

CHESAPEAKE  
CONSERVATION  
REPORT  
2024

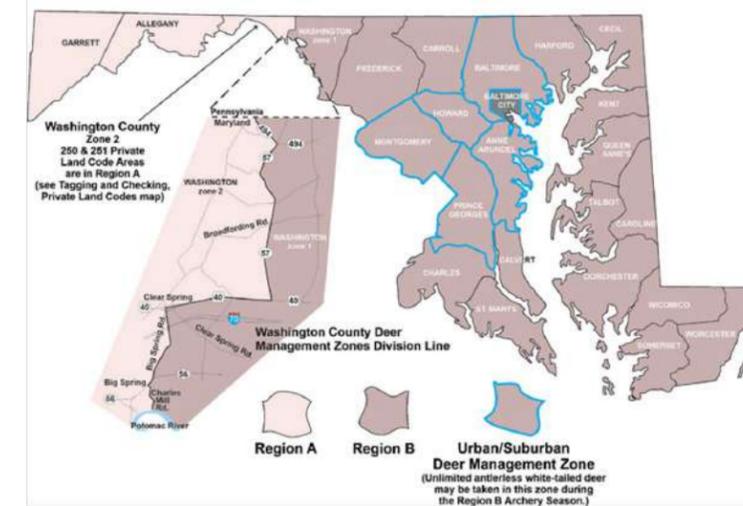
THE LAND GROUP

# DEER DATA



Photo: Jesse Highling

## MARYLAND



### 2023-2024 DEER POPULATION ESTIMATES:

#### WHITE-TAILED DEER

- Statewide: 236,775 deer
- Region A: 40,970
- Region B: 20,2379

#### SIKA DEER

- Statewide: 18,709 deer. Their current distribution is primarily along the Eastern Shore including Dorchester, Somerset, and Wicomico counties.

### 2023 HARVEST:

Maryland deer hunters harvested 72,642 deer during 2023-2024. The statewide harvest included 30,025 antlered and 38,511 antlerless white-tailed deer, and 1,912 antlered and 2,194 antlerless sika deer. The overall harvest was 5 percent lower than the 2022-2023 total of 76,687 deer.

The harvest in deer management in Region A decreased 4%, from 9,552 deer last year to 9,169 this year. Hunters in the western counties reported 5,678 antlered and 3,491 antlerless deer. Deer hunters in Region B harvested 63,473 deer, down 6% from 67,135 deer harvested last year. A total of 26,259 antlered and 37,214 antlerless deer were reported in this region.

Frederick County had the highest reported harvest with 6,549 deer reported. Carroll (5,729) and Dorchester (5,520) counties had the second and third highest reported harvest. Garrett and Baltimore rounded out the top five with 5,108 and 4,550, respectively.

Hunters harvested 7,074 deer on Sundays. Sunday deer hunting opportunities are available in 20 of Maryland's 23 counties. Opportunities vary by county and are only permitted during certain weeks of the deer hunting season.

### CWD & EHD MONITORING:

In 2023-2024, department staff and volunteers examined 4,068 deer at butcher shops across the state during the muzzleloader and firearm seasons. Overall, Maryland's long-term data for these indicators show healthy, productive deer populations across the state. The percentage of yearling bucks in the harvest remains very healthy and has shown a positive declining trend in recent years. However, the average number of antler points and the average antler beam diameter for yearling bucks has also been declining. These data will continue to be monitored closely in the coming years, but the declining trend may be an artifact of the sampling that now occurs at butcher shops.

Significant HD outbreaks typically occur every three to five years and may affect 10-20 percent, or more, of a local deer population. There were no significant HD outbreak reported in 2023-2024, although there were three confirmed white-tailed deer with Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease Virus (EHDV) in Frederick County, during August 2024.

# DELAWARE



Delaware is a wonderful and sometimes challenging place to hunt white-tailed deer. Your hunting effort will determine your success on harvesting the quality buck or large 'freezer queen'.

