

IMPORTANT NOTICE

The Maryland Wildlife Advisory Commission

**Will Meet at 10:30 AM
On Wed., October 18, 2023
Department of Natural Resources
Google Meet**

Meeting Agenda:

Introduction of New Members

Approval for October 18, 2023, Meeting Agenda

Approval for Minutes from August 16, 2023, Meeting

WHS Regional Operations Program Update (Associate Director Harry Spiker)

Internal Bi-Annual Game Species Regulations Concepts (Acting Director Karina Stonesifer)

2024 WAC Annual Schedule and Draft Monthly Agenda (WAC Discussion)

Maryland Farm Bureau Update

Natural Resources Police Update (Captain Shawn Garren)

Old Business:

- **Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation (R3)/ Funding Update**
- **Online Hunting Automatic Registration Renewal Update**
- **Blood Tracking Regulation Update**

New Business:

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 2023 meetings
Of the Wildlife Advisory Commission is as follows:**

January 18th	Google Meet
February 15th	In-Person Meeting at Tawes State Office Building
March 15th	Google Meet
April 19th	Google Meet
May 17th	No Meeting
June 21st	In-Person Meeting at Tawes State Office Building
July 19th	No Meeting
August 16th	Google Meet
September 20th	TBD - Google Meet or No Meeting or Field Day
October 18th	Google Meet
November 15th	Google Meet
December 15th	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 Meeting. When meeting in person, the meetings will be held in the C-1 Conference Room Department of Natural Resources - Tawes State Office Building beginning at 10:30 am. 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

OCTOBER 18, 2023

Chair Carl Wagner called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m. This meeting was held via teleconference. Chair Wagner asked for a roll call of individuals on the “call.” Unfortunately, because of the anonymity of Google Meet callers, it was impossible to determine the identity of every participant.

Introduction of New Wildlife Advisory Commission Members

- Chair Wagner welcomed Kathryn Kullberg and Michael Smith as new members of the Wildlife Advisory Commission.

Approval for October 18, 2023, Meeting Agenda

- Assistant Secretary Paul Peditto announced that Karina Stonesifer was appointed as the Director of the Wildlife and Heritage Service by Secretary Kurtz and Governor Moore. Director Stonesifer is the first woman to run the Wildlife and Heritage Service and one of a handful of women across the continent who have had the opportunity to head up a Fish and Wildlife Agency. Assistant Secretary Peditto congratulated Director Stonesifer on her new position.
 1. On behalf of the Wildlife Advisory Commission members, Chair Wagner congratulated and expressed that this promotion was well-deserved to Director Stonesifer. Chair Wagner thanked Director Stonesifer for her service and looks forward to working with Director Stonesifer in her new role.
- Motion to Approve the Agenda:
 1. Commissioner Schroyer moved to accept the October 18, 2023, Commission Meeting Agenda.
 2. Commissioner Parks seconded.
 3. All in favor. Motion passed.

Approval for Minutes from August 16, 2023, Meeting

- Motion:
 1. Commissioner Cole moved to accept the August 16, 2023, Meeting Minutes.
 2. Commissioner Schroyer seconded.
 3. All in favor. Motion passed.

Regional Operations Update – Harry Spiker, Associate Director

- Associate Director Spiker gave a presentation on the Regional Operations Update. [ATTACHMENT A]
- Regional Operations focus on hunting and wildlife-dependent recreational activities.
- The Commission was involved with Regional Operations, hiring much-needed staff over the years. Staff are excited to have new individuals onboard the Wildlife and Heritage Service.
- Regional Operations is divided into four regions: Central, Eastern, Southern, and Western.
- The wildlife response staff receives very little federal funding; when staff respond to a wildlife issue, it is supported by special funds. Special funds are basically hunting license dollars. WHS is not federally reimbursed for responding to wildlife issues, but it is an integral part of what WHS does.
- Q&A Section
 1. Chair Wagner asked if there are any current open positions and the status of future hiring or openings in Regional Operations.
 - a. Associate Director Spiker outlined that one position was posted on October 18, 2023, for a Frederick and Washington Counties Habitat Manager. There are a few more positions. Regional Operations has a long-standing land management technician who will be retiring as of November 1, and a contractual wildlife response technician resigned due to receiving an offer elsewhere. Regional Operations has about four or five positions that need to be filled.

- There is constant rotation in the Regional Operations.
- b. Director Stonesifer pointed out that WHS is working on converting some long-term contractuales who have been with us for a while to permanent positions.
2. Chair Wagner asked if the Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation (R3) positions were included and on the same time frame for refilling them.
 - a. The R3 positions are current vacancies. The R3 positions have pins and dedicated funding associated with them; however, we are still waiting for the PINS to officially move into the budget. Staff are working with the Department of Budget and Management for the R3 positions.

