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## HOUSE BILL NO. 963

Offered January 8, 2020

Prefiled January 7, 2020

A *BILL to amend and reenact § 29.1-529 of the Code of Virginia, relating to bear kill permits; crop damage.*

Patron—Webert

Referred to Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources

**Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**

**1. That § 29.1-529 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:**

**§ 29.1-529. Killing of deer, elk, or bear damaging fruit trees, crops, livestock, or personal property; wildlife creating a hazard to aircraft or motor vehicles.**

A. Whenever deer, elk, or bear are damaging fruit trees, crops, livestock, or personal property utilized for commercial agricultural production in the Commonwealth, the owner or lessee of the lands on which such damage is done shall immediately report the damage to the Director or his designee for investigation. If after investigation the Director or his designee finds that deer or bear are responsible for the damage, he shall authorize in writing the owner, lessee, or any other person designated by the Director or his designee to kill such deer or bear when they are found upon the land upon which the ~~damages~~ damage occurred.

However, the Director or his designee shall have the option of authorizing nonlethal control measures rather than authorizing the killing of elk or bear, provided that such measures occur within a reasonable period of time; and whenever deer cause damage on parcels of land of five acres or less, except when such acreage is used for commercial agricultural production, the Director or his designee shall have discretion as to whether to issue a written authorization to kill the deer.

*Whenever the Director or his designee finds that bear are responsible for damaging crops, including during a harvest, he (i) shall authorize in writing the owner, lessee, or any other person designated by the Director or his designee to kill such bear when they are found upon the land upon which the damage occurred and (ii) shall not authorize nonlethal control measures unless such measures are specifically requested by the owner or lessee.*

The Director or his designee may limit ~~such~~ the written authorization to kill by specifying in writing the number of animals to be killed and duration for which the authorization is effective and may in proximity to residential areas and under other appropriate circumstances limit or prohibit the authorization between 11:00 p.m. and one-half hour before sunrise of the following day. The Director or his designees issuing these authorizations shall specify in writing that only antlerless deer shall be killed, unless the Director or his designee determines that there is clear and convincing evidence that the damage was done by deer with antlers. Any owner or lessee of land who has been issued a written authorization shall not be issued an authorization in subsequent years unless he can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Director or his designee that during the period following the prior authorization, the owner or his designee has hunted bear or deer on the land for which he received a previous authorization.

B. Subject to the provisions of subsection A, the Director or his designee may issue a written authorization to kill deer causing damage to residential plants, whether ornamental, noncommercial agricultural, or other types of residential plants. The Director may charge a fee not to exceed actual costs. The holder of this written authorization shall be subject to local ordinances, including those regulating the discharge of firearms.

C. Whenever wildlife is creating a hazard to the operation of any aircraft or to the facilities connected with the operation of aircraft, the person or persons responsible for the safe operation of the aircraft or facilities shall report such fact to the Director or his designee for investigation. If after investigation the Director or his designee finds that wildlife is creating a hazard, he shall authorize such person or persons or their representatives to kill wildlife when the wildlife is found to be creating such a hazard. As used in this subsection, the term "wildlife" shall not include any federally protected species.

D. Whenever deer are creating a hazard to the operation of motor vehicle traffic within the corporate limits of any city or town, the operator of a motor vehicle or chief law-enforcement officer of the city or town may report such fact to the Director or his designee for investigation. If after investigation the Director or his designee finds that deer are creating a hazard within such city or town, he may authorize responsible persons, or their representatives, to kill the deer when they are found to be creating such a hazard.

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59 E. Whenever deer are damaging property in a locality in which deer herd population reduction has  
60 been recommended in the current Deer Management Plan adopted by the Board, the owner or lessee of  
61 the lands on which such damage is being done may report such damage to the Director or his designee  
62 for investigation. If after investigation the Director or his designee finds that deer are responsible for the  
63 damage, he may authorize in writing the owner, lessee or any other person designated by the Director or  
64 his designee to kill such deer when they are found upon the land upon which the ~~damages~~ damage  
65 occurred. The Director or his designee also may limit such authorization by specifying in writing the  
66 number of animals to be killed and the period of time for which the authorization is effective. The  
67 requirement in subsection A of this section, that an owner or lessee of land demonstrate that during the  
68 period following the prior authorization deer or bear have been hunted on his land, shall not apply to  
69 any locality that conducts a deer population control program authorized by the Department.

70 F. The Director or his designee may revoke or refuse to reissue any authorization granted under this  
71 section when it has been shown by a preponderance of the evidence that an abuse of the authorization  
72 has occurred. Such evidence may include a complaint filed by any person with the Department alleging  
73 that an abuse of the written authorization has occurred. Any person aggrieved by the issuance, denial or  
74 revocation of a written authorization can appeal the decision to the Department of Game and Inland  
75 Fisheries. Any person convicted of violating any provision of the hunting and trapping laws and  
76 regulations shall be entitled to receive written authorization to kill deer or bear. However, such person  
77 shall not (i) be designated as a shooter nor (ii) carry out the authorized activity for a person who has  
78 received such written authorization for a period of at least two years and up to five years following his  
79 most recent conviction for violating any provision of the hunting and trapping laws and regulations. In  
80 determining the appropriate length of this restriction, the Director shall take into account the nature and  
81 severity of the most recent violation and of any past violations of the hunting and trapping laws and  
82 regulations by the applicant. No person shall be designated as a shooter under this section during a  
83 period when such person's hunting license or privileges to hunt have been suspended or revoked.

84 G. The Director or his designee may authorize, subject to the provisions of this section, the killing of  
85 deer over bait within the political boundaries of any city or town, or any county with a special late  
86 antlerless season, in the Commonwealth when requested by a certified letter from the governing body of  
87 such locality.

88 H. The parts of any deer or bear killed pursuant to this section or wildlife killed pursuant to  
89 subsection C shall not be used for the purposes of taxidermy, mounts, or any public display unless  
90 authorized by the Director or his designee. However, the meat of any such animal may be used for  
91 human consumption. The carcass and any unused meat of any such animal shall be disposed of within  
92 24 hours of being killed. Any person who violates any provision of this subsection is guilty of a Class 3  
93 misdemeanor.

94 I. It is unlawful to willfully and intentionally impede any person who is engaged in the lawful killing  
95 of a bear or deer pursuant to written authorization issued under this section. Any person convicted of a  
96 violation of this subsection is guilty of a Class 3 misdemeanor.