

The House Committee on Game, Fish and Parks offers the following substitute to SB 72:

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED  
AN ACT

1 To amend Chapter 1 of Title 27 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to  
2 general provisions relative to game and fish, so as to remove a prohibition on hunting on  
3 wildlife management areas; to change the date of effective rules and regulations of the Board  
4 of Natural Resources; to amend Part 1 of Article 1 of Chapter 3 of Title 27 of the Official  
5 Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to general provisions relative to hunting, so as to  
6 provide for regulation of hunting with air guns of not less than 0.30 caliber; to modify  
7 seasons and bag limits for deer, opossum, and raccoon; to provide for the prohibition of air  
8 guns for hunting in certain circumstances; to modify certain prohibitions relating to  
9 restrictions on hunting feral hogs; to amend various provisions of the Official Code of  
10 Georgia Annotated, so as to make conforming changes; to amend Article 3 of Chapter 3 of  
11 Title 50 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to state symbols, so as to  
12 designate the shoal bass as the official Georgia state native riverine sport fish; to provide for  
13 legislative findings; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other  
14 purposes.

15 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

16 **SECTION 1.**

17 Chapter 1 of Title 27 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to general  
18 provisions relative to game and fish, is amended in Code Section 27-1-33, relating to  
19 noncompliance with laws while on fishing area, fish hatchery, natural area, or wildlife  
20 management area, hunting without wildlife management area license, and acts constituting  
21 criminal trespass, by revising subsection (a) as follows:

22 "(a) It shall be unlawful to enter upon or to hunt, trap, or fish on any public fishing area,  
23 fish hatchery, or natural area, or wildlife management area owned or operated by the  
24 department except in compliance with all applicable laws and all rules and regulations  
25 promulgated by the board, including, but not limited to, any law, rule, or regulation relating  
26 to seasons or bag limits or requiring a special permit. ~~Further, it shall be unlawful for any~~

27 ~~person except those specifically excluded by law to hunt on a wildlife management area~~  
 28 ~~without a valid wildlife management area license as authorized by Code Section 27-2-23."~~

29 **SECTION 2.**

30 Said chapter is further amended by revising Code Section 27-1-39, relating to rules and  
 31 regulations used to establish criminal violations, as follows:

32 "27-1-39.

33 Notwithstanding any other law to the contrary, for purposes of establishing criminal  
 34 violations of the rules and regulations promulgated by the Board of Natural Resources as  
 35 provided in this title, the term 'rules and regulations' means those rules and regulations of  
 36 the Board of Natural Resources in force and effect on January 1, ~~2016~~ 2019."

37 **SECTION 3.**

38 Part 1 of Article 1 of Chapter 3 of Title 27 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated,  
 39 relating to general provisions relative to hunting, is amended in Code Section 27-3-4, relating  
 40 to legal weapons for hunting wildlife generally, prohibition of use of silencers and  
 41 suppressors, and penalty for violations, by revising paragraphs (8) and (9) of and adding a  
 42 new paragraph to subsection (a) and subsection (b) as follows:

43 "(8) There are no firearms restrictions for taking nongame animals, nongame birds, or  
 44 feral hogs; and

45 (9) The use of silencers, ~~or~~ suppressors, or air guns for hunting within this state is  
 46 prohibited; provided, however, that a silencer, ~~or~~ suppressor, or air gun may be used for  
 47 hunting on the private property of the person using such silencer, ~~or~~ suppressor, or air gun  
 48 on private property for which the owner of such property has provided verifiable  
 49 permission to the person using such silencer, ~~or~~ suppressor, or air gun and on public lands  
 50 in areas designated by the department.

51 (10) For purposes of this subsection, the term 'air gun' means any pistol, handgun, or  
 52 shoulder-held device, each of not less than 0.30 caliber, or air bow that propels a  
 53 projectile in the form of a slug, shot, or arrow equipped with a broadhead utilizing  
 54 unignited compressed air or gas. Air guns are legal weapons for hunting big game only  
 55 during primitive weapon hunts, primitive weapon seasons, and firearm seasons. This  
 56 paragraph shall stand repealed effective July 1, 2024, unless continued in effect by the  
 57 General Assembly prior to that date. At its 2024 regular session, the General Assembly  
 58 shall review this paragraph to determine whether it should be continued in effect.