Internal Bi-Annual Game Species Concept Proposals – Director Karina Stonesifer

- The Game Management Program reviews the bag limits and seasons for hunting and trapping every two years. Staff will provide an update to the Commission starting in January through March. The Commission will vote on the proposals after the public comment period. Director Stonesifer outlined the Bi-Annual Game Species Management Regulation Process to the Commission in the PowerPoint on slide two. Director Stonesifer explained that the Bi-Annual Games Species Management Regulation Process is lengthy for staff and the members of the Commission. Also, Director Stonesifer offered the Commission to contact staff with questions during the process. WHS acknowledged the importance of public comments.
- Director Stonesifer announced Joshua Homyack as the new Game Bird Section Leader and Jonathan Trudeau as the new Game Mammal Section Leader.
- The presenters were Central Region Manager Jim Bennet, Furbearer Biologist Joshua Tabora, and Game Mammal Section Leader Jonathan Trudeau.
- The Game Species Management Concepts were presented to the Commission. **[ATTACHMENT B]**
- Concept Proposals as in the Presentation:
 1. Combine the Sea Duck Zone (SDZ) and the Offshore Waterfowl Hunting Zone (OWHZ) Boundary. The Kent County Shoreline, lower Chester River Area, Lower Choptank River, and Lower Little Choptank River will remain part of the Sea Duck Zone only. The Sea Duck Zone will expand in some areas where it currently does not extend, such as the Susquehanna Flats. A hunter can now hunt sea ducks in the Susquehanna Flats but cannot chase crippled ducks while under power because it is not allowed under federal regulations unless it is in the SDZ. These changes will reduce discrepancies between the two zones. The goal is to make it easier for both the hunters and law enforcement and provide additional hunting opportunities.
 - a. No comment from the Commission.
 2. Eliminate the unlimited bag limit for red squirrels and combine red squirrels with the gray squirrel and eastern fox squirrel into a single bag limit to simplify regulations. The gray squirrels can be located statewide. The eastern fox squirrels are common in Central and Western Maryland. The red squirrels appear restricted to only Allegany, Garrett, and parts of Washington and Frederick Counties. Red squirrels are smaller and are approximately the size of chipmunks. Also, red squirrels are associated with pine forest habitat.
 - a. Commissioner Showater requested that staff clarify to the public what species hunters may harvest and distinguish the species allowed vs the Delmarva Fox Squirrel.
 - b. The Delmarva Fox is listed in the hunting guide as closed season.
 3. Extend the fox and coyote trapping seasons by two weeks. Staff have been receiving comments from trappers that they are losing access to private properties due to the extension of deer seasons. The landowners have expressed to the trappers that they do not want trappers and deer hunters on their properties during the same period. Therefore, the concept would allow two weeks at the end of the fox and coyote seasons in the two different zones that WHS has established, which are east and west of the Susquehanna River. Staff do not anticipate any population-level effects, and hopefully, it will help retain some of Maryland's trappers.
 4. Allow Hunters in Region A, Garrett, Allegany, and Western Washington Counties to harvest two antlerless deer during archery or one antlerless deer harvested during two separate weapon

seasons. WHS has been hearing regularly from hunters and farmers alike about the inability to harvest deer in Region A, especially from the farmer's standpoint, trying to mitigate crop damage. The goal is to create additional opportunities for hunters in Region A. Last year, out of 3,800 antlerless deer that were harvested, 86% percent of hunters harvested single deer, so 300 of the hunters of the 3,800 mostly shot a single deer. WHS does not anticipate this concept of increasing the overall antlerless deer harvest. This concept creates an opportunity for those who do want to harvest an additional antlerless deer to do so in Region A. Maryland has a healthy deer herd population that WHS believes can support a slight increase in the antlerless deer harvest. Again, the concept is to increase the opportunity for hunters to harvest two antlerless deer.

- a. Commissioner Schroyer stated that he is fine with this concept, especially the option for all individuals to take two antlerless deer during the archery season. Commissioner Schroyer raised that there would be pushback from individuals who do not archery hunt, but overall, Commissioner Schroyer agreed with the concept.
 - b. Commissioner Rossignuolo supported Commissioner Schroyer's comments. Commissioner Rossignuolo added that it would be a welcome increase, especially for the farmers in Region A, who are trying to keep their crops as safe as possible.
5. Implement two distinct black bear lottery options: 950 permits that can be used within the entire occupied black bear range and 100 permits that can be used in Frederick or Washington counties. This concept is to increase hunting opportunities in Washington and Frederick Counties. The entire black bear range includes Garrett, Allegany, Washington, and Frederick Counties. Data demonstrated that only 10 to 20% of the overall bear harvest comes from Washington and Frederick Counties. These areas have increased bear nuisance complaints because of the ideal bear habitat. This concept aims to create additional opportunities for Washington and Frederick Counties by having a second lottery option. In doing so, WHS will maintain the current lottery where a person could put in for the 950 permits that could be used within the entire occupied bear range. Still, there would be a secondary option where a resident of Washington County or Frederick County may want to hunt only in these counties, which historically have been underutilized; there would be a secondary lottery for 100 permits used in those two counties. Staff do not believe this concept would significantly increase the bear harvest.
- Chair Wagner outlined the Discussion Advanced by Commissioner Keithley on Dog Tracking Regulations. The Commission received Commissioner Keithley's suggestions. **[ATTACHMENT C]**
 1. Commissioner Schroyer highlighted one of the more significant issues for the deer trackers is their inability to allow their dogs to work off-leash.
 - a. Commissioner Schroyer commented that these dogs are trained to track and not chase.
 - b. Commissioner Schroyer explained that it is unfair that these dogs be restricted to leash. Commissioner Schroyer informed the Commission that no laws prohibit private individuals from turning their dogs loose in the woods. These trackers have spent countless hours and money on these dogs to be able to track.
 - c. Commissioner Schroyer indicated another point that these trackers do not show up with a pack of hounds; for the most part, these trackers will track with an individual dog or have a pup along in training. The dog will be in voice control of the handler, a piece missing in the law.
 2. Assistant Secretary Peditto outlined the regulations are more detailed than the dog tracking law. In reference to the interest of the advocates, the Commission heard from Mr. Minor and others from the United Blood Trackers of Maryland. These individuals' goal is to tighten this up related to dog tracking.
 - a. Assistant Secretary Peditto explained that one of the things that Commissioner Keithley shared was a provision that would require either the Department to oversee the certification of the dogs or the Department to accept certification from an outside party. Presumably, that would be United Blood Trackers of Maryland, and those dogs are certified to track. WHS does not accept certification from external parties; WHS issues certification.
 - b. WHS would like to improve the recovery rates of deer; including infrared drones is not bad.

