



Office of the Secretary
Washington, DC 20250

September 9, 2024

MR. COLLIN O'MARA AND MR. JOHN DEVNEY
Chair, Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council
5275 Leesburg Pie, MS EA
Falls Church, Virginia 22041

Dear Chairman O'Mara:

Thank you for your letter of September 19, 2023, regarding Sunday hunting opportunities on National Forest System lands and the National Wildlife Refuge System. We understand that hunting is an important public use of wildlife resources that is greatly valued by many people, and we are committed to its sustainable management. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service works in partnership with state fish and wildlife agencies to ensure wildlife on our National Forests is managed to maintain ecological benefits to ecosystems and to create recreational opportunities, including wildlife hunting and trapping.

Hunting activities are primarily regulated by the states. The federal government works cooperatively with states to manage wildlife on federal lands, with states bearing most of the responsibility for managing hunting and fishing (see 16 USC § 7901(a)(1) or 43 USC § 1732(b)). Consequently, even though the Forest Service has broad regulatory authority that allows it to regulate hunting and fishing activities, the Forest Service rarely exercises its authority to preempt state laws related to hunting and fishing (see 43 USC § 1732(b) and 36 CFR § 241.2, 261.10(d)).

We have reviewed our database and show no Forest Orders that specifically prohibit hunting, fishing, or recreational shooting on Sundays in Alabama, Delaware, Maryland, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Virginia. We further narrowed and clarified the data search to include the words "discharging a firearm, air rifle, or gas gun" and "hunting or fishing," but we did not find any closure orders on National Forest System lands in the listed states that had specific prohibitions on Sunday hunting.

While we understand your perspectives, it is important to recognize that most federal lands and waters are open to hunting and/or fishing. Stakeholders contend that these areas provide many hunters and anglers with their only access to hunting and fishing. The Forest Service will continue to work with the states to address the numerous aspects related to hunting on the National Forests and Grasslands.

Again, thank you for your letter and for sharing your concerns. If you have further questions, please contact

Sincerely,

THOMAS J. VILSACK
Secretary