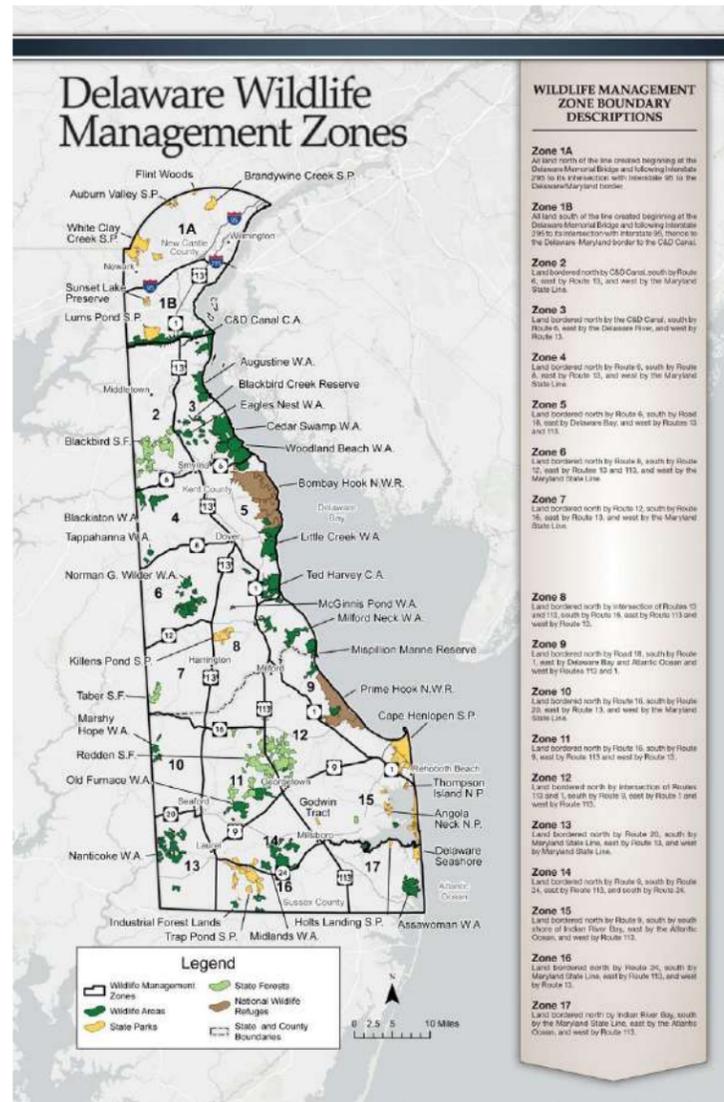
Sam Millman  
Delaware Deer Biologist

## HARVEST DATA OF WHITETAIL DEER:

ZONE	TOTAL
1A	841
1B	376
2	825
3	569
4	731
5	563
6	1020
7	1191
8	1051
9	745
10	672
11	1210
12	794
13	838
14	682
15	774
16	964
17	695
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>14541</b>

## POPULATION STATUS:

As of 2009 there are an estimated 25,730 post-harvest. Delaware is currently planning to start a new population survey in 2025 post-harvest.