- c. The heavy lift will be a question of what individuals interpret as the dog having to be on a physical leash. Assistant Secretary Peditto historically interpreted it to mean the dog must be in control, which means the dog could be on a check cord close by as long as the person can get the dog back in close or avoid a property line problem, which is within the intent of the regulations. Additionally, there is the use of e-collars for dogs, and clearly, the handler is in control.
 - d. Assistant Secretary Peditto encouraged Director Stonesifer to include the United Blood Trackers of Maryland in the stakeholders' meeting.
 - e. Director Stonesifer verified with NRP about their interpretation of tracking dogs being on leash, and NRP confirmed that the dogs must be physically on leash. There is a need for more discussions on this topic.
3. Commissioner Schroyer suggested that there should be two different regulations concerning dog tracking for deer and the other for bears.
 4. Chair Wagner decided to table the discussion until November 15, 2023, at the WAC meeting so Commissioner Keithley could join.
- Q & A Section:
 1. Chair Wagner asked for clarification on the Kent County Shoreline, Lower Choptank River, and Lower Little Choptank River as part of the Sea Duck Zone (SDZ) about public hunting access or licensing of shorelines.
 - a. Central Region Manager Jim Bennet explained that this concept is separate from the licensing of shorelines. Currently, the offshore waterfowl zone ends 800 yards offshore on the Kent County shoreline, whereas the SDZ is a little closer. The Offshore Waterfowl Hunting Zone (OWHZ) will not change; it will stay within the existing boundaries. The SDZ will enter the mouth of the Chester River, the tip of Eastern Neck Island, Choptank River, and Little Choptank River; these won't change. This type of hunting is not shoreline hunting without blinds; it is big open-water hunting in both SDZ and OWHZ, where hunters are hunting from boats.
 2. Chair Wagner asked if this concept is opening more areas in the SDZ or restricting the hunters more.
 - a. No, it is not restricting the hunters. It is going to open both zones to more sea duck hunting areas. The Susquehanna Flats will be added to the SDZ, and the Atlantic Ocean and a few Chesapeake Bay areas will be added to the OWHZ; these changes are more hunting opportunities. Basically, the OWHZ is not going to extend up into some areas that have historically only been accessible for open water for sea ducks.
 - b. The Eastern Bay, the mouth of Chester River, and Choptank River are the three significant areas that won't open additional waterfowl non-sea-ducks hunting opportunities. Still, these areas will remain accessible to sea ducks hunting.
 3. Captain Garren asked if the proposal passes and what would be the squirrel bag limit.
 - a. It would be a combined bag limit between the red squirrel, gray squirrel, and eastern fox squirrel. Currently, it is a gray squirrel and eastern fox squirrel with a consolidated bag limit of 12. The concept would add the red squirrel to that number.
 4. Commissioner Showater asked for confirmation if the regulations currently distinguished between hunting and trapping for coyotes, but hunting and trapping of foxes are the same. Therefore, Commissioner Showater also asked, concerning foxes, is WHS proposing to extend only the fox trapping by two weeks but have fox hunting on the dates that currently exist, or is WHS extending the fox hunting and trapping by two weeks?
 - a. For simplicity, extending fox hunting would make the most sense.
 - b. Commissioner Showater replied that he would support that concept.
 5. Chair Wagner asked about the logic behind reducing fox and coyote seasons.
 - a. Foxes are kind of a mainstay of Maryland trappers. Also, there are concerns about going into the breeding season to raise the pups.
 - b. Fox hides are going out of prime-ness. A fox captured later in February loses much of its fur

