

Legislative Analysis



STATE PARK PERMIT; ORV LICENSES

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Senate Bill 924 (Substitute S-2)

Sponsor: Sen. Michelle A. McManus

House Committee: Conservation, Forestry, and Outdoor Recreation

Senate Committee: Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs

First Analysis (11-30-06)

BRIEF SUMMARY: The bill would extend the sunset on state park permit fees, require the department to replace lost park permits and ORV licenses under certain circumstances, and allow the department to waive the daily park fee for volunteers who help clean-up the parks.

FISCAL IMPACT: This bill would not have a fiscal impact on the state or on local governmental units. The bill would extend the sunset date for Motor Vehicle Permits (Annual and Daily) to January 2010. There may be a revenue loss if the director waives fees for volunteer operations, but the amount would depend on the number of free permits provided.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

The current state park fees for motor vehicle permits were set in 2003, when increases were enacted. These fees, which yield about \$13 million annually and constitute about one-third of the operating revenue for the state park system, are scheduled to expire on January 1, 2007. If the sunset takes effect, the Department of Natural Resources would have no authority to charge park entrance fees. Legislation has been introduced to extend the permit fees until January 1, 2010.

Further, the Department of Natural Resources currently replaces a lost park permit or off-road vehicle license if the permit-holder or licensee provides sufficient evidence that the original was lost, stolen, or destroyed. Some have proposed the department's policy be made a statutory requirement.

Finally, the Department of Natural Resources currently relies upon volunteers to help with state park clean-up and maintenance. Under the law, the volunteers must pay the \$6 daily park permit fee when they enter the park. Some have also proposed that the director and state parks managers have the authority to waive the fees.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act to:

- Delay from January 1, 2007, to January 1, 2010, the expiration date on annual and daily state park permit fees (shown in table below).

- Require the Department of Natural Resources to replace a person's annual park permit or off-road vehicle license free of charge, if the permit or license were lost or destroyed; and allow the DNR to require a person requesting a replacement to supply sufficient evidence of the loss or destruction of the original permit or license.
- Allow the DNR to waive the state park permit requirement for department-sponsored events or other circumstances, as determined by the DNR director or the director's designee.

State Park Entrance Fees

Permit	Fee
Annual	
Resident	\$24
Resident 65 years or older	6
Resident food stamp card-holder	18
Nonresident	29
Daily	
Resident	6
Nonresident	8

The annual ORV license fee is \$16.25.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ACTION:

The House Committee on Conservation, Forestry, and Outdoor Recreation reported out the Senate-passed version of Senate Bill 924 (S-2) without amendments. Some information in this analysis is derived from the Senate Fiscal Agency analysis dated 9-28-06.

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The loss of revenue from the state park motor vehicle entrance fees would leave a sizeable hole in the DNR's budget if the fees are allowed to expire. In fiscal year 2004-05, these fees generated over \$13 million. Without this revenue, the DNR's ability to maintain, improve, and operate the state parks would be seriously undermined. The department likely would have to close some parks, depriving Michigan residents of valuable recreational opportunities. By delaying the sunset for three years, the bill would maintain the DNR's authority to collect park entrance fees at current rates, as well as give department officials and lawmakers more time to assess the adequacy of the fees and make necessary adjustments.

For:

There has been some confusion about the Department of Natural Resources' policy regarding the replacement of lost or destroyed park permits or ORV licenses: sometimes they are replaced free of charge, while at other times they are not. The bill would specify that the DNR provide a free replacement, while allowing officials to require a permit

holder or licensee to supply satisfactory evidence that the original was lost, stolen or destroyed.

For:

There are a number of opportunities for people to perform volunteer work in state parks. Recently, for example, volunteers were needed for the Piping Plover Patrol at the Wilderness and Leelanau State Parks. The State Park Stewardship Program currently is seeking volunteers to collect native prairie seeds at several parks and recreation areas. In addition, a group called the Friends of Sleepy Hollow State Park has built trash bag dispensers at trail heads and other key locations in the park. An ongoing program involves the Great Lakes Lighthouse Museum, at the Leelauau State Park, where volunteer "keepers" maintain the building and grounds, staff the admissions desk, work in the gift shop, and clean the tower. Other state park volunteer opportunities involve cleanup and maintenance work. Although the participating individuals contribute their time and energy without compensation, they still are required to pay motor vehicle entrance fees. By allowing the DNR director or the director's designee to waive the fees, the bill could increase volunteerism, which is especially important in these tight budget times. The fee waiver also would show appreciation for the efforts of the individuals, who should not have to pay in order to perform volunteer work.

POSITIONS:

The Department of Natural Resources supports the bill. (11-30-06)

The Citizens Committee for State Parks supports the bill. (11-30-06)

The Michigan Environmental Council supports the bill. (11-30-06)

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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.