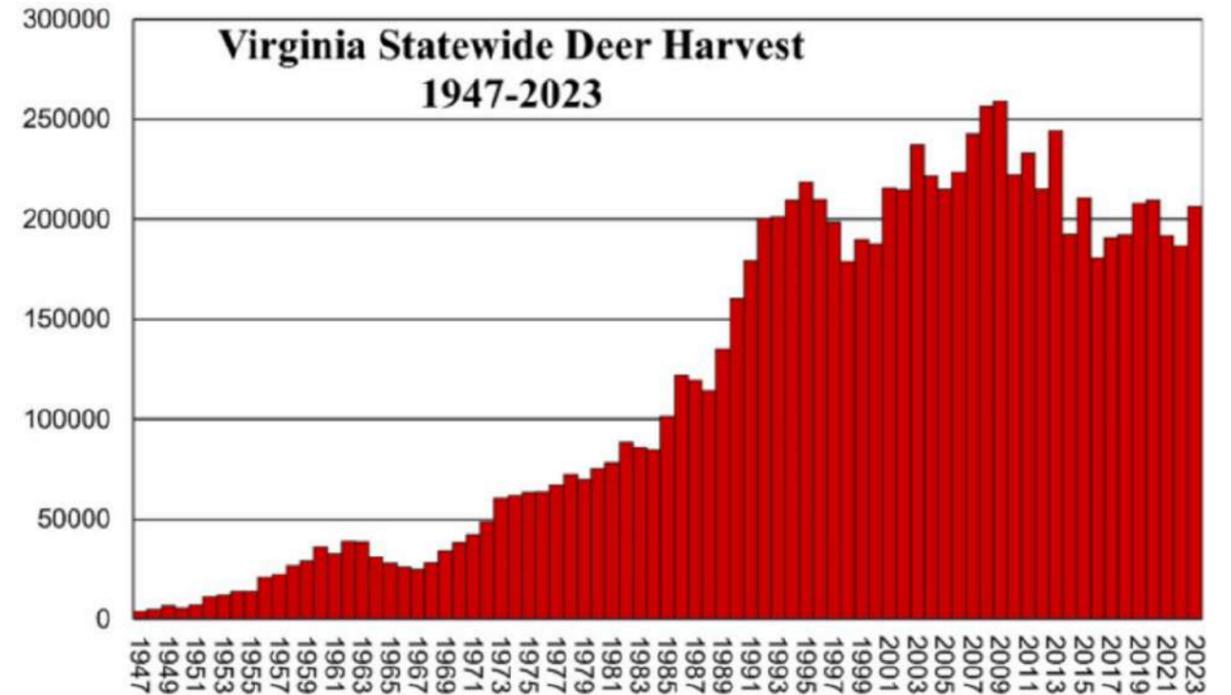


## CWD & EHD MONITORING:

Hemorrhagic disease (HD) is a viral disease spread by biting midges. HD, or "blue tongue," commonly appears in late summer and early fall. Deer that have survived hemorrhagic disease and are harvested will exhibit hooves with sloughing or peeling tissue. These deer are still suitable for human consumption.

- As of the 2023/24 CWD Surveillance season, there were no detections from the 750+ samples collected from hunter harvests.
- No reports of Hemorrhagic Disease Virus (EHV).

# VIRGINIA



During the 2023–24 deer hunting season, hunters reported harvesting 206,586 deer in Virginia, up approximately 12% from the 184,968 deer taken during the same time frame the previous season. This year's total included 105,201 antlered bucks, 982 bucks that had shed their antlers, 12,567 button bucks, and 87,836 does (42.5%).

The youth and apprentice deer hunting weekend resulted in a harvest of 2,890 deer. Archery hunters took 14% of the total deer harvest, while muzzleloading deer hunters and firearm hunters took 26% and 60% of the total harvest, respectively. In counties where dogs could be used to hunt deer, 50% of deer were harvested with the aid of dogs during the general firearm season.

The 2023–24 deer harvest was up 5% from the previous 10-year average of 196,862. This season's harvest represented a rebound from the 2022–23

## 2023 HARVEST DATA:

COUNTY	ANTLERED MALES	MALE FAWNS	FEMALES	% FEMALES	TOTAL HARVEST
Accomack	1103	277	1545	52.8%	2925
Northampton	538	105	558	46.5%	1201

season, when harvests were down due to a bumper crop of acorns. The dip in harvest last season likely created a "stockpile" of deer for hunters this season. Additionally, deer experienced a mild winter, entering 2023 on a higher nutritional plane and enabling the herd to be more productive.

White oak mast was scarce during the fall of 2023, which could have made deer move more in search of this preferred food item, increasing their visibility to hunters. Additionally, a number of new deer hunting regulations designed to increase harvest opportunities went into effect, which also may have contributed to the increased harvest.



Billy (right) with his dad

# Q&A

## WITH BILLY HARDESTY

**Hometown:** Frankford, DE

**Profession:** Taxidermist.

**What You Probably Don't Know:** I didn't hunt a lot growing up.

**First Hunt:** Squirrel hunting with my dad.

**First Shotgun:** Hawthorne bolt action .410

**Go-To Gun and Why:** My go-to shotgun is undoubtedly the Benelli M2 20 gauge. It's lightweight, shoulders fast and packs all the punch you'll ever need.

**Favorite Duck to Hunt:** Mallards.

**Favorite Duck to Mount:** Pintail.

**Best Local Hunt:** Full 8 man limit of ducks on public land in Maryland.

**Scariest Hunting Experience:** My dog broke (went before being sent) and chased a sailing cripple wigeon across a deep frozen pond. He broke through the ice and couldn't get out for several minutes. As I started across to help him, he finally was able to climb back onto the ice.