- value, so the pelt's financial value is significantly lower. Fox captured in late November through December was worth \$14, which is low, but the same fox caught in February would be worth between \$2 to \$3. So, the season closure at that time is primarily to protect pelt prices and prevent subprime fox harvest.
- c. Maryland fox trapping season concept would be in line with adjacent states.
 - d. Discourage trappers from releasing subprime foxes after capture because the pelts were unsellable.
6. Commissioner Kullberg asked what Region A is.
 - a. Region A is Garrett, Allegany, and Western Washington County, a small proportion of the overall State.
 7. Chair Wagner asked if the black bear secondary option is either/or if a person could select two options.
 - a. A person would need to select one option but not both options. A person must choose either the entire black bear range or, more specifically, Washington and Frederick Counties. Staff anticipate fewer individuals taking advantage of the 100 permits system, hopefully increasing hunters' chances of being drawn.
 - b. 80% of the bear harvest typically comes from Garrett and Allegany Counties.
 8. Commissioner Schroyer asked if having two options for the bear lottery would reduce the bear permit opportunities by 100 for Garrett and Allegany Counties.
 - a. It would not reduce the permit opportunities for Garrett and Allegany Counties.
 9. Former WAC Chair Compton asked for clarity if he would successfully draw a bear permit for the Garrett and Allegany Counties, which is part of the entire black bear range, and if would he be able to hunt in Washington and Frederick Counties.
 - a. Yes, if a hunter put in for the traditional 950 permits, a hunter could utilize that permit in any of the four counties: Garrett, Allegany, Washington, and Frederick Counties. The additional 100 permits would be only for hunters in the two specific counties, Washington and Frederick Counties. So again, it would allow anyone who wants to hunt the entirety of the area to do so, but it would encourage those who know they are only going to utilize a small portion to have a greater chance.
 10. Commissioner Smith asked if there is a black bear size limit that is being harvested.
 - a. There is no size limit.
 11. Former WAC Chair Compton reported that he did not have a comment specifically regarding dog tracking regulations. However, Former WAC Chair Compton raised an issue related to it: the use of drones for deer recoveries. Drones for recovering deer are becoming popular and widespread in the Midwest. Several operators will cover parts of Maryland with drones. Former WAC Chair Compton asked if staff and the Commission are concerned about adopting or restricting the use of drones for recovering deer.
 - a. Chair Wagner recalled that some individuals use drones to scout for deer and turkeys. The Commission would need to review what other states are doing to manage the use of drones for deer recoveries.
 - b. Director Stonesifer informed the Commission that WHS has started reviewing the use of drones for deer recoveries as internal conversations. WHS does not have a drone concept now, but WHS is looking into it. Staff are checking into what other states are doing about this issue.
 - c. Commissioner Showater mentioned that he supports the ability of people to recover their deer. However, the thought of having everybody flying drones with infrared imagery to find deer was something that he thought would be a step too far. Commissioner Showater suggested that the use of drones warrants additional discussion.
 12. Commissioner Showater mentioned that two people called him last year about a deer they could not find on a Saturday in Talbot County when Sunday hunting was closed. The hunters could not get a tracking dog until Sunday on the property. The hunters were able to locate the deer, and it was dead. In the second case, the hunters tracked the deer, which was still alive. The hunters elected to shoot it out of the season rather than leave it suffering. Commissioner Showater asked

what hunters should do if the deer is still alive and the season is not open. Commissioner Showalter said he thinks the answer should be to call the Natural Resources Police and get permission to shoot the deer.

- a. The hunters should contact NRP in both situations in advance to obtain permission to handle the situations out of season.
13. Commissioner Smith asked who makes the decision on how far to pursue these wounded animals because someone must decide to call off the pursuit and how that structure is.
- a. Assistant Secretary Peditto pointed out that he has been in several tracking situations in various terrains and tracks.
 - b. It would depend on the track, situation, and the barrier of property lines.

2024 WAC Annual Schedule and Draft Monthly Agenda - WAC Discussion

- Chair Wagner tabled the 2024 WAC Annual Schedule and Draft Monthly Agenda to the November 15, 2023, meeting agenda.

Maryland Farm Bureau Update (MFB) –

- MFB is still looking for a replacement.

Natural Resources Police Update – Captain Shawn Garren gave a presentation.

- Captain Garren informed the Commission that NRP is still waiting for the appointment of a new Colonel and Lieutenant Colonel. Applications were submitted for both appointments.
- Captain Garren outlined the Natural Resources Police stats, which changed the format. The violations total is 22,689.
- There were 1,110 wildlife violations, 8,620 boating, 2,669 public lands, 7,227 fisheries, and 3,063 traffic violations.
- The percentage per category is 38% boating, 13.5% traffic, 11.8% public lands, 4.9% wildlife, and 31.9% fisheries violations.
- Captain Garren expressed that the dog tracking is included in the written permission. When crossing boundaries, the handler and hunter need written permission to retrieve the deer.

Old Business

- R3 Update – WHS is waiting for the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) approval after resubmitting the formal request for the R3 pins after the Administration changed hands. Chris Markin and Torey Vayer held an archery event. There are a couple of mentor hunts coming up.
- Online Automatic Hunting Registration Renewal – The Department is waiting to implement the new licensing system.
- Blood Tracking Regulation tabled to the November 15, 2023, meeting.
- Chair Wagner requested an update on where the new hunting increase funding will be spent. Also, Chair Wagner asked if any Pittman-Robertson Funding is being reverted to USFWS. These two items will be discussed at a future meeting.

