

Legislative Analysis



DISABLED VETERANS: \$1 HUNTING & FISHING LICENSES; PARK FEE WAIVERS

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House Bill 5189 (Substitute H-2)

Sponsor: Rep. Gary McDowell

Committee: Military and Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security

First Analysis (2-7-08)

BRIEF SUMMARY: The bill would allow disabled American veterans and former prisoners of war to buy hunting and fishing license for \$1, and would waive their state park entry and camping permit fees.

FISCAL IMPACT: This bill would have an indeterminate negative fiscal impact on the Game and Fish Protection Fund and the Park Improvement Fund. The actual loss in revenue would depend on the number of disabled veterans and former prisoners of war who purchase the \$1 hunting and fishing licenses, and who obtain the free permits authorized by this bill.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

The non-profit organization Disabled American Veterans serves almost 1.4 million members nationwide. "Service connected disabilities" are the basis for membership in the group. See [Background Information](#).

According to the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs [see <http://www.michigan.gov/dmva>], there are 65,037 disabled veterans of the armed services living in Michigan. Of those, almost eight percent are completely disabled—that is, 5,020 individuals. It is thought some of the disabled vets are former prisoners of war; however, the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs does not know the number, if any, of soldiers once held captive by enemy armies who are now living in Michigan.

In Michigan, many disabled veterans receive health care services in a network of medical centers located in Saginaw, Iron Mountain, Grand Rapids, Ann Arbor, and Grayling. At two sites—Grand Rapids and Marquette—veterans can receive residential care in nursing homes. In addition, the state has tailored various economic development and employment programs to reward veterans for their service. For example, veterans are given preference in state hiring and in the awarding of state contracts. A list of state services available to veterans is posted on the website of the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth [see <http://www.michigan.gov/mdcd>].

Legislation has been introduced to provide free state park entry and camping permits, as well as \$1 hunting and fishing licenses, to all veterans who are totally disabled, and also to former prisoners of war.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (NREPA) to provide an exemption from or reduction of certain license fees and recreational permit fees paid by disabled American veterans.

For hunting and fishing licenses, a disabled veteran or a veteran who had been a prisoner of war would pay \$1.00 for each license. [The bill defines "disabled veteran" to mean either of the following: a resident who has been determined by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to be permanently and totally disabled as a result of military service and entitled to veterans' benefits at the 100 percent rate, or a resident rated by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs as individually unemployable.]

In addition, the bill specifies that state park entry, camping, and camping permits fees would be waived for disabled veterans, as well as for residents who have been prisoners of war.

Under the bill, the Department of Natural Resources could demand proof of eligibility.

MCL 324.43537, et al

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Disabled American Veterans. The DAV was formed in 1920 when the U.S. faced the needs of disabled veterans who fought in World War I. The organization was chartered by an Act of Congress on June 17, 1932 (see 36 U.S.C. Section 50301 et seq.), and is headquartered in Cincinnati, Ohio with its national service and legislative headquarters in Washington D.C. The organization has served veterans wounded in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and the First Gulf War. Today, a new generation of wartime disabled veterans returns from the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan where they volunteered to fight.

Nationwide, the Disabled American Veterans have 88 offices, a corps of 260 national service officers, and 26 transition service officers who directly represent veterans with claims for benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense. The service is free, and veterans need not be members of the DAV to get them. Through a wide network of 52 state-level departments and 1,932 local chapters, the organization extends its mission of hope to communities where disabled veterans and their families live. See <http://www.dav.org>

ARGUMENTS:

For:

All Americans own a debt of gratitude to the men and women who served in the Armed Forces of the United States. To those who suffer disabilities or who have been prisoners of war because they chose to fight in the nation's wars, Americans owe even more. This

bill signals our respect, by offering Michigan disabled veterans and former prisoners of war \$1 hunting and fishing licenses, and by waiving for them all of their state park entry, camping, and camping permit fees.

Against:

The Department of Natural Resources notes that the federal government reimburses states (according to a formula administered through the U.S. Department of the Interior, and that yields different values each year) for each "unique buyer" of hunting and fishing licenses. The federal government implements the reimbursement program under the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act (customarily called the Pittman-Robertson Act, [16 U.S.C. sections 669-669i]), and the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act (customarily called the Dingell-Johnson Act, [16 U.S.C. Sections 777-777l]). Michigan's federal match ranges from \$10 to \$13 for each person purchasing one or more licenses to hunt and/or fish. Under the federal law, the match is not available for free licenses. Instead, a state must charge a fee for each license that meets or exceeds its cost, ensuring a net profit in the licensing program. In Michigan, each license must cost at least 86 cents in order to be eligible for the federal match. As originally introduced, House Bill 5189 would have eliminated Michigan eligibility for the federal match, by providing free hunting and fishing licenses for totally disabled veterans. The revenue loss would have had a significant negative impact on the Department of Natural Resources.

Response:

In order to protect the federal match on hunting and fishing licenses, the members of the House Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security reported out a substitute for House Bill 5189 that charges \$1 for each license. Since state park entry and camping permits are not affected by the federal match program, the cost of those permits is waived under the substitute bill.

POSITIONS:

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources supports the bill as amended. (2-6-08)

The Veterans of Foreign Wars supports the bill. (1-30-08)

The Michigan Paralyzed Veterans support the bill. (1-30-08)

The Michigan Purple Heart Organization supports the bill. (1-30-08)

The American Legion Marine Corps League supports the bill. (1-30-08)

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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.