**Best Hunting Trip:** Oregon Elk.

**Local Hero:** Big bird cropper, Jeff Coats, Marc Spagnola.

**If You Could Have One Hunt to End the Season On, What Would It Be and Why?** Icy conditions, sunny and windy open water ducks.

**Favorite Hunting Movie or Show?** Avian X or anything Roger Raglin has ever been a part of!

**Time Spent Other than Waterfowl Hunting:** Anything outdoors, shooting, fishing, turkeys.... Boy do i love my turkeys!

**Best Post-Hunt Meal After a Cold Day On the Marsh:** Caesar's Pizza Palace in Princess Anne, MD. There has been many a hot wing, pizza and cheese fries consumed after getting our asses kicked by the ducks. Maybe even a pitcher of beer or three!

**Ambitions:** Sky's the limit! I don't have enough time to list all of my ambitions. There are so many things I've gotten to experience, so many people I call friends, all because of my love for the outdoors.

**If You Had to Pick One Job Other Than What You're Doing, What Would It Be?** I worked for a pest control company for 17 years. Most of that time I was in sales. Not sure I'd pick that for myself, but my guess is I'd still be there if not for going full time into taxidermy. I always enjoyed the sales portion of my job that involved meeting new people on the road.

**Favorite Quote:** "In the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years." -Abraham Lincoln

**Inspiration:** My kids inspire me to be the best version of myself.

**Most Valued Possession:** My friends and family are more valuable to me than any material items. If I had to choose though I'd say my decoy collection.

**Biggest Virtue:** Creative, outgoing, driven.

**Worst Habit:** Starting one project without finishing another.

**Overrated:** Fancy decoys.

**Underrated:** Gadwalls!!

**Biggest Buzzkill on a Hunt:** Getting to your spot super early just to have some guy who overslept come and sit 50 yards downwind of you.

**Spirit Animal:** Merganser.

**Name Drop:** Ramsey Russel, Fred Zink, Tony Vandemore. Have shared a blind with all of them.

**People Say I Look Like:** Steve O.

**Catch Phrase:** I'll sleep when I'm dead.

**11th Commandment:** Thou shalt not know a stranger. Give everyone the benefit of the doubt!

**Breaking the Law:** 10 you're fine, 11 you're mine.... Applies to speed limits and legal shooting time.

**Message for the Misguided Youth Coming Up in the Outdoors:** The hunting community is small, help one another, network and promote ethical hunting. It's not about the piles guys. Guilty as charged but it's a phase that most of us outgrow I think.

**Who Would You Nominate to be the Next Outdoorsmen Spotlight?** Jeff Coats, Pitboss Waterfowl.

**Credit Due:** Dave Hagner. If it wasn't for him I'd still be working for someone else. He gave me the extra little push I needed to chase my dreams.

**If You Could Do One Thing Over Again:** Worked for myself full-time much sooner.

**Unnecessary Accessory:** Red dot sight on a turkey gun. That being said, I've got several!

**What Do You Like Most About Hunting?:** As hunters we see things that so many people will never get to experience that don't hunt. Being afield is a magical experience. Watching the world come alive from a tree or blind is magic!

**What Does it Mean to be an Outdoorsman/Hunter from Delmarva?:** Our area is rich with hunting heritage and tradition. The versatility of this place we call home is very unique in such a way that you could be hunting in cypress swamps for wood ducks and mallards one day, bobbing in the ocean the next shooting long tails and scoter's. We have as big of whitetail deer as almost any place in the country and the bugle of a sika deer in our salt marshes is enough to captivate any outdoorsman.

**What is Today's Hunting Culture Lacking?:** Respect for the animal and fellow hunters.

## DELMARVA HUNTERS



Kyle Lewis



Dillon Harrington



Callum and Kevin Hales



# CONSERVATION UPDATE

## OUR STRATEGIC PARTNERS

### BLUACRES: [bluacres.com](http://bluacres.com)

BluAcres specializes in the restoration of wetlands, streams and wildlife habitat. They provide clients with technical assistance to develop high-quality wildlife habitat for mitigation, conservation and improved hunting and fishing opportunities.



### ORION WILDLIFE: [orionwildlife.com](http://orionwildlife.com)

Orion works with landowners throughout the Mid-Atlantic region to improve wildlife habitat on their farms. They design and install shallow-water field impoundments, plant high-quality food plots and design and restore warm season grass cover.



