



**House
Legislative
Analysis
Section**

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**NATURAL HERITAGE LICENSE
PLATES**

**House Bill 5426 (Substitute H-1)
First Analysis (12-12-95)**

**Sponsor: Rep. Beverly Bodem
Committee: Conservation,
Environment, and Great Lakes**

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Approximately 20 states currently have programs that use the sales of specialized license plates to fund environmental or outdoor programs. These programs have generally been effective in providing a valuable and entirely voluntary supplemental source of funding for environmental programs, possibly because of a growing awareness of and desire to protect natural resources. Although Michigan's citizens have shown broad public support for the state's natural resources in their support for such measures as the bottle bill, the Natural Resources Trust Fund, and the state parks funding initiative, Michigan does not currently provide its citizens with this particular opportunity to publicly display their pride in and support of Michigan's natural resources.

Legislation has been introduced to offer Michigan residents the opportunity to apply for and receive specialized license plates, and to earmark the money to the Nongame Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would add a new part to the Michigan Vehicle Code to provide for a specialty natural heritage license plate (defined under the bill to mean a registration plate containing a specialized design pertaining to the natural heritage of the state), the fees from which would be deposited into the Nongame Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund. Under the bill, the natural heritage license plate would be developed by the secretary of state. The word "Michigan" would appear on each one; otherwise, the design of the plate and its letters and numbers would be determined by the secretary of state, with the advice and consent of the director of the Department of Natural Resources.

All rights to imitation or representation of the natural heritage plate would remain with the state of Michigan. Any person or group seeking to make any commercial use of the plate design would be required to receive written consent from the secretary of state and the director of the Department of Natural Resources, as

well as pay a commercial use fee to the Nongame Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund. The amount of the commercial use would be determined by the Department of Natural Resources.

Service Fees. The natural heritage registration plate would be issued for use on all vehicles for which a standard registration plate is normally issued, and applications would be submitted according to the vehicle registration requirements specified under the code. Application for an original or renewal plate would be accompanied with payment of the regular vehicle registration tax, in addition to a service fee, as follows:

*For an original natural heritage registration plate, the service fee would be \$3 for the first month, and \$2 per month for each additional month of the registration period.

*For a renewal natural heritage registration plate, the service fee would be \$15.

However, the secretary of state could issue natural heritage license plates to vehicles assigned to the Department of Natural Resources without additional charge beyond the usual registration tax.

Expiration Dates. The expiration date for an natural heritage license plate would be as prescribed under the vehicle registration provisions of the act. The secretary of state could issue a tab or tabs designating the month and year of expiration when issuing or renewing a plate. A temporary registration permit could also be issued to an applicant without a separate fee if the applicant's current vehicle registration was due to expire before the natural heritage registration plate was received. The temporary registration would expire upon receipt of the natural heritage registration plate, or 60 days after it was issued, whichever occurred first.

Nongame Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund. Fees collected for natural heritage registration plates would be identified and segregated into a separate account, and,

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after manufacturing and administration costs were deducted, the secretary of state would, on a quarterly basis, transfer the balance of the fees to the state treasurer for credit into the Nongame Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund.

The revenue received from the sales of the natural heritage registration plates would be used to support the overall management goals of the Nongame Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund. This would include:

- *Developing fish and wildlife viewing areas;
- *Improving the habitats of nongame species;
- *Developing interpretive centers and outdoor education programs;
- *Helping with activities related to collecting, summarizing, and analyzing information on Michigan's natural features;
- * Wildlife outreach activities;
- *Assisting landowners to enhance natural heritage values and nongame wildlife on private lands; and
- *Management and interpretation of natural areas;

The bill would specify that the revenue could be used to produce, distribute and display information for the public about the natural heritage plate.

MCL 257.811d

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

According to the Department of Natural Resources, the Nongame Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund currently receives about \$600,000 per year through the check-off on the income tax return. It is anticipated that the license plate program proposed under the bill would generate an additional \$2 million per year. (12-7-95)

The Department of State reports that the bill would not affect the Michigan Transportation Fund. (12-4-95)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The offering of a specialized license plate would provide interested citizens with the opportunity donate money to and show support for natural resource programs in the state of Michigan. The sale of natural heritage license plates would provide an entirely voluntary and regular source of funding for the

Nongame Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund (which engages in the management and support of nongame and endangered species and their habitats). Currently, the trust fund is financed through a check-off on Michigan's individual income tax forms and garners approximately \$600,000 per year in donations. Department of Natural Resources' surveys indicate a high level of interest in this type of designer license plate and it is estimated that the sales of such license plates could provide an additional two million dollars a year towards the fund.

Against:

The original version of the bill provided that the money from the license plates would go towards the funding of state parks.

Response:

The adoption of Proposal P last year has provided adequate funding for the state's parks.

POSITIONS:

The Department of Natural Resources supports the bill. (12-7-95)

The Michigan Audubon Society supports the bill. (12-7-95)

The Citizens Advisory Committee to the Natural Heritage Program supports the bill. (12-7-95)

The Michigan Environmental Council supports the bill. (12-7-95)

The Nature Conservancy supports the bill. (12-7-95)

The Michigan United Conservation Clubs supports the bill. (12-7-95)

■ 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.