



Romney Building, 10th Floor  
Lansing, Michigan 48909  
Phone: 517/373-6466

## HUNTING AND FISHING HARASSMENT

### House Bill 5366 as passed by the House Second Analysis (8-17-98)

**Sponsor: Rep. Allen Lowe**  
**Committee: Conservation, Environment  
and Recreation**

#### ***THE APPARENT PROBLEM:***

Recent statistics indicate that hunting is declining in Michigan, and some people attribute it to the opposition displayed by anti-hunter and animal rights organizations. Hunters and anglers are protected from harassment under Michigan law. Part 401 of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act prohibits a person from obstructing or interfering with the lawful taking of animals by another person with the intent to prevent that lawful taking. The prohibition was passed in 1990 because of rumors that certain radical groups might launch organized attempts to interfere with hunters legally attempting to take game. (Although at the time no incidents of hunter harassment apparently had been documented in Michigan, some other states reportedly had experienced confrontations between hunters and animal rights activists.) In 1996, Public Acts 316, 317, and 318 extended protection against harassment and interference to the state's sport and commercial fishers. That legislation was enacted in response to reports from a nationally recognized animal rights organization, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), which had launched a campaign to ban sportfishing in the United States. Now some people believe that the laws should go further by providing rewards for information -- which could be phoned in on the DNR's "Report All Poaching" (RAP) hot-line -- that led to the arrest of persons who harassed hunters or anglers. The awards would be disbursed from a fund that is derived from a percentage of hunting and fishing license fees.

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

Part 435 of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (NREPA), which regulates hunting and fishing licensing, specifies that thirty-five cents from each license and stamp fee must be credited to the Wildlife Resource Protection Fund, and expended only

for certain purposes, such as the hiring of conservation officers. House Bill 5366 would extend the list of permitted expenditures from the fund.

Wildlife Resource Protection Fund. The bill would require expenditures from the fund each fiscal year for the following:

- For rewards for information leading to the arrest and prosecution of those who violate the act's prohibition against interfering with the lawful taking of animals or aquatic species. Further, if such acts of interference resulted in the death of a person lawfully hunting or fishing, the reward would be \$5,000. However, the person who was the subject of the harassment would not be eligible to receive this reward.
- For a promotional and educational campaign to inform the general public about the rewards proposed under the bill to protect hunters and anglers from harassment; or on how to identify and report persons violating the act's prohibitions against obstructing or interfering in the lawful taking of animals or aquatic species.

MCL 324.43555 et al.

#### ***FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:***

According to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the bill would have no impact on state funds. (8-11-98)

#### ***ARGUMENTS:***

##### ***For:***

It is in the state's best interest to protect fishing and hunting since the industry contributes significantly to the state's economy, provides quality outdoor

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recreation, and supports the management of Michigan's aquatic and natural resources. However, Michigan hunters and anglers are sometimes harassed verbally by fringe groups that attempt to denounce any activity relating to hunting or fishing. There have been instances where this opposition has gone beyond speech into physical harassment. According to the Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) Law Enforcement Division, 122 complaints of harassment of hunters and anglers were received in 1996, and 115 were received in 1997. (According to the department, the majority of these complaints concern hunters; and only about ten percent of the cases concern anglers.)

***Against:***

Pointing to the fact that the state recently offered a \$1,500 reward for information leading to the apprehension of the person who killed a bear, while no reward has been offered for the apprehension of the person who murdered a hunter, the Michigan Big Game Hunter Association argues that it would appear that the state places the value of animal life above that of humans. The association, on the other hand, has formed a coalition with other hunting organizations to provide rewards -- ranging from \$20,000 to \$100,000 -- for information leading to the arrest and conviction of persons who murder hunters, and, in written testimony to the House committee, suggests that the bill should also focus on this problem. The association also suggests that the reward be increased to \$10,000, in which case it would provide a \$10,000 match.

***POSITIONS:***

The Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC) supports the bill. (8-14-98)

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has no position on the bill. (8-11-98)

The Michigan Big Game Hunters Association opposes the bill. (8-14-98)

Analyst: R. Young

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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.