There are so many options when it comes to conservation programs and opportunities for landowners. Our expertise in conservation can help guide you and provide important representation of your interests during the complicated process of evaluating the farm for programs, applying for conservation programs, engineering and design, permitting, enrollment and more! Our knowledge of conservation programs and connections to the local offices of State, Federal, County, and non-profit organizations expedites the process more than the average citizen working on their own.

## NEW NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE COMING TO SOUTHERN MARYLAND

If approved, this refuge will be the first established in the Chesapeake Bay watershed in 26 years. Chesapeake Conservancy is proud to be a member of the coalition of partners known as the Southern Maryland Conservation Alliance, which is calling for the establishment of an expanded National Wildlife Refuge System presence in southern Maryland.

The refuge would consist of four watershed-based units in Anne Arundel, Calvert, Charles, Prince George's and St. Mary's counties. The total area encompassed by the proposed refuge acquisition boundary is approximately 577,420 acres, of which a maximum of 40,000 acres could be acquired in fee-title acquisitions or conservation easements from willing sellers.

**What are National Wildlife Refuges?**  
The National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on behalf of the American people and is the largest assemblage of lands and waters devoted to fish and wildlife conservation in the world.

The Chesapeake Bay and the forests, rivers and wetlands of Southern Maryland provide important habitat for birds that migrate and overwinter along the Atlantic Flyway, as well as important nursery habitat for nearly 350 species of finfish. Extensive research, data collection and analysis has shown that currently, unprotected habitats in these counties support significant populations of fish, wildlife, and migratory birds of conservation concern including shorebirds, forest-interior birds and grassland-dependent birds. These species face the threat of habitat loss from land use changes, climate change, competition from invasive species and other external population stressors. Southern Maryland contains tens of thousands of acres of unprotected habitats that support these species, and the loss of these habitats would have severe consequences for those species that depend on them.

**What Types of Activities will be Allowed on the Refuge?**  
Wildlife-dependent recreation, including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation.

## EASEMENT OPPORTUNITIES:

Easements continue to be a viable financial opportunity for large tract private landowners. If your land is not already enrolled in a conservation easement, you may want to consider the benefits and contact us to help you make that decision. There are a plethora of options out there and two of the most common and financially rewarding options include preserving agricultural lands and wetland restoration. Below are tables that display data from Delaware for each program and by county.

## DELAWARE AGLANDS PRESERVATION TOTAL EASEMENTS SINCE INCEPTION:

	PENDING	SETTLED	ACRES	COST
New Castle	4	110	14,998	\$39,813,286
Kent	23	554	73,966	\$114,080,225
Sussex	54	503	56,830	\$223,566,299
<b>State</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>1167</b>	<b>145,795</b>	<b>\$267,459,811</b>

## DELAWARE WETLAND RESERVE EASEMENT GARC RATES FOR FY 2025:

	MARKET VALUE PER ACRE**	95% GARC - ADJUSTED VALUE
<b>NEW CASTLE COUNTY</b>		
Typical cropland w/ hydric soils	\$14,000.00	\$13,300.00
Typical woodland w/ hydric soils	\$10,900.00	\$10,355.00
<b>KENT COUNTY</b>		
Typical cropland w/ hydric soils	\$13,300.00	\$12,635.00
Typical woodland w/ hydric soils	\$5,650.00	\$5,367.50
<b>SUSSEX COUNTY</b>		
Typical cropland w/ hydric soils	\$14,900.00	\$14,155.00
Typical woodland w/ hydric soils	\$9,550.00	\$9,072.50

