

Senate Fiscal Agency
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SFA**BILL ANALYSIS**

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Senate Bill 977 (Substitute S-5 as reported)
Sponsor: Senator Joel D. Gougeon
Committee: Hunting, Fishing and Forestry

Date Completed: 6-2-98

RATIONALE

According to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), there are many areas in the southern Lower Peninsula of the State where the deer population is above the DNR's objective levels. Reportedly, in 1996 Michigan had an estimated 2 million deer; 700,000 more than the 1.3 million deer conservation officials determined to be ideal. As a result, deer overpopulation has destroyed crops, depleted other plants and lower vegetation, caused vehicle-deer accidents, and resulted in the starvation of deer, among other things. The DNR has considered various wildlife management policies to control the increasing deer population, such as the issuance of more antlerless deer hunting permits, redistribution of the herd population, expansion of hunting seasons, and limits on buck (male deer) harvest.

Many people believe that lawful hunting by licensed hunters should be the preferred method of reducing game population, unless there was concern for the health, safety, and welfare of the public.

CONTENT

The bill would amend Part 435 (Hunting and Fishing Licenses) of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act to provide that the Department of Natural Resources would be required to use lawful hunting by licensed members of the public as the preferred method of reducing game populations unless the health, safety, or welfare of the public required that a different method be used.

MCL 324.43526

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

The bill would address the deer overpopulation problem by establishing that hunting by licensed hunters would be the preferred method of reducing game population unless a different method was required to maintain the health, safety, or welfare of the public. The bill would provide flexibility in the management of wildlife for unique circumstances, such as outbreaks of bovine tuberculosis in deer. The recent outbreaks of bovine TB in five Michigan counties has forced the Governor to issue an executive directive to ban year-round feeding of deer and the Department to issue directives to ban deer captivity and limit types of bait used by hunters to minimize the chance of deer having nose-to-nose contact.

Response: The DNR supports hunting as a legitimate and useful tool in the management of the wildlife resource. The bill's provisions, however, would reiterate the DNR's current wildlife management policies. Ballot Proposal G of 1996 amended the NREPA to give the Commission exclusive authority to regulate the taking of game in the State, using principles of sound scientific management. Hunting policies should be formed by professional wildlife managers.

Opposing Argument

Increased hunting actually could exacerbate the deer overpopulation problem, according to The Fund for Animals in Baltimore, Maryland. Hunting deer is not only inhumane, but also ineffective in solving any type of conflict between humans and deer. Like other animals, deer breed more when their species is attacked. It would be better to control deer by putting up fencing and planting vegetation the deer find unpalatable.

Response: These and other options have been considered and found to be unacceptable or not feasible.

Legislative Analyst: N. Nagata

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would have no fiscal impact on State or local government.

Fiscal Analyst: G. Cutler

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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.