may attract more disabled hunters to participate in the season.

Status: Move forward to public comment period

Deer & Black Bear



Management Concept:

Modify the requirements for rifles used to harvest deer and black bear to have either a minimum muzzle energy of 1,200 foot pounds OR to be a minimum of .30 caliber.

Rationale/Goal: Simplify the energy requirements. The current regulation excludes many popular pistol rounds used in rifles. This change would legalize and expand the use of popular modern hunting rifles that are commonly used in other states that do not currently meet the energy requirement. Additionally, this change increases the rifle options for youth, senior, and disabled hunters who may be restricted by due to recoil.

Status: Add metric standard (7.62mm) and move forward to public comment period

Black Bear

Management Concept:

Adopt an infinite grace period for black bear lottery preference points.

Rationale/Goal: Common request from hunters. Currently, if a hunter misses a single year, they lose all of their preference points. This has caused frustration amongst resident and non-resident hunters. Implementing a grace period will improve hunter retention, hunter relations, and reduce confusion surrounding the lottery process.

Status: Move forward to public comment period

Drones

Management Concept:

To establish regulations for approved uses of small unmanned aerial vehicles (i.e., drones) while hunting.

- May not use a drone to locate, drive, or herd wildlife for the purpose of hunting, trapping, or killing EXCEPT to aid in the recovery of a wounded or expired animal.

Rationale/Goal: Currently, there are no restrictions for drone use. This regulation would promote fair chase hunting and align more closely to neighboring states (i.e. Virginia).

Status: Add call-in requirement before tracking and move forward to public comment period

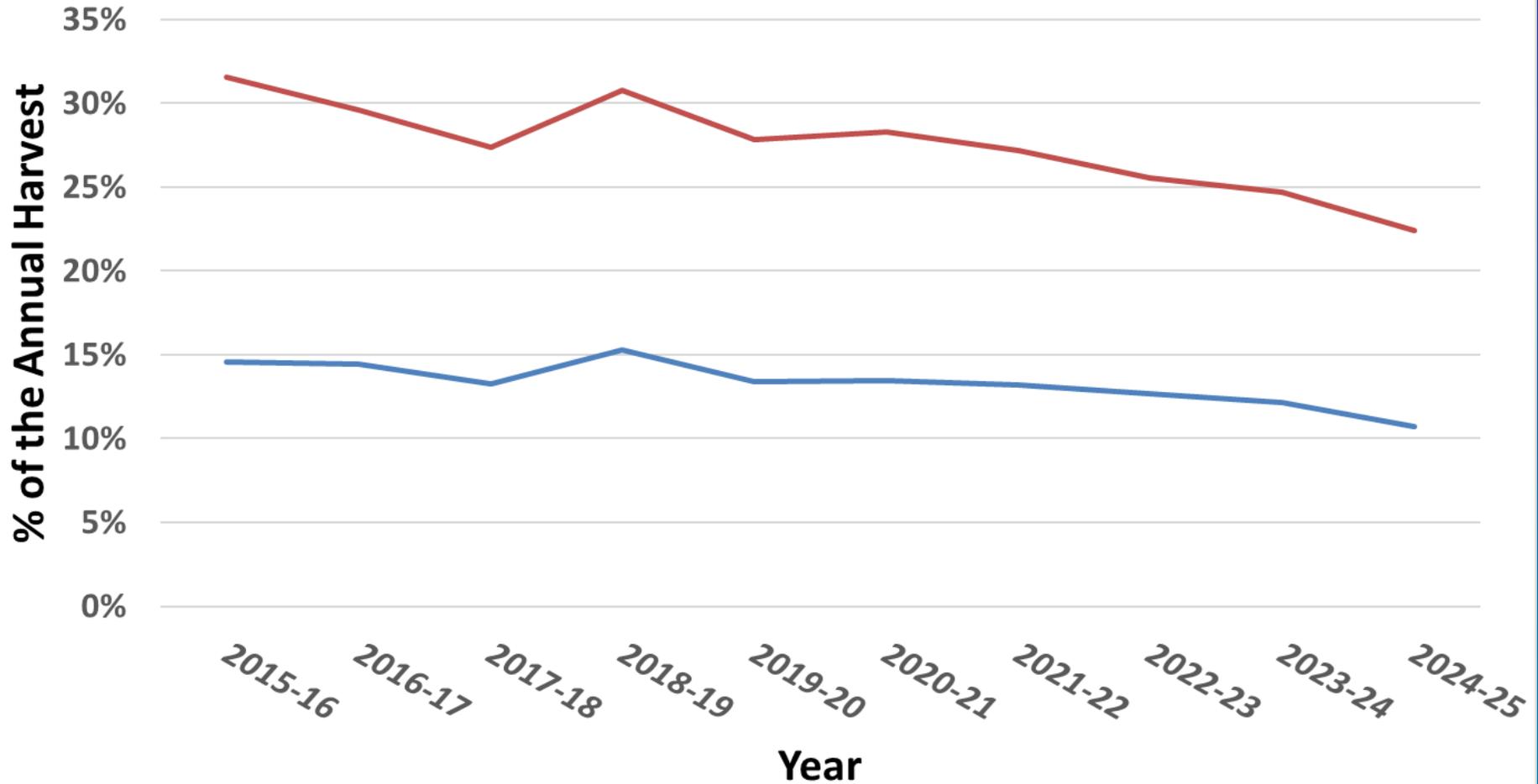
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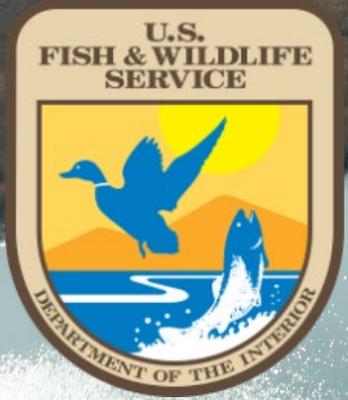
Photo credit: Christopher Michael

