



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 (Substitute S-1 as passed by the Senate)
Sponsor: Senator Gerald Van Woerkom
Committee: Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs

Date Completed: 8-9-07

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. To expand their hunting opportunities, it has been suggested that a special disabled veterans hunting season be created to coincide with youth hunting days, which are designated under a Natural Resources Commission (NRC) order establishing an annual two-day youth hunting season near the end of September. Additionally, it has been suggested that the criteria to qualify as a "disabled veteran" be revised to include veterans whose disabilities are not total and permanent.

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 as a pilot project in 2007.

The pilot project would be held in at least three areas of the State, including Marquette, Mason, and Newaygo Counties. The 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.

These provisions would not limit the NRC's authority under the Act to establish a special hunting season in any area of the State for veterans with disabilities or other classes of individuals.

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 a resident who has been determined by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to be "in individually unemployable status as a result of military service" (rather than "permanently and totally disabled") and entitled to veterans' benefits, for a disability other than blindness.

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 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.

Veterans groups, businesses, landowners, and members of the law enforcement community have expressed an interest in volunteering their land, time, and equipment to assist disabled veterans in getting outdoors and having a safe, enjoyable hunting experience. A hunt is already in the planning stages on the west side of the State, should the legislation be enacted. Using that hunt, as well as those in other areas specified in the bill, as a pilot project, the NRC could determine whether the disabled veterans season should be held in the future and expanded statewide. The pilot also would be helpful to the NRC in conjunction with a more comprehensive review of the State's policies and practices regarding disabled hunters.

Supporting Argument

Revising the definition of "disabled veteran" would take into account that 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. "Individually unemployable" is 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 pilot program for 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
Briana Kleidon, Intern

A0708\633b

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.