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WHITE-TAILED DEER LICENSE PLATES & AND ROAD CLEANUP

House Bill 4081 as passed by the House
Sponsor: Rep. Larry DeVuyst

House Bill 4630 as passed by the House
Sponsor: Rep. Vera Rison

Second Analysis (7-1-99)
Committee: Conservation and Outdoor Recreation

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

The concept of creating a new vehicle registration plate that would display the image of a white-tailed deer has been debated for some time. At the same time, some local units of government reportedly have difficulty finding the money to take care of "roadkill" -- the remains of deer and other animals that are left behind on roads after they are killed by motorists. Consequently, it is proposed that the suggested white-tailed deer registration plate be offered to Michigan motorists, and that the proceeds from the plate's sales be assigned to local governmental units to pay the costs of cleaning up roadkill.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILLS:

House Bill 4081 and 4630 would amend the Michigan Vehicle Code (MCL 257.811d) and the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (NREPA) (MCL 324.9001 et al.), respectively, to require that the secretary of state develop and offer applicants the option of obtaining a registration plate that would contain a specialized design pertaining to the white-tailed deer instead of a standard registration plate, and to require that money from sales of the new plate be deposited in a Michigan Roadkill Cleanup Fund.

White-tailed Deer License Plates. Each registration plate would bear the word "Michigan." Those making application for the new registration plate would be required to follow all existing motor vehicle registration and re-registration procedures (as specified in sections 257.217 of the vehicle code), except that, in addition to the regular vehicle registration tax, a service fee of \$3.00 for the first month and \$2.00 per month for each additional month of the registration period would be charged. In addition, a \$10 service fee would be charged to renew the plate. The

secretary of state could issue tabs designating the month and year of expiration.

The secretary of state could issue a temporary registration permit to an applicant whose current vehicle registration was due to expire before the white-tailed deer registration plate was received, provided that an application was submitted with the proper payments. The temporary registration would expire when the special registration was received, or 60 days after it was issued, whichever occurred first. The temporary permit would be issued without a separate fee.

Michigan Roadkill Cleanup Fund. House Bill 4630 would add a new part, Part 90, entitled "Roadkill Cleanup," to the NREPA to establish the Michigan Roadkill Cleanup Fund. The fund would receive, among other revenues, all money received as service fees, after deductions for the secretary of state's manufacturing and administrative costs, from the sale of white-tailed deer license plates. The fund would be appropriated to the Department of Transportation (MDOT) and used exclusively by it to provide grants to local governmental units for removing animal carcasses and offal from state and local highways. The bill would require that the secretary of state transfer the balance of the white-tailed deer registration place service fees on a quarterly basis.

Distribution of Grants. Under House Bill 4630, MDOT would be required to establish and administer a Michigan Roadkill Cleanup Grant Program to pay for, or to offset the costs of, roadkill removal. MDOT would also be required to develop guidelines to implement the program; supply application forms; and distribute the grants. The grants would be distributed to local units of government, with distribution to be

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guided by the reported deer vehicle crashes for the previous year, as compiled by the Department of State Police. Grants received from MDOT by a local governmental unit could be also used to contract with a private company for roadkill removal and disposal.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The Secretary of State's Office has proposed a program that would create "specialty" license plates. Six would be sold to raise money for designated purposes, including water quality, wildlife habitat, lighthouses, the Children's Trust Fund, and two others that have not yet been designated toward a specific program. Other plates would be set aside for public universities and nonprofit organizations. Reportedly, legislation is under consideration that would permit the specialty license plates to be issued.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

According to the House Fiscal Agency (HFA), the bills would have an indeterminate cost to the state. It is anticipated that revenues from the sale of the license plates would offset the cost of producing them. (6-30-99)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Reportedly, tens of thousands of deer and other animals are killed on Michigan roads each year. Naturally, the problem occurs more frequently in northern areas of the state, where the wildlife population is higher. Unfortunately, the introduction of divided highways to these areas has meant that animals trying to cross the roads are trapped by the barriers between highway lanes. The cost of paying for roadkill cleanup falls on local governmental units, but such funds are often scarce in northern, more rural, parts of the state.

Against:

The secretary of state has proposed issuing six specialty license registration plates, three of which -- those with symbols designating water quality, wildlife

habitat, and lighthouses -- would be designated to raise money for wildlife concerns. Since revenues from the sales of the proposed white-tailed deer license plates would also be appropriated for wildlife, or outdoor, concerns, representatives of environmental groups are concerned that the introduction of another license plate

with this designation would simply dilute the available pool of money.

POSITIONS:

The Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC) supports the bills. (6-30-99)

The County Road Association of Michigan supports the bills. (7-1-99)

The Michigan Farm Bureau supports the bills. (7-1-99)

The Secretary of State's Office has no position on the bills. (6-30-99)

The Michigan Environmental Council (MEC) opposes the bills. (6-30-99)

Analyst: R. Young

■ 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.