



Fiscal Note for Proposed Fox Squirrel Hunting Rule Amendment for the Wildlife Resources Commission

Rule Amendments: 15A NCAC 10B .0206 SQUIRRELS

Agency Contact: Michael Smallwood
Policy Analyst
NC Wildlife Resources Commission
1751 Varsity Drive, Raleigh, NC
919-707-0014
michael.smallwood@ncwildlife.org

Impact: State Government: Yes
Local Government: No
Private Impact: Yes
Substantial Economic Impact: No

Authority: G.S. 113-134; 113-291.2

BACKGROUND

The wildlife resources of the State belong to the people of the State, including the enjoyment of these resources (G.S. 113-131(a)). The Wildlife Resources Commission (hereinafter WRC or Commission) is tasked with the conservation of wildlife resources of the State (G.S. 143-239). This responsibility includes managing as equitably as possible the various competing interests regarding these resources, including the use and take of such resources (G.S. 113-131.1(a)). The statutes governing wildlife resources are found in Chapter 113, Subchapter IV of the General Statutes, and WRC has been granted rulemaking authority to implement the provisions of these statutes (G.S. 113-134). In accordance with the supply of wildlife and other factors it determines to be of public importance, the WRC may fix seasons and bag limits upon the wild animals and wild birds authorized to be taken that it deems necessary or desirable in the interests of the conservation of wildlife resources (G.S. 113.291.2(a)).

A summary of the proposed rule amendment is shown below, with the full text included in Appendix A.

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This change would serve to offer additional fox squirrel hunting opportunity by opening the fox squirrel season statewide (i.e. all 100 counties) and extending the season to close on January

31st each year (currently closes on December 31st).

Squirrel hunting effort and harvest have decreased substantially over recent decades. The decrease in long-term squirrel harvest and hunting presumably stems from changing hunter interests due to increases in big game populations and big game hunting opportunity as well as overall decreases in the number of hunters in North Carolina. It is very unlikely that these decreases in hunting and harvest are indicative of declining squirrel populations or habitat conditions.

Fox squirrel populations have expanded considerably in recent years to areas where suitable habitat exists. Continued increases in fox squirrel abundance and range are expected, regardless of whether or not additional hunting opportunities are offered. This current proposal would essentially revert to fox squirrel hunting regulations that were in place in previous decades, now that squirrel hunting effort and overall harvest vulnerability have decreased considerably to the point that no population impacts are expected. Maintaining the very conservative daily and season limits will also ensure that populations are not overharvested.

Offering additional hunting opportunities for fox squirrels will have several benefits. Principally, it will allow hunters to pursue fox squirrels outside of deer hunting seasons. Accessing land during deer seasons and avoiding conflicts with deer hunters is a major concern for many small game hunters, particularly those that hunt with dogs. Additionally, allowing fox squirrel hunting statewide can serve to spread hunting pressure and harvest out across the state, rather than concentrating it only in the relatively few counties and Game Lands with open seasons. This change would also serve to simplify regulations.

NCWRC's Vision calls for programs that conserve the diversity and abundance of the State's wildlife resources and that are based on sound science. Specific agency goals and objectives focus on expanding opportunities for all wildlife associated recreation. These proposed changes are in keeping with this vision and will help achieve agency goals and objectives. Fox squirrel hunting offers excellent opportunities for R3 initiatives (Retention, Recruitment, Reactivation) and mentored or youth hunts.

Fiscal Impact

State Impact

This rule amendment has the potential to benefit the state by increasing hunting license sales, as it is possible that the additional hunting opportunity could provide additional hunter recruitment. However, this benefit is unquantifiable due to lack of data.

Local Impact

This rule has no local government impact.

Private Impact

Fiscal impacts are expected to be limited to those squirrel hunters who take advantage of the

additional hunting opportunity. There may be some increase in taxidermy as hunters in newly opened areas may wish to have fox squirrels mounted. Although the Commission does not have a mechanism to determine the fiscal impact of these opportunities, economic research on the value individuals place on hunting can provide useful context for rules that affect opportunities for this activity. Taking the median of the findings across multiple studies, researchers have estimated that the value of hunting per person per day is approximately \$63.¹

This figure represents individuals' total willingness to pay to engage in the activity, less the cost to do so. It does not represent any economic activity generated by the activity, such as retail sales. Additionally, this estimate is not species or location-specific. However, to the extent that the proposed rule induces hunters to increase or decrease their trips in particular areas of the state, these findings provide a rough approximation of the costs or benefits to the individual. Unfortunately, due to lack of data, the Commission is unable to estimate the potential fiscal impacts at this time.

¹Rosenberger, Randall S.; White, Eric M.; Kline, Jeffrey D.; Cvitanovich, Claire. 2017. Recreation economic values for estimating outdoor recreation economic benefits from the National Forest System. Gen. Tech. Rep. PNWGTR-957. Portland, OR: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station. 33 p.

APPENDIX A

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(a) Squirrel Open Seasons:

(1) Gray and red squirrels may be taken by hunting on the Monday on or closest to October 15 to the last day of February.

(2) Fox squirrels may be taken by hunting on the Monday on or nearest October 15 to ~~December in the counties of Alleghany, Anson, Ashe, Bladen, Brunswick, Cumberland, Duplin, Edgecombe, Greene, Harnett, Hoke, Johnston, Jones, Lenoir, Moore, New Hanover, Onslow, Pender, Pitt, Richmond, Sampson, Scotland, Stokes, Surry, Watauga, Wayne and Wilkes.~~ January 31.

(b) Squirrel Bag Limits:

(1) The daily bag limit for gray and red squirrels is eight and there are no season and no possession limits.

(2) ~~In those counties listed in Subparagraph (a)(2) of this Rule, the~~ The daily bag limit for fox squirrels is one; the possession limit is ~~two~~, two; and the season limit is 10.