New Business

- National Archery in School Program (NASP) Funding Issue – Former WAC Chair Compton mentioned that amendments were offered to the education of the Secondary Education Act. Due to the gun safety law that was passed last year to offer an amendment not to allow any weapon training in school, they considered archery equipment as a weapon. The current Secretary of Education interpreted that no funding was to go to any weapons program in school. A bill that would have amended that amendment would roll back to where funding is allowable for those archery and hunting programs was introduced. The bill passed in both the House and Senate; now, it is waiting for the President's signature.
 - a. Maryland has two new schools participating in the NASP, with the potential of a third school joining it.

b. These schools are in counties that never had NASP. Therefore, NASP in Maryland is doing well.

- Former WAC Chair Compton congratulated Director Stonesifer on her appointment. Former WAC Chair Compton has known Director Stonesifer for more than 15 years, and she has been a supporter of the NASP and other outreach programs. Former WAC Chair Compton could not think of a better person to take on the Director of the Wildlife and Heritage Service role.
- Former WAC Chair Compton wished Assistant Secretary Peditto well in his new position, and he thanked Assistant Secretary Peditto for his candid nature and assistance on many occasions. Working with Karina Stonesifer and Paul Peditto has been a pleasure over the years.
- Director Stonesifer and Assistant Secretary Peditto thanked Former WAC Chair Compton.

Public Comment –

- The public may contact the Members of the Commission at wac.dnr@maryland.gov.
- There were no public comments.

Adjournment

- The meeting was adjourned at 12:11 p.m.

The next meeting will be held at 10:30 a.m. on Wednesday, November 18, 2023, using Google Meet.

Attendance

Members:	M. Cole, T.J. Jenkins, K. Kullberg, J. Parks, J. Schroyer, R. Showalter, M. Smith, K. Rossignuolo, and C. Wagner
Absent:	S. Keithley
Guest:	L. Compton and T. Hough
Staff:	J. Bennett, B. Eyler, S. Forrest, S. Garren, R. Karge, B. Long, P. Peditto, T. Spencer, H. Spiker, K. Stonesifer, J. Tabora, G. Timko, and J. Trudeau



Regional Operations Program

WMA Mission

To conserve and enhance diverse wildlife populations and associated habitats while providing public enjoyment of the State's wildlife resources through hunting and other wildlife-dependent recreation.

Staff and Responsibilities

*49 staff members working in 15 offices across the State (**14 staff < 2 years on the job)*

- *7 Administrative Staff*
- *11 Wildlife Response Staff*
- *31 Land Management Staff*
- *** A lot of cross pollination taking place to make it all work*
- *RO Staff provide technical assistance to other programs.*

Land Management

- 62 Wildlife Management Areas in total
- Cover more than 127,000 acres
- Located in 19 of 23 counties
 - AA, HA, SM & TA counties don't have a WMA
- 70% East, 20% West
- 5% South, 5% Central



Recent WMA Acquisitions

- 1,166 acres added to WMA system in last 2 years
- Acquisitions ranged from 5 to 404 acres in size
- Lands added in Eastern, Southern & Western regions
- 9 acquisitions in 5 counties
- **734 acres added to Dan's Mt WMA (Allegany Co) as 2 acquisitions



After the Acquisition



- Stabilization funds acquired for projects to make the property safe and accessible
- Boundaries marked
- Parking lots, trails, culverts, gates, etc. installed to control access
- Often times, structures need secured, stabilized or razed prior to opening a property
- Property gets added to permitting system if applicable

Land Management

- Plant trees and wildlife food plots
- Enhance habitat with burning, discing, chainsaw, etc.
- Remove invasive species
- Mow fields and meadows
- Boundary marking
- Maintain facilities, roads, trails, parking lots, etc.
- Repair and install hunting blinds



Wildlife Response

- Injured Animals
- Captive Animals
- Nuisance Animals
- Disease response
- Provide Information and Assistance



Black Bear Response Team

24/7 emergency response for:

- Aggressive bears
- Bears in homes, tents, etc.
- Dead bears (e.g. road kills)
- Livestock or pet attacks
- human safety/injury



Support to Other Programs

- Game Program
- Natural Heritage Program
- I & E Program
- Hunter Education
- Maryland Forest Service
- Maryland Park Service