Percentage of Sika Spike Harvest

— Total Harvest — Antlered Harvest



Proposed Migratory Game Bird Hunting Seasons for 2026-27



September Teal Season



Federal Framework:

A 9-day season may be held between Sept. 1 and Sept. 30 with a 6 bird daily bag limit. Teal season may not run concurrently with other seasons that allow special considerations (resident Canada goose) such as modified shooting hours or unplugged guns.

Proposed Season and Bag Limit:

Sept. 17, 2026 – Sept. 26, 2026

Daily Bag Limit: 6 blue-winged or green-winged teal, singly or in aggregate, per day



“Regular” Duck Hunting Season



Federal Framework:

60-day season between Saturday nearest Sept. 24 and January 31 with a daily bag limit of 6 ducks (species restrictions).

| Eastern Duck Zone | Western Duck Zone |
|---|--|
| Oct. 10, 2026 – Oct. 17, 2026 Nov. 14, 2026 – Nov. 27, 2026 Dec. 15, 2026 – Jan. 30, 2027 | Oct. 3, 2026 – Oct. 17, 2026 Nov. 21, 2026 – Nov. 27, 2026 Dec. 15, 2026 – Jan. 30, 2027 |

Daily Bag Limit:

6 per day (including mergansers) but no more than 4 sea ducks (3 long-tailed ducks, 3 scoters, 3 eiders), 4 mallards (2 hens), 3 wood ducks, 3 pintails, 2 redheads, 1 scaup*, 2 canvasbacks, 2 black ducks (during black duck season), 1 mottled duck, and 1 fulvous tree duck.

Scaup hybrid season: Daily bag limit is 1 except between Jan. 8, 2027 and Jan. 30, 2027 when 2 scaup per day may be harvested.



Youth/Military Waterfowl Hunting Days



Federal Framework: States can hold 2 youth/military personnel days outside of regular duck season but within 14 days of the end framework dates (Sept. 24 and Jan. 31). Must be on weekends, holidays, or other non-school days.

