



**House  
Legislative  
Analysis  
Section**

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## PRESERVE WILD TURKEY POPULATION

House Bills 4007 and 4008 as enrolled  
Third Analysis (6-29-89)

Sponsor: Rep. John D. Pridnia  
House Committee: Tourism & Recreation  
Senate Committee: Natural Resources and  
Environmental Affairs

### **THE APPARENT PROBLEM:**

Efforts have been made within the past few years to increase Michigan's wild turkey population. However, the number of these birds continue to be dramatically decreased due to the introduction of domestic (farm-bred) turkeys into the population. Domestic birds are sometimes introduced in the wild by people attempting to establish a wild turkey population. These efforts fail because domestic turkeys are typically tame and easy prey when introduced in the wild. In addition, the domestic birds often spread diseases to wild turkeys, thereby accelerating the demise of the wild population. Although current law prohibits the introduction of domestic birds into the wild, the law has not served as deterrent to the illegal release of turkeys. Legislation has been proposed to address the illegal release of domestic turkeys.

Reportedly, approximately 50 years ago the DNR attempted to increase bird populations by establishing a limit on the minimum number of birds to be released each year during the shooting preserve season. Today there is no need for the minimum limit because most bird populations have been firmly established. In addition, the designation of limits for the taking or release of animals is currently regulated by the Natural Resources Commission through the rule making process. Therefore, legislation has been proposed to delete the minimum release limit and allow the commission to continue regulation of the number and types of animals to be stocked and released.

### **THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:**

Under current law, a person cannot maintain game in captivity or propagate or sell game without a valid license. House Bill 4007 would require all wild turkeys or wild turkey hybrids covered by a license to have one wing pinioned (clipped) within fourteen days of hatching. The bill would also prohibit the removal of game from licensed premises by persons other than game breeders, shooting preserve operators, or persons holding permits authorizing the possession of the game. Further, the bill would prohibit the removal of wild turkeys or turkey hybrids from licensed premises unless they were pinioned. Under the bill, removal of the fertile eggs of wild turkeys and turkey hybrids from licensed premises would be prohibited. The bill would also prohibit the release of game birds from licensed premises without the written permission of the director of the DNR.

The bill would clarify that a license could be suspended or revoked when a license holder failed to comply with any requirement of the act or was convicted of violating the act. The bill would also provide for the consistent use of terminology relating to game birds by ascribing to the term "game" the same meaning that it has in the Wildlife Conservation Act. (That definition lists over 30 types of animals including wild turkeys.) Finally, the bill would allow

the Natural Resources Commission to issue orders to permit the shooting of game birds, protect the public interest, and provide for the proper administration of the act. Commission orders would have to be issued according to the provisions in the Wildlife Conservation Act governing the issuance of commission orders.

MCL 317.71 et al.

House Bill 4008 would amend the act regulating shooting preserves to require preserves with animals not native or commonly found in the wild in Michigan to be adequately fenced and maintained to keep animals in complete and continuous captivity as approved by the director of the DNR. The bill would also require wild turkey or wild turkey hybrids to have one wing pinioned and to be fenced and released in compliance with regulations established by the DNR. In addition, birds that could be hunted under a shooting preserve license would be limited to artificially propagated wild turkeys and wild turkey hybrids and other artificially propagated species as prescribed by the director of the DNR. (Currently, the act simply specifies artificially propagated species.) Finally, the bill would require that animals held under a suspended or revoked license (in addition to birds, as currently specified) would have to be disposed of as approved by the department.

The bill would also delete a provision of the law which establishes a minimum release limit of 100 birds during the shooting preserve season. The bill would authorize the director of the DNR to promulgate rules governing the act's administration and would allow the Natural Resources Commission to issue orders governing the administration of the act. Commission orders would have to be issued according to provisions in the Wildlife Conservation Act governing the issuance of commission orders.

MCL 317.301 et al.

### **FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:**

According to the Senate Fiscal Agency, the bills would have no immediate fiscal implications for the state; however, reduction in the wild turkey population due to inbreeding with or disease from domestic turkeys could result in decreased state revenue and potentially increased state costs.

Turkey hunting permit sales have been steadily increasing and generated over \$350,000 in revenue for fiscal year 1987-88. Reduction in the population could result in a decrease in this revenue source.

For fiscal year 1988-89, the DNR employed two staff persons at a cost of \$160,000 (from permit revenue) to administer the turkey habitat program. The DNR has made an approximately \$300,000 investment in importing wild

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turkeys from other states, and at present does not intend to continue this aspect of the program. A decrease in the wild turkey flock may prompt the need for renewal of importation or additional trapping and transporting activities. (4-4-89)

## **ARGUMENTS:**

### ***For:***

Within the past five years the DNR has implemented a program, designed to increase the state's wild turkey population, that involved the importation of wild turkeys from other states for release in Michigan. The DNR reportedly imported 600 wild turkeys at a cost of \$500 each and projects an increase of 100,000 in the wild turkey population by the year 2000. Despite this action, the wild turkey population in some counties, including Newaygo County, has almost completely vanished due to the release of domestic turkeys into the wild and the spread of diseases to the wild turkey population from domestic turkeys. Requiring people who keep domestic turkeys to pinion the birds' wings will help to protect the state's considerable investment by decreasing the probability of the decimation of total wild turkey populations. If a domestic turkey were released with its wings pinioned, the chances of its survival would be very slim, because it would not be able to fly away from predators and would not have the survival instinct of a wild turkey. Further, the turkey would have less of a chance to breed with wild turkeys and spread diseases to the population. In addition, domestic birds have been known to scratch cars and become extremely aggressive with dogs and small children during the spring mating season, and it is hoped that the bills will also address this situation by rendering the birds harmless if they are illegally released.

### ***For:***

The Department of Natural Resources has received many complaints concerning animals non-native to Michigan that have been found outside of shooting preserve areas. For example, during the 1987 firearm deer hunting season a deer hunter shot a wild boar that escaped from an inadequately fenced shooting preserve area. House Bill 4008 will address this problem by requiring preserve areas with non-native animals to be adequately fenced and maintained.

In addition, when birds and animals are held under a suspended or revoked license, it is not clear who is responsible for disposing of the game nor in what manner the game is to be disposed of. Sometimes, animals are shipped to zoos or temporarily housed by the department, but a procedure has not been clearly established to deal with this issue. House Bill 4008 will clarify that animals (in addition to birds) held under a suspended or revoked license will be disposed of only in a manner approved by the DNR.

### ***For:***

Approximately fifty to sixty years ago a minimum release limit was necessary in order to increase the bird populations within the state. Today, the bird populations have been firmly established in the environment and play an important role within the state's ecological system. Therefore, there is no longer a need for the minimum release limit. In addition, since the Natural Resources Commission currently has the authority and flexibility to regulate the stocking

and release of animals, it is impractical to have certain types of animals still regulated in statute. House Bill 4008 will address both of these issues by deleting the minimum release limit.