Regional Highlight: Central/Southern Regions

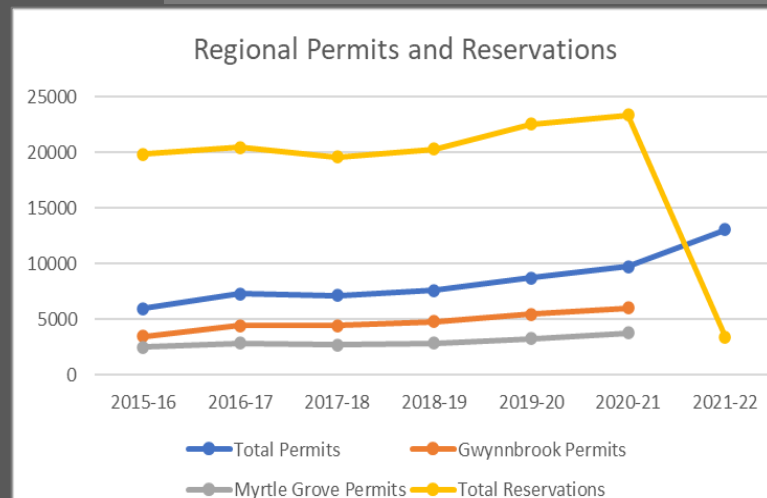
Increased bear activity in recent years:

- Sightings are more frequent with a longer duration Apr – Oct vs. May – July
- Common reports in Carroll, Baltimore, Harford, Howard & Montgomery counties



Free Public Hunting Permit

- CR & SR permits have been combined into one permit
- Permit available through COMPASS and valid immediately
- Parking pass mailed out next day



Questions?



Concept Proposals: 2024-25 and 2025-26 Hunting Seasons



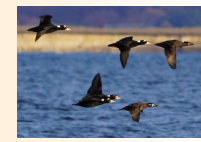
Maryland Department of Natural Resources

Wildlife and Heritage Service

- ✓ The Game Program meets and develops Management Concepts.
 - September 2023
- ✓ Presents Management Concepts to Wildlife Advisory Committee.
 - October 18, 2023
- ✓ Presents Concepts to a meeting of Internal Stakeholders.
 - December 14, 2023
- ✓ Presents Concepts to a meeting of External Stakeholders.
 - January 10, 2024
- ✓ Concepts are refined further and developed into Proposals and are placed online for public comment.
 - February 2024
- ✓ Comment period closes and Proposals are finalized and presented to the Wildlife Advisory Commission for a final vote.
 - March 20, 2024
- ✓ Final Proposals are forwarded to the Maryland Register for additional comment and regulations become final.

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

Waterfowl Hunting

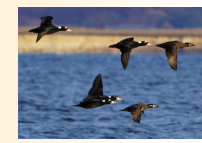


Concept Proposal: Combine the Sea Duck and Offshore Waterfowl Hunting Zone boundary.

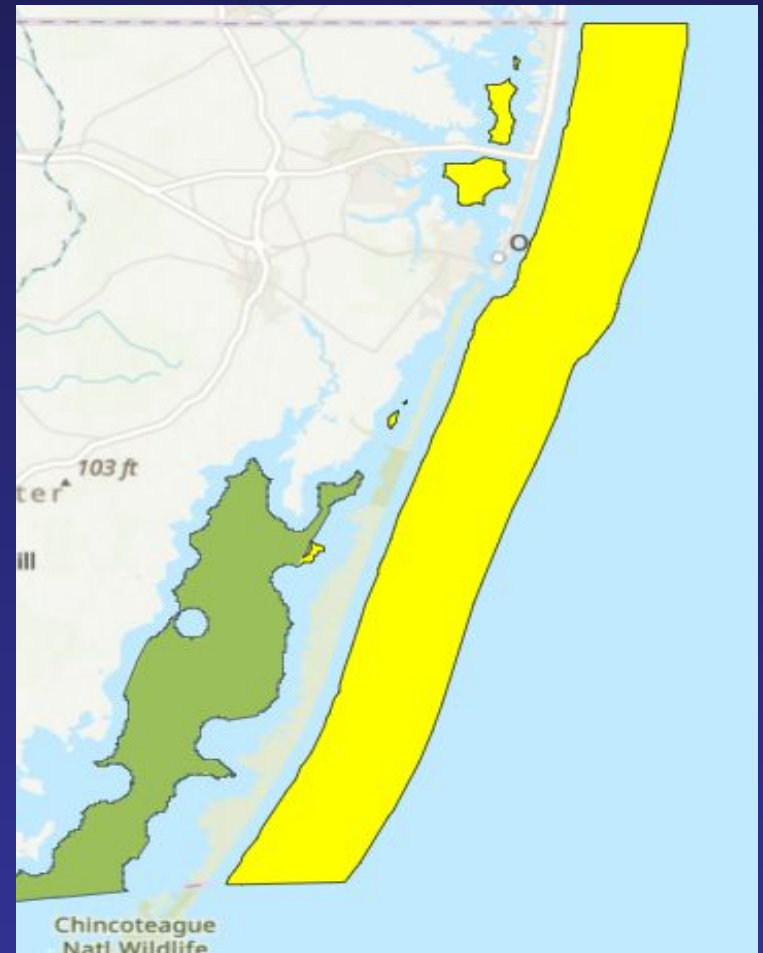
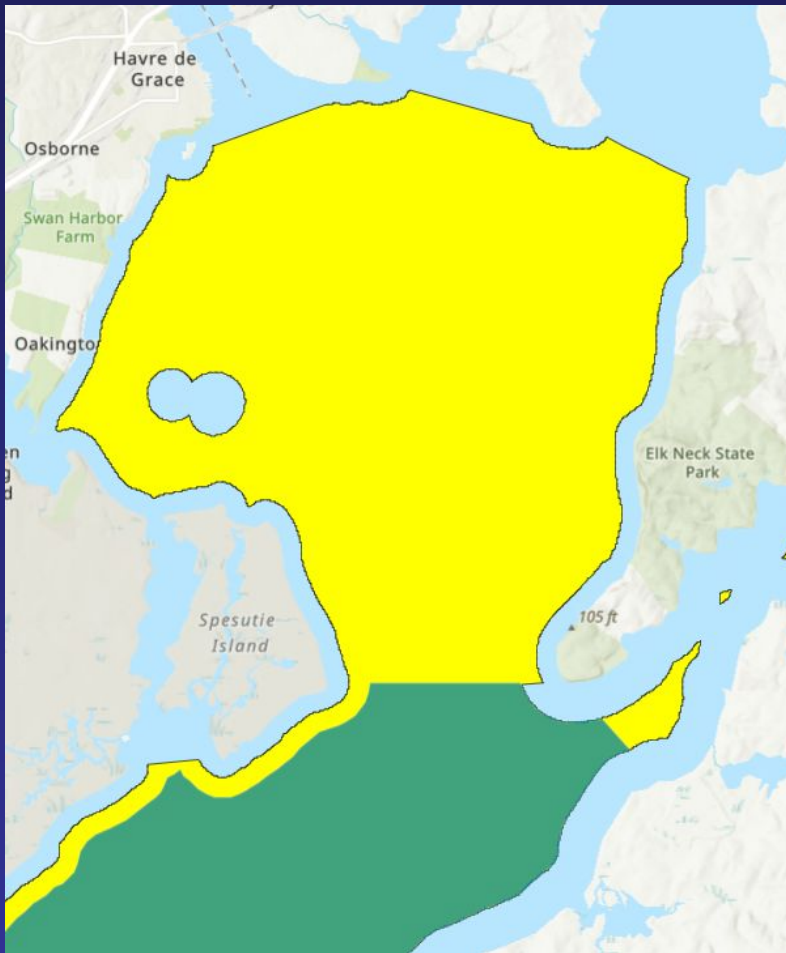
Recommended Action: Combine the Sea Duck and Offshore Waterfowl Hunting Zone boundary to include the largest extent of both zones. This change would exclude the Kent County Shoreline, lower Chester River, lower Choptank River, and lower Little Choptank River, which will remain open to sea duck (scoters, long-tailed duck, eiders) harvest only by allowing the traditional Sea Duck Zone boundaries to remain in place.