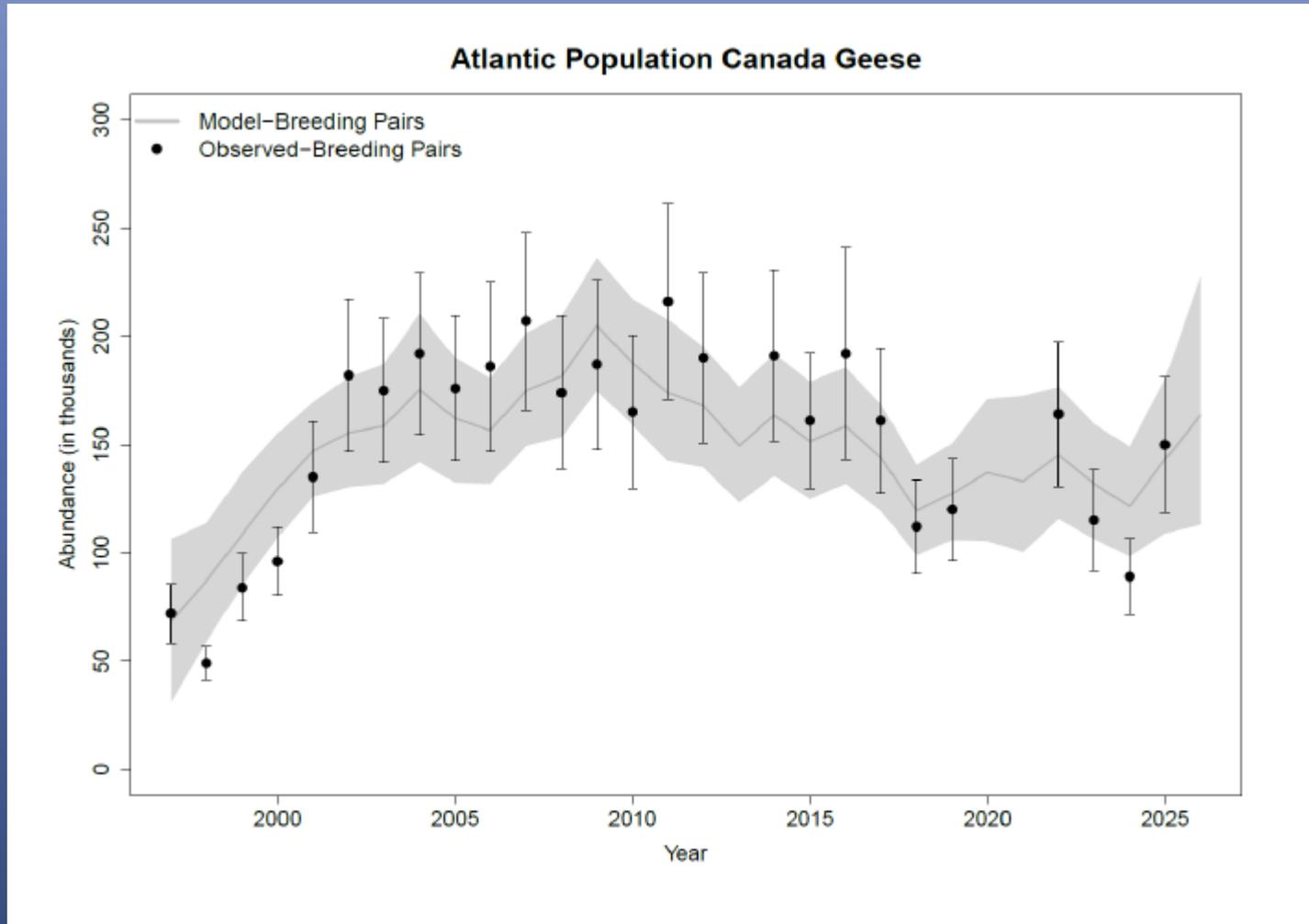
Proposed Dates: Nov. 7, 2026 and Feb. 6, 2027

Daily Bag Limit: 6 ducks (certain species bag restrictions), 2 Canada geese in the AP Zone or 5 Canada geese in the late RP Zone, 1 brant, 25 light geese, 2 scaup and 15 coots.

Requirements: Youth hunter must be 16 years of age or younger and accompanied by an unarmed adult at least 21 years old. The adult may assist in calling, setting decoys, and retrieving downed birds. Military veterans (as defined in Section 101 of title 38, United States Code) of any age and members of the armed forces on active duty, including members of the National Guard and Reserves on Active duty (other than for training) can participate in these two hunt days.