59 (b)(~~†~~) It shall be illegal to use a silencer, ~~or~~ suppressor, or air gun for hunting in violation  
 60 of paragraph (9) of subsection (a) of this Code section. A person who violates the  
 61 provisions of this paragraph shall be guilty of a misdemeanor.

62 (2) The hunting privileges of any person who has been convicted of violating the  
 63 provisions of this title or any rule or regulation promulgated pursuant thereto by hunting  
 64 without landowner permission, hunting in an area that is closed for hunting, or hunting  
 65 big game out of season ~~or at night with a firearm equipped with a suppressor~~ shall be  
 66 suspended for three years."

67 **SECTION 4.**

68 Said part is further amended in Code Section 27-3-15, relating to hunting seasons and bag  
 69 limits, promulgation of rules and regulations by board, possession of more than the bag limit,  
 70 and reporting number of deer killed, by revising subsections (a) and (b) as follows:

71 "(a) It shall be unlawful to hunt the following game species at any time during the periods  
 72 set forth below:

<u>Game Species</u>	<u>Closed Season</u>
(1) Quail	March 16 — Oct. 31
(2) Grouse	March 1 — Oct. 14
(3) Turkey	
(A) Gobblers	May 22 — March 14
(B) Hens	All year
(4) Deer	Jan. 16 — Sept. 7; except that <del>the closed season may be Feb. 1 — Sept. 7 in those counties specified as having an extended archery-only open season in paragraph (4) of subsection (b) of this Code section as may be appropriate, and based solely on sound wildlife management principles, the department may by rule extend the season by region, by county, or locale to Jan. 31 for archery only.</del>
(5) Bobcat	March 1 — Oct. 14
(6) Opossum	March 1 — Oct. 14; <del>for that area north of and including Haralson, Paulding, Bartow, Cherokee, Forsyth, Hall, Banks, Franklin, and Hart counties</del>

- 97 (7) Rabbit March 1 — Oct. 31
- 98 (8) Raccoon March 1 — Oct. 14, ~~for that area~~
- 99 ~~north of and including Carroll,~~
- 100 ~~Fulton, Gwinnett, Barrow, Clarke,~~
- 101 ~~Oglethorpe, Taliaferro, Wilkes, and~~
- 102 ~~Lincoln counties~~
- 103 (9) Squirrel March 1 — August 14
- 104 (10) Bear Jan. 16 — Sept. 7
- 105 (11) Sea turtles and their eggs All year
- 106 (12) Cougar (~~Felis~~ Puma concolor) All year
- 107 (13) Alligators Nov. 1 — March 31
- 108 (14) Migratory game birds March 11 — August 31

109 (b) It shall be unlawful to hunt the following game species at any time during the period  
 110 set forth below, except that it shall not be unlawful to hunt the following game species  
 111 during such periods or portions thereof, and in such number not to exceed the following  
 112 numbers, as may be designated by the board as open seasons and bag limits for such  
 113 species:

Game Species	Maximum Open Season	Maximum Bag Limits	
		Daily	Season
(1) Quail	Nov. 1 — March 15	12	No limit
(2) Grouse	Oct. 15 — Feb. 29	3	No limit
(3) Turkey gobblers	March 15 — May 21	3	3
(4) Deer	Sept. 8 — Jan. 15; except that <del>there may</del> <del>be also an extended archery-only open</del> <del>season Jan. 1 — Jan. 31 in the counties</del> <del>of Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Forsyth,</del> <del>Fulton, Gwinnett, and Rockdale due to</del> <del>the extra need for herd reduction in that</del> <del>urban and suburban area of the state as</del> <del>may be appropriate and based solely on</del> <del>sound wildlife management principles,</del> <del>the department may by rule extend the</del> <del>season by region, by county, or locale to</del> <u>Jan. 31 for archery only</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>12</u> <del>The daily limit shall be</del> <del>ten antlerless deer and</del> <del>two antlered bucks. The</del> <del>season limit shall be ten</del> <del>antlerless deer and two</del> <del>antlered bucks.</del> <del>Only one antlered buck</del> <del>may have less than four</del> <del>points one inch or</del> <del>longer on one side of</del> <del>the antlers.</del>

