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BILL ANALYSIS



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Senate Bill 633 (as enacted)

PUBLIC ACT 60 of 2007

Sponsor: Senator Gerald Van Woerkom

Senate Committee: Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs

House Committee: Tourism, Outdoor Recreation and Natural Resources

Date Completed: 9-20-07

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 was 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 was 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 amended 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 must be held in at least three areas of the State, including Marquette County and deer management units 053 and 064 (Mason and Oceana Counties, respectively). The season must correspond with the youth firearm hunting days, if any, established by order of the NRC. A disabled veteran may take one deer during the

season. A disabled veteran taking deer during the season must 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 is hunting. The same kind of deer may be taken during the disabled veterans season as during the regular November firearm deer season.

These provisions do 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.

Previously, under Part 435, a resident who had 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, was eligible to purchase a senior hunting or fishing license at the discounted rate. Under the bill, a "disabled veteran" is eligible to purchase a senior hunting or fishing license. The bill defines "disabled veteran" as either of the following:

- A resident who has been determined by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to be permanently and totally disabled as a result of military service and entitled to veteran's benefits at the 100% rate, for a disability other than blindness.
- A resident rated by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs as individually unemployable.

The bill took effect on September 18, 2007.

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 coincides with the earlier youth hunting days, when the weather is better and fewer hunters are in the field, the bill will enable more people to take advantage of hunting opportunities. Although the NRC also 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 is one way to demonstrate gratitude for their service.

Veterans groups, businesses, landowners, and members of the law enforcement community 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 has been in the planning stages on the west side of the State, pending enactment of this legislation. Using that hunt, as well as those in other areas specified in the bill, as a pilot project, the NRC will be able to determine whether the disabled veterans season should be held in the future and expanded statewide. The pilot also will 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" takes into account that many veterans experience significant disabilities as a result of military service, but do not meet the 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 will 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 results in more veterans' purchasing senior hunting or fishing licenses, the State will see an increase in revenue. 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

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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.