AP Breeding Pairs



Atlantic Population Canada Goose Harvest Strategy



- AP Canada goose IPM predicts 163,500 (95% CI = 113,000–227,500) breeding pairs for June 2026.

| Population Thresholds (Breeding Pairs) | Harvest Package | Target Adult Harvest Rate | Packages for Chesapeake Region AP Areas | Packages for Mid-Atlantic and New England Region AP Areas |
|--|-----------------|---------------------------|---|---|
| > 160,000 | Liberal | 7% | 45 days and 2 geese/day | 45 days and 3 geese/day |
| ≤ 160,00 and > 125,000 | Moderate | 5% | 30 days and 2 geese/day | 30 days and 3 geese/day |
| ≤ 125,000 and ≥ 60,000 | Restrictive | 3% | 30 days and 1 goose/day | 30 days and 1 goose/day |
| < 60,000 | Closed | 0% | Closed | Closed |

Atlantic Population (AP) Canada Goose Hunting Season



Federal Framework:

A 45-day season may be held between Nov. 15 and Feb. 5 with a 2 bird daily bag limit. The season may be divided into no more than 2 segments.

Proposed Season and Bag Limit:

Nov. 24, 2026 – Nov. 27, 2026

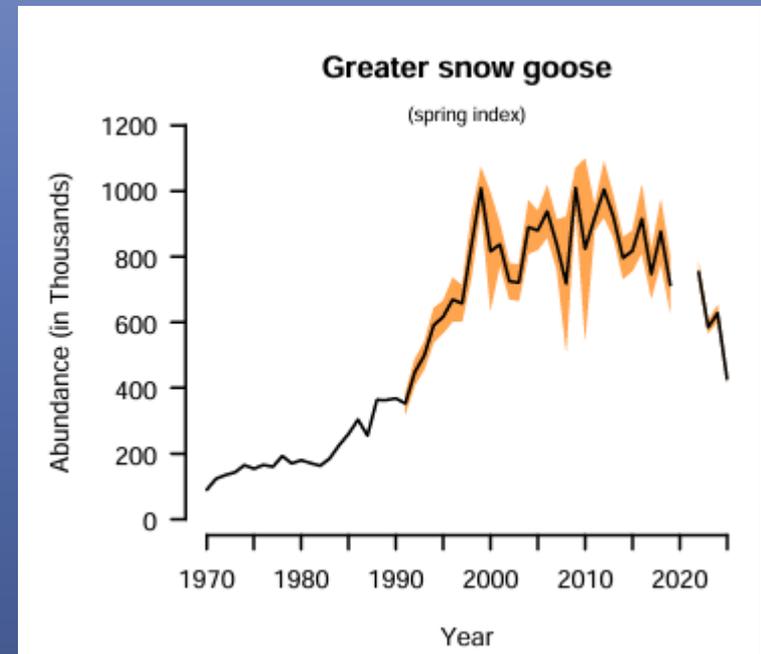
Dec. 15, 2026 – Jan. 30, 2027

Daily Bag Limit: 2 per day



Snow Geese

- 2025 spring index 428,000.
- -32% from 2024.
- 23% juvenile to adult ratio in 2025.
(LTA 23%, 24% in 2024)



Light Goose Hunting Season



Federal Framework:

107-day season between Oct. 1 and Mar. 10 with a 25-bird daily bag limit and no possession limit.

Proposed Season:

Nov. 5, 2026 - Nov. 27, 2026

Nov. 30, 2026 - Mar. 10, 2027*

Daily Bag Limit: 25 per day
No Possession Limit

*The following special methods may be used from February 8, 2027 – March 10, 2027: (1) Hunters may use shotguns capable of holding more than three shotshells; and (2) Hunters may use electronic calls with recordings of light geese.

Light Goose Conservation Order Hunting Season



Federal Framework:

The Conservation Order allows extended shooting hours for light geese (one-half hour after sunset) and imposes no daily bag limits for light geese. The CO may only open when all waterfowl (including light goose) and crane hunting seasons (excluding falconry) are closed.