\*\*as determined by average values in AWMA

# DUCK DATA

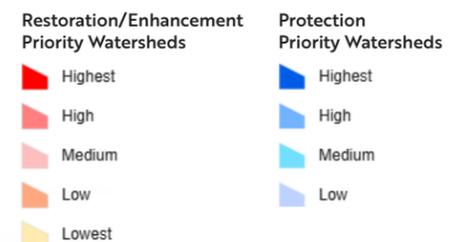
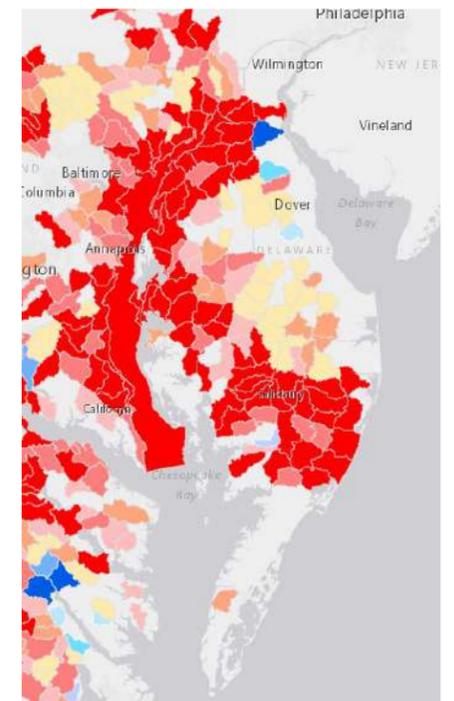


Ducks Unlimited is the world's leader in wetlands conservation. We partner with private landowners and public agencies stewarding public lands in the target geography to identify, plan and complete wetland restoration to improve water quality, waterfowl habitat, and increased recreational opportunities within the Chesapeake Bay.

## RESTORATION:

In the fall of 2023, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) awarded DU a Chesapeake Watershed Investments for Landscape Defense (WILD) grant to restore 20 acres of wetlands in the lower shore of Maryland and initiate a land protection initiative in the same area. This project will lay the foundation for a strong, targeted conservation initiative in an area that is primed for protection and restoration. Both restoration and protection will be critical to ensuring the long-term integrity of the landscape in these watersheds. DU will directly deliver three wetland projects totaling more than 20 acres on private property in the Big Annemessex River, Marumsco Creek-Pocomoke Sound, Back Creek and East Creek-Pocomoke Sound watersheds. Additionally, DU has committed to planning and outreach that will create a cornerstone of conservation in those areas. DU staff will work with partners to prioritize parcels for both restoration and protection within these watersheds. A landowner outreach event to highlight wetland restoration opportunities and practices will be held using one of these sites.

Through this outreach and technical assistance, DU hopes to protect and conserve additional habitat beyond the direct delivery of this project. The work will directly and indirectly improve water quality. The wetland restoration projects will remove agricultural land from production to restore wetlands, which will provide immediate water quality benefits through reduced nutrient inputs in these watersheds. Our outreach and planning will enable DU to complete future work that will have similar conservation outcomes.



## LEARN MORE:

If you would like to learn more about Ducks Unlimited or participate in any conservation programs, please reach out to **Michael Randall** (540) 845-3772 [mrandall@ducks.org](mailto:mrandall@ducks.org) or **Scott Reinhart** (814) 319-4329 [sreinhart@ducks.org](mailto:sreinhart@ducks.org).

# FEATURED LISTINGS



## LAWSON MARSH HUNTING RETREAT | CRISFIELD, MD

- 1,119.42± acres
- Includes 7.43± acre parcel on Lloyd Webb Road with a 1,250 sq. ft. lodge featuring 3 bedrooms
- The lodge is being sold furnished
- Includes a cabin with 115' pier and an offshore blind

Contact Sue Hudson: 302-448-9727 or [sue@thelandgroup.us](mailto:sue@thelandgroup.us)



## ALMODINGTON FARM | PRINCESS ANNE, MD

- 203± acres of tillable and marsh land
- Property features a mid-18th century Georgian Plantation home with 1.2 miles of shoreline on the Manokin River
- Two waterfowl impoundments totaling 22 acres
- The land is in a conservation easement

Contact Ben Alder: 443-865-1344 or [ben@thelandgroup.us](mailto:ben@thelandgroup.us)



## RECREATIONAL HOMESITE | MARION STATION, MD

- 72± acres of hardwoods and pine with several cleared areas for food plots and an established road system
- Improvements include 2 mobile homes, 3 barns and a lean-to
- Several box stands, tree stands and feeders convey

Contact Sue Hudson: 302-448-9727 or [sue@thelandgroup.us](mailto:sue@thelandgroup.us)



## RIVERSIDE LODGE | FISHING CREEK, MD

- 980± acre complex of islands with renowned waterfowl and sika opportunities
- Improved by a 3,900 sq. ft., 5 bed, 5 bathroom lodge
- Private dock and boat slips offer deep water port

Contact Ben Alder: 443-865-1344 or [ben@thelandgroup.us](mailto:ben@thelandgroup.us)

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