

## INTERNET HUNTING

Mitchell Bean, Director  
Phone: (517) 373-8080  
<http://www.house.mi.gov/hfa>

**House Bill 4465 (Substitute H-3)**

**Sponsor: Rep. Glenn Steil**

**Committee: Conservation, Forestry, and Outdoor Recreation**

### **First Analysis (6-6-05)**

**BRIEF SUMMARY:** The bill would prohibit a person from using, offering, and providing, a remotely operated firearm, bow, or crossbow to kill a wild bird or a mammal in Michigan.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** The bill would have no fiscal impact.

### **THE APPARENT PROBLEM:**

An entrepreneur, John Lockwood, operates a website called live-shot.com that for a fee of a few hundred dollars allows anyone with access to a computer to shoot and kill a variety of animals roaming a fenced, 300-acre ranch 30-miles northwest of San Antonio, Texas. A rifle, video camera, and computer are mounted on a stand at the ranch at a spot frequented by deer, antelope, and sheep. The ranch features blackbuck antelope from India, fallow deer from Europe, Barbary sheep from Africa, as well as wild hogs and native Texas white-tail deer.

From thousands of miles away, via computer, a person can control the zoom cameras, and the remotely operated gun, firing with a click of the 'mouse'. Never leaving a home computer station, a client can sight game, aim a rifle, and fire it.

In the first Internet hunt in late January 2005, recorded by a German television crew, a man shot a wild hog while sitting at a computer 45 miles away, while Lockwood, at the ranch, killed the boar with two more shots. In a second hunt, a quadriplegic from Indiana who once enjoyed hunting, got three clear shots at a fallow deer over two days of hunting, but came away empty-handed. (Information from the *Los Angeles Times*, 4-21-05)

Many hunters have urged policymakers in 15 states to ban what they consider to be an unsportsmanlike practice. They point out that the concept of 'hunting' requires real people in real time, since hunting, by definition, describes people who go into the forest or wild range and stalk their game by tracking. The challenge of the hunt resides in the chase, and in understanding nature and terrain, not in the kill. In contrast, remote-controlled hunting values killing, rather than hunting. As a result, some people consider the practice unethical—an extension of violent video games.

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

House Bill 4465 would amend the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act to prohibit a person in Michigan from using, and also from offering or providing for use, a remotely operated firearm, bow, or crossbow for the purpose of taking a bird or a mammal in Michigan.

MCL 324.40111b

## ***ARGUMENTS:***

### ***For:***

Critics say that Internet-based hunting—or any practice in which remotely operated weapons are used to kill wild game—defies any justifiable rationale for hunting and the taking of game by sportsmen and sportswomen. As hunters attest, the joy of the sport comes in the chase, and in being attuned to the natural world, not in the kill itself. In contrast, the Internet-based hunter takes an unseemly delight in killing, which some people consider a disturbing and unethical extension of video games in which players pretend to kill animals and people. The practice has the feel of a video game: it is remote; it is disconnected from the reality of the hunt; and the hunter does not have to deal with any blood, or wounding, or tracking. Some have likened it to 'pay per view slaughter.

Fourteen states (Alabama, California, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, West Virginia, and Wisconsin) and the United States Congress have moved to prohibit Internet-based hunting. The state of Virginia recently enacted a law to do so. Michigan should do the same and outlaw this practice.

### ***Against:***

This bill should be amended to prohibit this practice on game farms and ranches where animals are fenced-in. As written, the bill only applies to the taking of wild game, and it is extremely unlikely that entrepreneurs would set-up remotely controlled rifles in the wild, and sell opportunities to kill the animals who roam the forests and ranges freely and widely. When the first remotely controlled firearms were used for hunting in Texas, they were set-up in a fenced ranch to contain the animals, making them easier targets to kill. Michigan law should prohibit remotely operated guns at fenced-in game areas.

### ***Response:***

Members of the Conservation Committee have discussed the possibility of introducing a separate bill, amending the Captive Cervidae section of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, in order to extend this prohibition to animals on farms and ranches.

## ***POSITIONS:***

The Department of Natural Resources supports the bill. (6-2-05)

The Michigan United Conservations Clubs support the bill. (6-2-05)

The Michigan Humane Society supports the bill. (4-20-05)

Legislative Analyst: J. Hunault  
Fiscal Analyst: Kirk Lindquist

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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.