132			<del>Up to two deer per</del>	
133			<del>managed hunt may be</del>	
134			<del>allowed on wildlife</del>	
135			<del>management areas</del>	
136			<del>without complying</del>	
137			<del>with the state-wide bag</del>	
138			<del>limit.</del>	
139			<u>The department may</u>	
140			<u>by rule exempt deer</u>	
141			<u>taken on department</u>	
142			<u>managed lands from</u>	
143			<u>the state-wide bag</u>	
144			<u>limit.</u>	
145	(5) Bobcat	Oct. 15 — Feb. 29	No limit	No limit
146	(6) Opossum	<del>(A) Oct. 15 — Feb. 29, for that area</del>	No limit	No limit
147		<del>north of and including Haralson,</del>		
148		<del>Paulding, Bartow, Cherokee, Forsyth,</del>		
149		<del>Hall, Banks, Franklin, and Hart counties;</del>		
150		<del>and</del>		
151		<del>(B) Jan. 1 — Dec. 31 for the</del>	No limit	No limit
152		<del>remainder of the state</del>		
153	(7) Rabbit	Nov. 1 — Feb. 29	12	No limit
154	(8) Raccoon	<del>(A) Oct. 15 — Feb. 29, for that area</del>	No limit	No limit
155		<del>north of and including Carroll, Fulton,</del>		
156		<del>Gwinnett, Barrow, Clarke, Oglethorpe,</del>		
157		<del>Taliaferro, Wilkes, and Lincoln counties;</del>		
158		<del>and</del>		
159		<del>(B) Jan. 1 — Dec. 31 for the</del>	No limit	No limit
160		<del>remainder of the state</del>		
161	(9) Squirrel	Aug. 15 — Feb. 29	12	No limit
162	(10) Fox	Jan. 1 — Dec. 31	No limit	No limit
163	(11) Migratory	Sept. 1 — March 10	Subject to limits set	
164	game		by the federal	
165	birds		government and	
166			adopted by the board	

167	(12) Bear	Sept. 8 — Jan. 15	2	2
168			<u>The department may by</u>	
169			<u>rule exempt bear taken</u>	
170			<u>on department managed</u>	
171			<u>lands from the</u>	
172			<u>state-wide bag limit.</u>	
173	(13) Alligators	April 1 — Oct. 31	Subject to limits	
174			adopted by the board"	

175 **SECTION 5.**

176 Said part is further amended in Code Section 27-3-24, relating to restrictions on hunting feral  
177 hogs, by revising subsection (a.2) as follows:

178 "(a.2) ~~It shall be unlawful for~~ Nothing in this Code section shall prohibit any person to  
179 place, expose, deposit, distribute, or scatter from placing, exposing, depositing,  
180 distributing, or scattering any corn, wheat, or other grains, salts, apples, or other feed or  
181 bait so as to constitute a lure, attraction, or enticement for feral hogs within 50 yards of  
182 any property ownership boundary; provided, however, that any such lure, attraction, or  
183 enticement shall not be placed, exposed, deposited, distributed, or scattered so as to cause  
184 hunting any species of wildlife on any adjoining property to be prohibited under this  
185 Code section."

186 **SECTION 6.**

187 The Official Code of Georgia Annotated is amended by replacing "conservation ranger" with  
188 "game warden" and "conservation rangers" with "game wardens" wherever the former terms  
189 occur in:

- 190 (1) Code Section 12-5-289, relating to inspection of marshlands;  
191 (2) Code Section 16-10-24, relating to obstructing or hindering law enforcement officers and  
192 penalties;  
193 (3) Code Section 16-11-129, relating to weapons carry license, gun safety information,  
194 temporary renewal permit, mandamus, and verification of license;  
195 (4) Code Section 27-1-6, relating to powers and duties of the Department of Natural  
196 Resources generally;  
197 (5) Code Section 27-1-16, relating to establishment of a unit for conservation rangers,  
198 qualifications, appointment, and supervisory personnel, and retention of badge and weapon  
199 upon disability retirement;  
200 (6) Code Section 27-1-17, relating to deputy conservation rangers;  
201 (7) Code Section 27-1-18, relating to powers of conservation rangers generally;