Justification: Combining the Sea Duck and Offshore Waterfowl Hunting Zones to the extent listed above will simplify regulations by reducing the discrepancies between the two zone descriptions, create additional hunting opportunity on public waters and improve winter boating safety by allowing hunters to legally pursue crippled ducks while under power in the entirety of these large open water zones.

Waterfowl Hunting



Notable changes: Left: Addition of Susquehanna Flats to SDZ
Right: Addition of Atlantic Ocean to OWHZ



Red Squirrels

Concept Proposal: Eliminate the unlimited bag limit for red Squirrels.

Recommended Action: Eliminate the unlimited bag limit for red squirrels (center). Consolidate red squirrels with gray squirrel and eastern fox squirrel into a single bag limit.

Justification: Elimination of separate bag limits for different squirrel species simplifies regulation and reduces the potential for confusion. Unlimited bag limits may be considered to be a de facto 'nuisance' designation and are not applied elsewhere except for furbearer species.



Red and Gray Fox, Coyotes



Concept Proposal: Extend fox and coyote trapping seasons.

Recommended Action: Land trapping seasons closing on February 1 would extend to February 15. Seasons closing February 15 would extend until the last day in February.

Justification: Extensions of deer hunting seasons may limit access to private land that previously support other pursuits such as trapping and small game hunting. Providing fox and coyote trappers with additional late season opportunity is not likely to have population level effects, but may help to retain existing trappers by restoring access. Proposed season extensions would make Maryland trapping seasons comparable to equivalent seasons in adjacent states such as West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Virginia. Fisher, long-tailed weasel, raccoon and opossum trapping seasons will remain unchanged.

Concept Proposal: Allow hunters in Region A to harvest a total of two antlerless deer during the deer hunting season. The two antlerless deer may both be harvested during the archery season OR one antlerless deer harvested during two separate weapon seasons.

Recommended Action: Move concept forward as a draft regulation proposal for public comment.

Justification: Increasing antlerless harvest opportunities is a very common request from hunters and the agricultural community seeking to mitigate damage to crops. Not unlike the black bear season, bad weather during the deer season can create a significant decline in antlerless harvest in Region A. By allowing hunters to harvest two antlerless deer during a single weapon season, it will create additional opportunities to harvest a deer and extend what is otherwise a short antlerless season for those hunters that have already harvested one antlerless deer. It is important to note that we are not proposing an increase in the bag limit, only an increase in opportunity.