Proposed Season:

TBD – March 11, 2027 - April 10, 2027

Daily Bag Limit: No bag limit
No possession limit

AF Resident Population Canada Goose Hunting Season



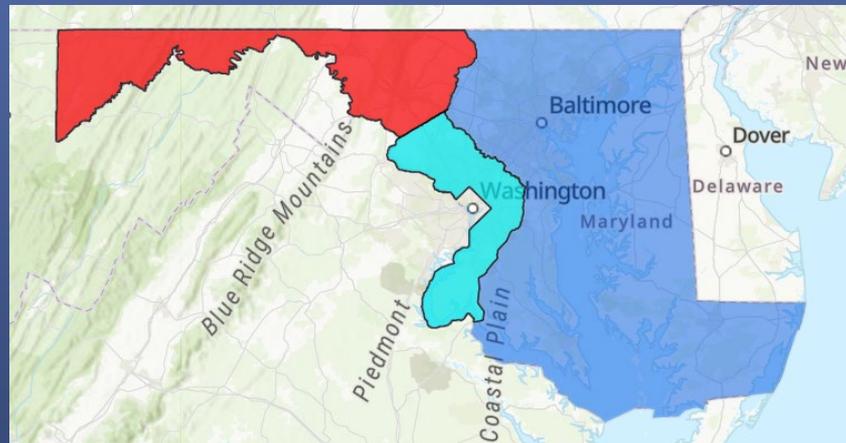
Federal Framework:

80-day season between Nov. 15 and Mar. 10

Daily Bag Limit: 5 per day

Late Southern Maryland Goose Zone

| Proposed Season Dates | Daily Bag Limit |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| Nov. 21, 2026 - Nov. 23, 2026 | 5 per day |
| Nov. 24, 2026 - Nov. 27, 2026 | 2 per day |
| Dec. 15, 2026 – Jan. 30, 2027 | 2 per day |
| Feb. 1, 2027 – Mar. 10, 2027 | 5 per day |



AF Resident Population Canada Goose Hunting Season



Federal Framework:

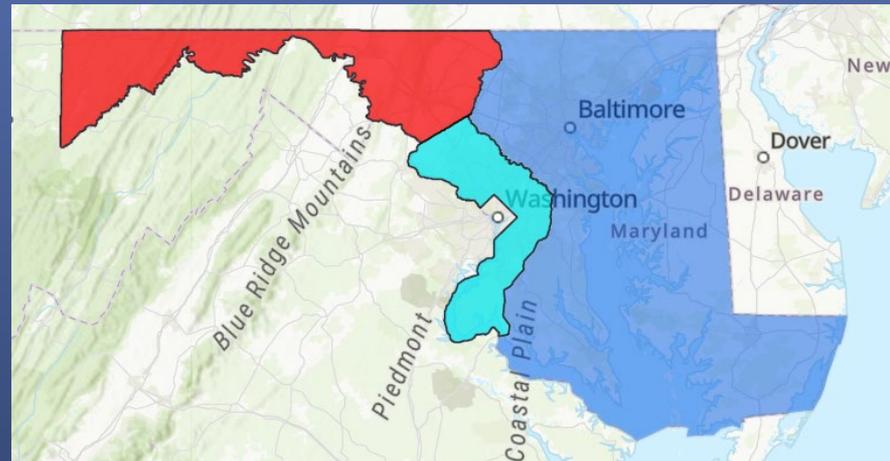
80-day season between Nov. 15 and Mar. 10

Daily Bag Limit: 5 per day

Late Western Maryland Goose Zone

Proposed Season Dates: Nov. 21, 2026 – Nov. 27, 2026
Dec. 15, 2026 – Mar. 10, 2027

Daily Bag Limit: 5 per day



Atlantic Brant Hunting Season



Federal Framework:

30-day season between the Saturday nearest Sept. 24 and Jan. 31 with a 1-bird daily bag limit.

Proposed Season:

Dec. 28, 2026 – Jan. 30, 2027

Daily Bag Limit: 1 per day

Mourning Dove Season



Federal Framework:

States may select a 90 day season between Sept. 1 – Jan. 31 with 15 birds/day. There can be no more than 3 season segments.

Proposed Season:

Sept. 1, 2026 – Oct. 17, 2026

Oct. 24, 2026 – Nov. 27, 2026

Dec. 19, 2026 – Jan. 9, 2027

Daily Bag Limit: 15 birds/day



Woodcock Season



Federal Framework:

States may select a 45-day season between October 1 and January 31 with a 3-bird daily bag limit. States may split their seasons into two segments.

