

Legislative Analysis



MICHIGAN WOODCOCK RESTORATION PLAN

Phone: (517) 373-8080
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House Bill 5631 as reported from committee

Sponsor: Rep. John D. Cherry

Committee: Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation

Complete to 7-20-22

Analysis available at
<http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

SUMMARY:

House Bill 5631 would amend Part 405 (Wildlife Restoration, Management, and Research) of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act to require the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to create a plan to restore populations of American woodcock (*Scolopax minor*). The DNR would have to develop the plan in consultation with the following entities:

- The American Woodcock Society.
- The Ruffed Grouse Society.
- The Michigan United Conservation Clubs.
- The Wildlife Management Institute.
- The DNR's Timber and Forest Products Advisory Council.
- The United States Forest Service.
- The United States Fish and Wildlife Service.
- Other interested persons.

The plan would have to include all of the following:

- Interim and final habitat and population goals for American woodcock and associated species for the entire state and for each region of the state, state or national forest management unit, state wildlife area, and state game area.
- Habitat treatments.
- Use of good neighbor authority under federal law on national forest lands.
- Information identifying American woodcock habitat needs on private lands, methods to expand woodcock habitat and populations on private lands, and implementation of those methods.
- Any other measures necessary to restore American woodcock populations.

The DNR would have to do all of the following:

- Submit the initial plan by December 31, 2023, to the House and Senate standing committees with primary responsibility for natural resources issues.
- Review the plan every five years, in consultation with the entities consulted in developing the plan, and update the plan as needed.
- Submit updated plans to the House and Senate standing committees with primary responsibility for natural resources issues.
- On July 1 of every year, submit a report on progress in meeting the goals in the plan to the House and Senate standing committees with primary responsibility for natural resources issues.

Proposed MCL 324.40503

BRIEF DISCUSSION:

Supporters of the bill note that the woodcock population has experienced a 1% decline each year for the past 50 years, resulting in a need for action to be taken to ensure the continued survival and success of the species. Proponents point to the positive economic impact of hunting and recreation in Michigan and cite the hunting of woodcock as a key part of the hunting appeal of the state.

The DNR indicated opposition to the bill (though not opposition to management of woodcock populations or habitat in general) because no other population management plans currently exist in state statute and the creation of one specific to woodcock may conflict with other habitat management plans. Woodcock are now one of 41 featured species in Michigan,¹ and the DNR does not see the need for a separate restoration plan, adding that the bill would create issues in balancing a statutory requirement to create and implement a woodcock restoration plan alongside other state and federal obligations regarding habitat management.

FISCAL IMPACT:

House Bill 5631 is likely to increase costs for the DNR by requiring the creation of a departmental plan to restore American woodcock populations. The extent of this cost increase is unclear at present. The bill does not provide funding to support these costs, so costs are likely to be covered by extant appropriations. The DNR's Forest Resources Division and Wildlife Division may be involved in the creation of the aforementioned plan. Their FY 2021-22 appropriations are \$62.3 million Gross (\$6.8 million GF/GP) and \$46.7 million Gross (\$4.5 million GF/GP), respectively. The department's FY 2021-22 total appropriations are \$464.3 million Gross (\$48.6 million GF/GP). The bill is unlikely to have an impact on DNR revenues, local government costs, or local government revenues.

POSITIONS:

The following entities testified in support of the bill (3-17-22):

- Nimrod Education Center
- Ruffed Grouse Society

The following entities indicated support for the bill (3-17-22):

- Wildlife Management Institute
- Audubon Great Lakes

The Department of Natural Resources testified in opposition to the bill. (3-17-22)

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

¹ See https://www2.dnr.state.mi.us/PUBLICATIONS/pdfs/HuntingWildlifeHabitat/Featured_Species/MDNR_Wildlife_explain_featured_species.pdf

Also https://www2.dnr.state.mi.us/PUBLICATIONS/pdfs/HuntingWildlifeHabitat/Featured_Species/MDNR_featured_species_guidance_-_woodcock.pdf