



March 1, 2022

House Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources Committee
Natural Resources Subcommittee

RE: **Senate Bill 8** (Petersen) - Permits hunting on Sunday on public or private land, so long as it takes place more than 200 yards from a place of worship.

Position: **SUPPORT**

Dear Delegate Edmunds,

On behalf of the members of Delta Waterfowl, both in Virginia and around the country, I'm writing you today in support of **Senate Bill 8** – legislation that would expand additional opportunities to Virginia's sportsmen and women by repealing the antiquated laws prohibiting hunting on public lands on Sundays.

Delta Waterfowl is a leading conservation group founded at the famed Delta Marsh in Manitoba, with its United States Headquarters in Bismarck, North Dakota. We work to produce ducks through intensive management programs and conservation of breeding duck habitat. Delta conducts vital waterfowl research, and promotes and protects the continuing tradition of waterfowl hunting in North America.

In 2014, Delta Waterfowl was instrumental in advocating for opening Sunday waterfowl hunting opportunities on Virginia's private and public waterways. However, Sunday hunting of other game can still only take place on private lands. Even for waterfowl, many areas remain off limits on Sundays, such as national forests, national wildlife refuges, military bases and certain wildlife management areas. The potential acres on which Sunday hunting in Virginia could expand totals in the millions.

Senate Bill 8 will Permits hunting on Sunday on public or private land, so long as it takes place more than 200 yards from a place of worship. It passed the Senate 29-11 with broad bipartisan support.

As you know, sportsmen and women in Virginia contribute financially to the acquisition and management costs of Wildlife Management Areas, owned by the Department of Wildlife Resources, by purchasing hunting licenses and paying excise taxes on firearms and ammunition. Hunting is also a major economic boom for the Commonwealth. According to the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, Virginia's sportsmen and women are a significant economic force – spending more than \$1.5 billion, supporting more than 39,160 jobs, generating more than \$1.17 billion in salaries and wages and \$242 million in state and local taxes. Despite all that, hunters, specifically those who hunt on public lands, are still the only user group actively discriminated against on Sundays while other user groups can access these lands every day of the year.

Hunters often cite "lack of time" as one of the number one reasons they stop hunting. Many hunters are prevented from introducing new or novice hunters to the great outdoors because they are competing against work, organized sports and other activities on Saturdays, which is currently their only opportunity to hunt outside of the typical work and school week. Allowing an extra day to access public lands will help recruit and retain a robust hunter population that is needed to provide critical funding for conservation efforts in the Commonwealth.

Opponents of expanding hunting opportunities to publicly owned lands on Sundays typically make emotionally based arguments regarding the safety aspect of hunters and non-hunters occupying the same areas. However, those arguments are not supported by any data. According to a National Shooting Sports Foundation study in 2017, hunting results in fewer injuries per 100,000 participants than many sports, including golf, bowling, and tennis. Additionally, the annual number of hunting related incidents in Virginia and wouldn't increase with additional days to hunt. Currently, there are more than 40 states that have some form of Sunday hunting opportunities on public and private lands available for their citizens. These states provide a clear blueprint for how hunting and non-hunting users can coexist on public lands in Virginia.

Finally, on October 28th, 2021, the Board of the Department of Wildlife Resources passed a resolution supporting changes to the law to allow public land hunters to hunt on Sundays on public lands subject to landowner approval. With their support, and the support of the majority of public land hunters in Virginia, this legislation is a common-sense solution.

We hope to see this legislation progress through the subcommittee and full committee, and look forward to working with committee members and the hunting community to continue to search for equitable opportunities for all of Virginia's sportsmen and women seven days a week. Should you, or any committee members, have questions, please feel free to contact me at cbaird@deltawaterfowl.org.

Respectfully,

Cyrus Hunter Baird
Senior Director of Government Affairs
Delta Waterfowl Foundation

Cc:

Del. Buddy Fowler (R-Ashland)
Del. Danny Marshall (R-Danville)
Del. Ken Plum (D-Reston)
Del. Kathy Tran (D-Springfield)
Del. Lee Ware (R-Powhatan)
Del. Tommy Wright (R-Victoria)