



Senate Fiscal Agency
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BILL ANALYSIS

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Senate Bill 207 (Substitute S-2 as reported)
Sponsor: Senator Joe Hune
Committee: Outdoor Recreation and Tourism

Date Completed: 3-14-11

RATIONALE

For a number of years, Michigan has experienced a decline in the number of people who hunt. Reportedly, the State ranks last in the nation in hunter recruitment and retention, replacing only 26 out of every 100 people who leave the field. Age restrictions are considered to be one factor contributing to the declining popularity of the sport. Currently, a child must be at least 10 years old to hunt, or 12 years old to hunt deer, bear, or elk with a firearm. It has been suggested that the minimum age requirements be eliminated, and that a mentored youth hunting program be implemented to encourage children under 10 to take up the sport.

CONTENT

The bill would amend Part 435 (Hunting and Fishing Licensing) of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act to do the following:

- **Eliminate the minimum hunting age.**
- **Require the Natural Resources Commission to establish a mentored youth hunting program.**
- **Establish a mentored youth hunting license for a person younger than 10, and allow a licensee to hunt with a mentor who was at least 21 in accordance with the program.**
- **Require the Department of Natural Resources to report to the Legislature every four years regarding the adequacy of the revenue from mentored youth hunting licenses.**

The bill would take effect on September 1, 2011.

Minimum Hunting Age

Under Part 435, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) may issue a hunting license to a minor child (a person under 17) if all of the following requirements are met:

- A parent or legal guardian applies for the license on behalf of the minor child.
- The parent or guardian represents that the requirements of Part 435 regarding the conditions under which a minor may hunt will be complied with.
- The minor child is at least 10 years old or, if the license is a license to hunt deer, bear, or elk with a firearm, at least 12 years old.

The bill would retain these provisions but delete the minimum age requirements.

Part 435 requires the DNR to issue a combination deer license that authorizes an individual to hunt deer both during the firearm deer seasons and during the bow and arrow seasons. The bill would eliminate a provision stating that a combination deer license issued to a person younger than 12 is valid only for taking deer with a bow and arrow, until the person is at least 12 years old.

Under Part 435, the fee for a resident fur harvester's license is \$15. For a resident or nonresident who is 12 through 16 years old, the fee is discounted 50% from the cost of the resident license. The bill would refer to a minor child, rather than a person who is 12 through 16 years old.

Mentored Youth Hunting Program & License

NRC Order. Within one year after the bill took effect, the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) would have to issue an order establishing a mentored youth hunting program. The order would have to require that a mentor be at least 21 years old before participating in the program, and that a mentor possess a valid hunting license, other than an apprentice license, before engaging in any mentored youth hunting program. The order also would have to provide that an individual could not be a mentor unless he or she presented proof of previous hunting experience in the form of a previous hunting license, other than an apprentice license, or certification of completion of training in hunter safety issued by the State of Michigan, another state, a province of Canada, or another country.

Mentored Youth License. Under the bill, a minor who was younger than 10 years old could obtain a mentored youth hunting license. The minor could not hunt game under such a license unless he or she complied with all requirements of the mentored youth hunting program established by the NRC. The fee for a mentored youth hunting license would be \$7.50, and would include all of the following:

- Resident small game license.
- Combination deer license.
- All species fishing license.
- Turkey hunting license.
- Resident fur harvester's license.

Minor Child: Hunting Conditions. Part 435 prohibits a parent or legal guardian of a minor child from permitting or allowing the child to hunt game under the authority of a license except under specified conditions. Depending on the child's age and the type of license, the child might be limited to hunting on private property; he or she might have to be accompanied by a parent or guardian, or another authorized person who is at least 18 or 21; or both conditions might apply.

Also, under the bill, a parent or guardian could allow a minor child who was younger than 10 to hunt only with a mentor in compliance with the mentored youth hunting program.

DNR Report. Within four years after the bill took effect, and every four years after that, the DNR would have to submit to the standing committees of the Senate and House of Representatives with primary responsibility for conservation and outdoor recreation issues a report evaluating whether the fee revenue the Department received from mentored youth hunting licenses was adequate to administer the mentored youth hunting program.

MCL 324.43507 et al.

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

Individuals engaged in hunting and fishing reportedly spend approximately \$3.4 billion in Michigan every year and generate hundreds of millions of dollars in tax revenue. In addition, hunters play an important role in wildlife conservation and management through the license fees they pay and by helping to control animal populations. For these reasons, waning participation in hunting is troubling, and measures should be taken to reverse the downward trend.

The State's minimum age requirements present a significant barrier to new hunter recruitment. Children have numerous opportunities for extracurricular activities and hobbies, and before they reach the age at which they are allowed to hunt, their schedules are often filled with other choices. In addition, some parents who hunt choose to forgo the experience rather than exclude their children who are too young to participate. Reportedly, most lifelong hunters are introduced to the sport in early childhood. Eliminating the age threshold would enable parents to determine when their children were mature enough to hunt and instill enthusiasm for the sport at an early age.

Children who hunt under the guidance of experienced family members develop respect for the outdoors, a sense of stewardship, and safe hunting habits that they carry into adulthood. Reportedly, in states with a minimum age limit, hunting incident rates are about 10% higher than in

states without such a requirement. According to the U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance, hunters accompanied by experienced mentors are seven times safer than the general hunting population. Under the mentored youth hunting program proposed by the bill, young people would be introduced to hunting in a safe, controlled environment. The program would help foster Michigan's hunting heritage and all of its associated benefits.

Legislative Analyst: Julie Cassidy

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would require the NRC to establish, and the DNR to administer a youth hunting program. The \$7.50 fee for youth hunting licenses would bring some unknown amount of revenue into the Department. The revenue would be credited to the Game and Fish Fund. The bill also would require the Department to report to the Legislature every four years on the adequacy of the fee. The DNR also would experience some increased costs as a result of administering the program. It is unknown whether the new revenue would exceed the additional costs; therefore, the fiscal impact of the bill is indeterminate.

Fiscal Analyst: Josh Sefton

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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.