Black Bears

Concept Proposal: Implement two distinct black bear lottery options. 1) 950 permits that can be used within the entire occupied black bear range; and 2) 100 permits that can only be used in Frederick or Washington counties.

Recommended Action: Concept for discussion.

Justification: The current black bear hunting season aims to slow the growth of our statewide bear population and limit the expansion of resident bear populations in eastern counties. However, several factors, including increasing nuisance bear responses, suggest additional hunting opportunities beyond the established permitting system would be beneficial. By providing two lottery options, we can increase hunting opportunities and participation in the eastern portion of the bear range while continuing to offer the same level of opportunity throughout the bear range.

Questions?



Discussion advanced by Commissioner Keithley

Key discussion points for possible Maryland Revisions:

The West Virginia Regulations are the most detailed and worthy of consideration with the exception of the outfitter/guide requirement.

The tracker should notify DNR, not the hunter as currently required. This will build relationships between DNR and the trackers.

A hunting license should be required to track, including out of state trackers.

.19 Use of Dogs for Tracking Deer and Black Bear.

A. It is unlawful to use dogs for locating dead, wounded, or injured deer or black bear except, if an individual legally hunting deer or black bear has killed, wounded, or injured a deer or black bear, or reasonably believes the individual has killed, wounded, or injured a deer or black bear, the individual may either personally, or by engaging a dog handler, use a dog to track and recover the killed, wounded, or injured deer or black bear.

B. The act of tracking a dead, wounded, or injured deer or black bear, with a dog, is considered to be hunting as defined by Natural Resources Article, §10-101(j), Annotated Code of Maryland, and is subject to all applicable laws, regulations, and conditions.

C. No person other than the hunter or the dog handler may carry a firearm or bow of any description while tracking dead, wounded, or injured deer or black bear under this regulation.

D. The hunter or the dog handler may kill a wounded or injured deer or black bear only if done in accordance with the laws, regulations, or other conditions for deer or black bear hunting at that time. The deer or black bear shall count toward the bag limit or quota of the hunter who first killed, wounded, or injured the deer or black bear.

E. Before tracking a dead, wounded, or injured deer or black bear, the hunter shall notify, by telephone or in person, the Natural Resources Police regional office. If the nearest regional office of the Natural Resources Police is unavailable, the hunter may notify the Department of Natural Resources Communication Center. The hunter shall provide information as to:

- (1) Where the deer or black bear was killed, wounded, or injured;**
- (2) The name, address, telephone number, and hunting license number of the hunter and dog handler;**
- (3) The general location of the dead, wounded, or injured deer or black bear; and**
- (4) The name of the landowner where the search will be conducted.**

F. The dog handler shall maintain physical control of the leashed tracking dog at all times while conducting the search.

G. The hunter shall obtain permission of the landowner or land manager before tracking deer or black bear with dogs as provided in this regulation.

Among the items up for discussion during the next regulatory proposals is the possible changes to the dog tracking regs. You may recall, I was approached by Mr Darren Minor, Blood Tracking Dogs of Md, to discuss possible reg changes. He was a guest at a WAC meeting several months ago, gave us a presentation. The interest in using dogs for tracking mortally wounded animals has grown rapidly the past several years, justifying a review of current regs.

Current Maryland regs (from the 23-24 hunting/trapping guide), Dogs cannot be used to hunt deer except trained tracking dogs may be used to find dead, wounded or injured deer. The dog handler must maintain physical control of the tracking dog at all times and only the hunter and dog handler may carry a hunting device while tracking the deer. Prior to tracking the deer, the hunter must notify the Natural Resources Police by telephone at 800-628-9944. The hunter may dispatch the deer only during legal shooting hours and by means legal for the current hunting season.

Current regs from surrounding states:

Virginia, Dogs must be leashed

Pennsylvania, Dogs must be leashed, trackers must have a valid hunting license for the game you are Tracking

New Jersey, Trackers must be permitted to track throughout the state, trackers must have a hunting license, dogs must be certified, dogs must be leashed, trackers must maintain records of tracks.

West Virginia (recently revised), It is legal for leashed dogs to be used for tracking and locating mortally wounded deer, bear, wild turkey or wild boar. The hunter is also permitted to use a dog handler of the leashed dogs for tracking and locating the mortally wounded deer, bear, wild turkey or wild boar. The hunter or handler shall maintain physical control of the leashed dogs at all time.

The use of dogs for tracking mortally wounded deer, bear, wild turkey or wild boar is considered hunting and thus the hunter and handler are subject to all applicable laws and regulations and must possess a valid hunting license.

The hunter must accompany the dog handler unless he/she is physically unable to track and locate the mortally wounded deer, bear, wild turkey or wild boar. The dog tracker may kill the mortally wounded animal if the hunter is physically unable. The deer, bear, wild turkey or wild boar counts towards the hunters bag limit.

Any dog handler providing tracking services for profit must be an outfitter or guide.

Key discussion points for possible Md Revisions,

The West Va regs are the most detailed and worthy of consideration with the exception of outfitter/guide requirement.

The Tracker should notify DNR, not the hunter as currently required. This will build relationships between DNR and the trackers.

A hunting license should be required to track, including out of state trackers.