- 202 (8) Code Section 27-1-19, relating to power of conservation rangers and deputy conservation  
203 rangers to arrest persons and procedure upon failure of person arrested to appear to answer  
204 charges;
- 205 (9) Code Section 27-1-20, relating to additional powers of conservation rangers and  
206 functions of other agencies assigned to department;
- 207 (10) Code Section 27-1-21, relating to seizure of disposal of wildlife illegally taken or  
208 possessed, civil action by possessor, disposal of wildlife unable to be stored, and disposition  
209 of unmarketable items;
- 210 (11) Code Section 27-1-24, relating to inspection of vessels and boats;
- 211 (12) Code Section 27-1-25, relating to interference with arrest or performance of ranger's  
212 duties;
- 213 (13) Code Section 27-2-5, relating to required hunter education courses;
- 214 (14) Code Section 27-2-28, relating to refusing inspection of identification or license,  
215 making false statements in obtaining a license or permit, counterfeiting or alteration, and  
216 unlawful collection of funds;
- 217 (15) Code Section 27-3-9, relating to unlawful enticement of game;
- 218 (16) Code Section 27-3-49, relating to killing of dogs running deer;
- 219 (17) Code Section 27-3-63, relating to general offenses and penalties;
- 220 (18) Code Section 27-3-68, relating to confiscation and disposal of unlawful devices;
- 221 (19) Code Section 27-3-71, relating to reports and records of fur dealers and inspection of  
222 premises;
- 223 (20) Code Section 27-3-92, relating to transportation of wildlife out of state;
- 224 (21) Code Section 27-4-2, relating to fishing in waters or from lands of another without  
225 permission and obstruction or interference with rights of others;
- 226 (22) Code Section 27-4-5, relating to methods for taking fish generally;
- 227 (23) Code Section 27-4-7, relating to use of gill nets and seizure of illegal nets;
- 228 (24) Code Section 27-4-76, relating to licensing of wholesale and retail fish dealers and sale,  
229 transportation into state, or possession of live fish and fish eggs;
- 230 (25) Code Section 27-4-92, relating to lawful baskets;
- 231 (26) Code Section 27-4-150, relating to taking, possessing, and dealing in crabs and peelers  
232 and required records;
- 233 (27) Code Section 27-4-151, relating to use of crab traps, identification of boats or vessels,  
234 and closure of salt waters authorized;
- 235 (28) Code Section 27-4-199, relating to evidence of intent to use as food and inspection of  
236 businesses;
- 237 (29) Code Section 35-4-2, relating to definitions relative to the Georgia Police Academy;

- 238 (30) Code Section 42-8-60, relating to probation prior to adjudication of guilt, violation of  
 239 probation, and review of criminal record by judge;
- 240 (31) Code Section 47-2-110, relating to retirement ages, application and eligibility for a  
 241 retirement allowance, suspension of retirement allowance upon reemployment, and health  
 242 benefits;
- 243 (32) Code Section 47-2-111, relating to persons eligible to retire at age 55;
- 244 (33) Code Section 47-2-221, relating to disability allowances payable to personnel for  
 245 certain disabilities arising in the line of duty;
- 246 (34) Code Section 47-2-226, relating to certain law enforcement officers permitted to obtain  
 247 creditable service in retirement system under certain conditions, "law enforcement officer"  
 248 defined, and payment of full actuarial value to applicant; and
- 249 (35) Code Section 52-7-25, relating to enforcement of general provisions regarding  
 250 watercraft.

251 **SECTION 7.**

252 The Georgia General Assembly finds that:

- 253 (1) The shoal bass has unique sporting qualities; occurs in abundance in the Flint,  
 254 Chattahoochee, and Ocmulgee rivers; and is dependent upon clean, flowing water;
- 255 (2) This unique native riverine sport fish moves dozens, and at times hundreds, of miles  
 256 to complete its spawning and other life stages and is therefore dependent upon long,  
 257 unobstructed segments of Georgia's rivers, in addition to high-quality shoal habitats;
- 258 (3) Both the hard rock formations of Georgia's piedmont region and the lime rock  
 259 formations of Georgia's coastal plain are important to this unique native riverine sport  
 260 fish, and important fishing and tourist economies are structured around this creature; and
- 261 (4) Georgia fishing has long been a tourism generator and internal economic engine. In  
 262 recent decades, Georgia's reputation for flowing water fishing has grown in national and  
 263 international recognition, and shoal bass are at the center of this burgeoning revenue  
 264 stream.

265 **SECTION 8.**

266 Article 3 of Chapter 3 of Title 50 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to state  
 267 symbols, is amended by adding a new Code section to read as follows:

268 "50-3-89.

269 The shoal bass (*Micropterus cataractae*) is designated as the official Georgia state native  
 270 riverine sport fish."



271

**SECTION 9.**

272 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.