Proposed Season:

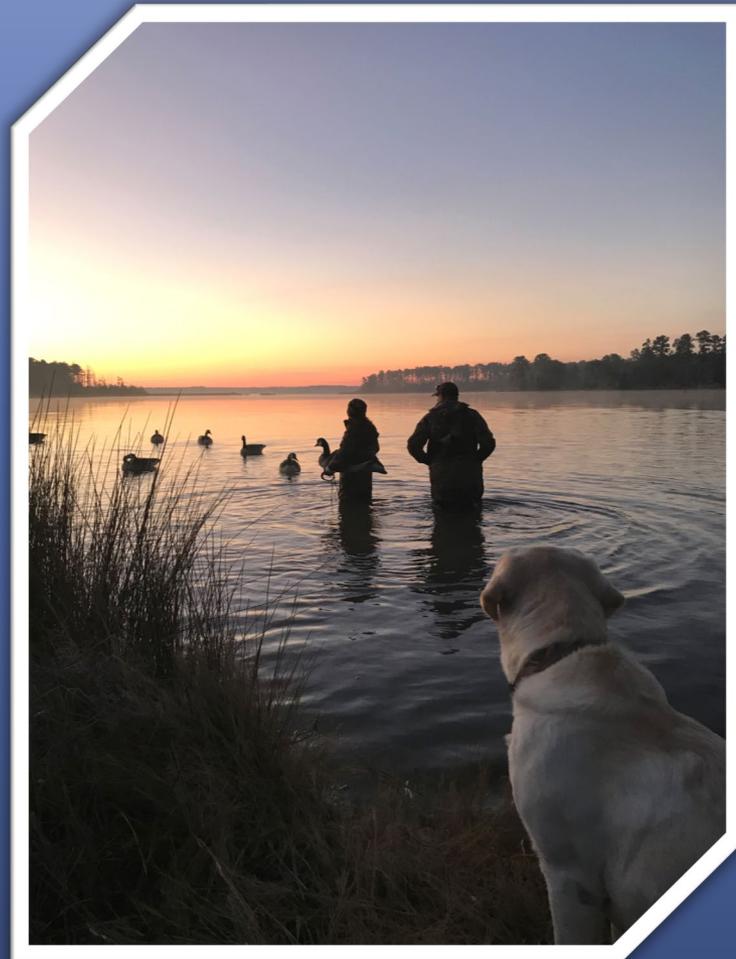
Oct. 24, 2026 – Nov. 27, 2026

Jan. 11, 2027 – Jan. 27, 2027

Daily Bag Limit: 3 birds/day



Questions?



**Summary of 2026 Proposed Legislation
Wildlife and Heritage Service
(as of January 20, 2026)**

| Number/ Chapter (Cross File) Total: 5 | Title | Primary Sponsor | Current Status | Original House Committee(s) and Hearing Dates | Opposite House Committee(s) and Hearing Dates |
|--|---|---|--|---|--|
| HB0091 | Agriculture - Neonicotinoid Pesticides - Prohibitions | Delegate Healey | In the House - Hearing 2/04 at 1:00 p.m. | Environment and Transportation 2/04/2026 - 1:00 PM | |
| HB0175 | Income Tax Credit - Venison Donation - Alterations | Delegate Ziegler | In the House - Hearing 1/20 at 1:00 p.m. | Ways and Means 1/20/2026 - 1:00 PM | |
| HB0186 | Natural Resources - Bow Hunting - Sundays | Delegate Bouchat | In the House - Hearing 2/04 at 1:00 p.m. | Environment and Transportation 2/04/2026 - 1:00 PM | |
| | | | | | |
| SB0181 | Hunting - Lead and Lead- Based Ammunition - Phase-Out | Senator Lewis Young | In the Senate - Hearing 2/03 at 1:00 p.m. | Education, Energy, and the Environment 2/03/2026 - 1:00 PM | |
| SB0242 | Modernizing Civil Relief for Service Members Act | Senator Simonaire | In the Senate - First Reading Education, Energy, and the Environment and Finance | Education, Energy, and the Environment Finance | |