



Senate Fiscal Agency
P. O. Box 30036
Lansing, Michigan 48909-7536

BILL ANALYSIS



Telephone: (517) 373-5383
Fax: (517) 373-1986
TDD: (517) 373-0543

Senate Bill 633 (as reported without amendment)
Sponsor: Senator Gerald Van Woerkom
Committee: Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs

Date Completed: 7-31-07

RATIONALE

Under the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, residents who meet certain criteria classifying them as disabled veterans are eligible to purchase a senior hunting or fishing license, the fee for which is discounted 60% from the fee for a resident license. With this license, a disabled veteran may hunt during the regular November hunting season. Adverse weather during that time of the year, however, can present obstacles to a disabled person's ability to hunt. Since the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) has established an annual two-day youth hunting season near the end of September, it has been suggested that a special disabled veterans hunting season be created to coincide with future designated youth hunting days.

CONTENT

The bill would amend Part 435 (Hunting and Fishing Licensing) of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act to establish a disabled veterans firearm deer season on all land in the State.

The disabled veterans firearm deer season would have to correspond with the youth firearm hunting days, if any, established by order of the NRC. A disabled veteran could take one deer during the season. A disabled veteran taking deer during the season would have to possess a current firearm deer license, combination deer license, or antlerless deer license or a deer management assistance permit authorizing him or her to take a deer with a firearm and issued for the area or land upon which he or

she was hunting. The same kind of deer could be taken during the disabled veterans season as during the regular November firearm deer season.

Under Part 435, a resident who has been determined by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to be permanently and totally disabled and entitled to veterans benefits at the 100% rate, for a disability other than blindness, is eligible to purchase a senior hunting or fishing license at the discounted rate. Under the bill, a "disabled veteran" would be eligible to purchase a senior hunting or fishing license. "Disabled veteran" would be defined as described above, except that the person would have to be disabled as a result of military service.

MCL 324.43537

ARGUMENTS

(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)

Supporting Argument

While disabled veterans with licenses may hunt during the regular November deer hunting season, cold temperatures, snow, and ice can interfere with their mobility and present risks to their health. By establishing a special disabled veterans season that coincided with the earlier youth hunting days, when the weather is better and fewer hunters are in the field, the bill would enable more people to take advantage of hunting opportunities. Although the NRC already designates a two-day hunting season for the disabled in October, it is not specifically for

veterans and participation is determined by lottery. Those who have become permanently disabled as a result of military service have made an incalculable sacrifice, and creating a special hunting season for them would be one way to demonstrate gratitude for their service. Evidently, veterans groups, businesses, and members of the law enforcement community have expressed an interest in volunteering their time and equipment to assist disabled veterans in getting outdoors and having a safe, enjoyable hunting experience.

Response: For the first year, the bill should restrict the disabled veterans hunting season to pilot projects rather than establish a statewide season. The NRC then could consider the outcome of the pilot projects in conjunction with a more comprehensive review of the State's policies and practices regarding disabled hunters.

In another matter, the definition of "disabled veteran" should be revised. Many veterans have experienced significant disabilities as a result of military service, but do not meet the statutory threshold of being permanently and totally disabled and entitled to veterans benefits at the 100% rate. In recognition of their service to the country and their sacrifice, perhaps the definition should refer to a person who is "individually unemployable", a classification of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs that acknowledges that the effects of some service-connected conditions do not meet the criteria for permanent and total disability but can interfere with a person's ability to work.

Legislative Analyst: Julie Cassidy

FISCAL IMPACT

The establishment of a disabled veterans firearm deer season would have an indeterminate effect on the revenue collected from fishing and hunting licenses by the Department of Natural Resources. To the extent that the bill would result in more veterans' purchasing hunting licenses, the State would see an increase in revenue. Currently, veterans who are classified as 100% disabled for disabilities other than blindness by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs are eligible to purchase a senior fishing or hunting license. The current price for a Senior Firearm Deer

License is \$6 and the price for a Senior Combination Deer License (covering both archery and firearms hunting) is \$12. The bill does not call for any changes to this fee schedule.

Fiscal Analyst: Stephanie Yu

A0708\633a

This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.