

Legislative Analysis



LOWER FIREARM MINIMUM AGE TO 12 & ESTABLISH APPRENTICE HUNTING LICENSE PROGRAM

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House Bill 5192 (Substitute H-1)

Sponsor: Rep. Scott Hummel

Committee: Conservation, Forestry, and Outdoor Recreation

First Analysis (1-30-06)

BRIEF SUMMARY: The bill would reduce the minimum age for a firearm deer, bear, or elk hunting license from 14 years old to 12 years old. It also would require the Natural Resources Commission to establish an apprentice hunting license program, beginning March 1, 2007.

FISCAL IMPACT: While this bill would encourage more young people to become hunters/sportsmen (generating more licensing revenue for the Game and Fish Protection Fund), there is nothing in this bill that would create an additional burden on the DNR or generate significant new revenue. There would be no fiscal impact on the state or on local governmental units.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Michigan has long enjoyed a strong hunting heritage. According to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, for almost 100 years hunting has provided a tool for sound wildlife management. Following an active one-year study, the department's Hunter Recruitment and Retention Work Group published a report in January 2006 to make recommendations for changes in policy that would shore-up Michigan's hunting heritage. See [Background Information](#) below.

The report notes that hunting has been an important way to educate citizens about their stewardship of the environment, as well as the cornerstone of funding for Michigan natural resource conservation. What's more, hunters boost Michigan's local economies. For example, in 2001 hunters spent \$490 million in Michigan, according to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

There were more than 865,000 licensed hunters in Michigan as of 2002. However, the total number of Michigan licensed hunters has remained about the same over the past 40 years. Consequently, the proportion of hunters in the total growing population has declined from an average of just over 10 percent in the 1960s, to an average of 8.7 percent today.

In addition to a decline in the proportion of Michiganians who hunt, there has been a shift in Michigan hunting away from species that can be hunted by younger hunters. Hunting in Michigan has become increasingly focused on deer; at least 91 percent of license buyers purchase a deer hunting license. And, in 2002, fully 62 percent of deer hunters

purchased only a deer hunting license, as compared to 1968 when 51 percent did so. (Likewise, fully 45 percent of small game hunters purchased only a small game hunting license, as compared to 16 percent in 2002.)

Together with the overall decline in hunting and the shift to species that cannot be hunted by younger hunters, there has been a major drop-off in hunting participation that occurs between the late teen years and the yearly 20s. To address these changes in hunting, the Hunter Recruitment and Retention Workgroup offers recommendations concerning 1) the access to and supply of hunting opportunity, 2) companion and mentor networks, 3) education and public relations outreach, and 4) regulations and enforcement. Among those recommendations is a proposal to lower the hunting age for youth so they can hunt big game.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

House Bill 5192 (H-1) would amend the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (MCL 324.43517 et al) to reduce the minimum age for a firearm deer, bear, or elk hunting license from 14 years old to 12 years old. It also requires the Department of Natural Resources Commission to issue an order to establish an apprentice hunting license program, to take effect March 1, 2007. The fee for the apprentice license would be no more than half the fee a person 17 years of age or older pays for a resident hunting license.

Currently the law allows the Department of Natural Resources to issue a hunting license to a minor child upon application of a parent, and payment of the license fee, if the young person will be accompanied by the parent or another person who is 17 years of age or older while hunting. However, a license to hunt deer, bear, or elk with a firearm cannot be issued to a person who is less than 14 years of old; and a license to hunt cannot be issued to a person who is less than 12 years old. House Bill 5192 would eliminate the restrictions to hunt deer, bear, or elk on those less than 14 years old, but retain the prohibition that a license could not be issued to a person less than 12 years old.

Currently under the law, a parent of a minor child cannot permit the young person to hunt on another person's property unless accompanied by the parent, or another person authorized by the parent who is at least 17 years old. Under House Bill 5192 this requirement would not apply if the minor child was less than 14 years of age, and the license was a license to hunt deer, bear, or elk with a firearm. Instead, House Bill 5192 specifies that a minor child younger than 14 years of age and having a license to hunt deer, bear, or elk with a firearm could hunt only on private property, and would have to be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

The bill defines the term "accompany" to mean to go along with another person while staying within a distance from the person that enables uninterrupted, unaided visual and auditory communication.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

To review either the 12-page executive summary or 32-page report entitled "Michigan Hunter Recruitment and Retention Work Group Recommendations," visit the Department of Natural Resources website at <http://www.michigan.gov/dnr>

ARGUMENTS:

For:

This legislation should be enacted because it sets up a mentoring program for young hunters, to begin in March 2007. Such a program can enrich young people's lives.

Hunters observe that "the hunt" connects them with animals and nature, in a way that sharpens their senses and aligns them with the great outdoors. Some hunters speak of the experience as one in which homage is paid to what is transcendent in the laws of nature. Yet others speak of the way in which hunting renews their spirit while humbling their sense of pride. They point out there are very few things in one's life that yield the precious gifts of renewal, humility, insight, and hope. Hunting is one of those things, and consequently, it should be held in reverence, and its life lessons shared with the young. Because it makes the hunter one with nature, hunting also teaches respect and stewardship for Michigan's natural resources. For these reasons, alone, this bill should become law.

For:

Chief among the reasons to support this bill is the fact that hunting spurs economic growth in many of Michigan's small communities. There are more than 865,000 licensed hunters in Michigan, and according to a recent study they spent \$490 million during the 2001 hunting season alone. Despite its continued popularity, hunting has declined over the past 40 years. This legislation can promote the sport among young hunters, and reverse the decline. That way, the economic benefits of hunting will be experienced by future generations.

POSITIONS:

The Department of Natural Resources supports the bill. (1-26-06)

Michigan United Conservation Clubs supports the bill. (1-26-06)

The Shooters Alliance for Firearm Rights supports the bill. (11-10-05)

Great Lakes Shooting Sports Association supports the bill. (11-10-05)

Michigan Hunting Dog Federation supports the bill. (11-10-05)

The Northwood Chapter of Safari Club International supports the bill. (11-10-05)

The Northern Michigan Wildlife Relief Organization supports the bill. (11-10-05)

The Sagola Township Sportsmen's Club supports the bill. (11-10-05)

The Upper Peninsula Bear Houndsmen Association supports the bill. (11-10-05)

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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.