

"HUNTERS HELPING LANDOWNERS" PROGRAM

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Senate Bill 717 (Substitute S-4)

Sponsor: Sen. John Proos

House Committee: Natural Resources, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation

Senate Committee: Outdoor Recreation and Tourism

First Analysis (6-12-12)

BRIEF SUMMARY: The bill would create a new program, known as the Hunters Helping Landowners program, for the harvest of antlerless deer. Individuals willing to harvest antlerless deer could submit an application to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) indicating where they are willing to harvest deer. Landowners who feel they need additional antlerless deer harvested on their property could contact the DNR and request a list of the individuals willing to harvest deer in the landowner's county.

The bill is intended as a complementary program to the deer damage shooting permit program, which allows for the issuance of deer damage shooting permits statewide to owners of land with significant, documented agricultural or horticultural crop damage

FISCAL IMPACT: Senate Bill 717 would have an indeterminate fiscal impact on the Department of Natural Resources. Any additional costs to the Department would depend upon the increased administrative workload incurred from the bill's provisions that the Department establish the new Hunters Helping Landowners Program, promote the program, process applications of interested hunters, compile lists of registered hunters by county, and post specific program information on the DNR website. The bill does not require an application fee, so there is no additional revenue being provided to the DNR for the expenses of the new program.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Part 401 (Wildlife Conservation) of NREPA allows the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to issue permits for the taking of certain animals for various purposes, including to prevent or control damage and nuisance caused by the animals.

As authorized under Part 401, Chapter 5 (Special Permit Regulations), Section 5.41, of the DNR Wildlife Conservation Order establishes guidelines for the issuance of deer damage shooting permits statewide to owners of land with significant, documented agricultural or horticultural crop damage (See **Background Information**). Permits authorize both the number of deer that can be taken and the time period during which the permit is valid. In accordance with Public Act 65 of 2012, landowners can designate up to 15 shooters to implement the provisions of the permit.

According to committee testimony, the deer population causes significant crop damage throughout the state. To remedy this problem, farmers are able to apply to the DNR for a

deer damage shooting permit to take a certain number of deer on the property. However, it can be difficult to find an adequate number of shooters available when a deer needs to be taken. This bill is intended to create a list within the DNR for farmers to use to fulfill the provisions of their permits. It will allow individuals to be placed on a list for certain counties if they are interested in participating in the program. Hunters operating under the "Hunters Helping Landowners" program would be subject to the provisions of the deer damage shooting permit program.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill amends Part 435 (Hunting and Fishing Licensing) of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act to require the DNR to establish a new program, known as the Hunters Helping Landowners program, for the harvest of antlerless deer.

The program must allow an individual willing to harvest antlerless deer to submit an application to the DNR to participate, indicating where the participant is willing to harvest the deer. Applicants could select up to two counties. Landowners that felt they needed additional antlerless deer harvested on their property could contact the DNR and request a list with all the individuals willing to harvest antlerless deer in landowner's county.

The DNR would have to include a notification in any list sent to landowners that the DNR has not verified that the individuals included on the list possess valid hunting licenses. On January 1 of each year the DNR would have to delete all information pertaining to hunters that are willing to harvest antlerless deer that was obtained during the previous year.

The DNR would also be required to make each of the following available on its website:

- A list of all the deer hunting licenses and permits available in the state.
- The criteria for qualifying for each of the licenses or permits.
- A list of where to obtain the licenses or permits.

All forms and information about the Hunters Helping Landowners program would have to indicate the program is voluntary.

The program would be automatically repealed on January 1, 2017.

Proposed MCL 324.43526a

HOUSE COMMITTEE ACTION:

The committee reported the Senate-passed bill without amendment.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Wildlife Conservation Order (as updated 2-14-12). Chapter V of the Wildlife Conservation Order, together with Part 401 of NREPA, authorize the Department of Natural Resources to issue deer damage shooting permits to owners of specific lands with significant agricultural or horticultural crop damage.

The current Wildlife Conservation Order (Chapter V) governing the issuance of deer damage shooting permits may be found at:

http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-10366_37141-120756--,00.html

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The bill would allow for the creation and maintenance of a list within the DNR that farmers could utilize in fulfilling the provisions of a deer damage shooting permit. It can be very difficult for farmers to find a sufficient number of people willing to be a designated shooter under a deer damage shooting permit. The bill would allow individuals willing to harvest antlerless deer to submit an application to the DNR indicating where the applicant is willing to harvest the deer. Landowners who feel they need additional antlerless deer harvested on their property could contact the DNR and request a list with all the individuals willing to harvest antlerless deer in landowner's county. The bill would essentially create a list within the DNR where landowners could find individuals within their county that are willing to harvest deer under a deer damage shooting permit. Individuals hunting under this program would be subject to the provisions established for the deer damage shooting permit program.

Against:

There was no opposition at the committee level.

POSITIONS:

Michigan Farm Bureau supports the bill. (6-12-12)

Michigan Department of Natural Resources is neutral on the bill. (6-12-12)

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■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.