



Senate Fiscal Agency
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BILL



ANALYSIS

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Senate Bill 412 (as enacted)

PUBLIC ACT 81 of 2012

Sponsor: Senator Darwin L. Boohar

Senate Committee: Outdoor Recreation and Tourism

House Committee: Natural Resources, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation

Date Completed: 7-23-12

RATIONALE

The Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act prescribes fees for a wild turkey hunting license and dedicates a portion of each fee to scientific research, biological survey work, and management of turkeys. Over the years, some people have suggested that there should be more focus specifically on the creation of turkey habitat, surveys, and disease testing. In addition, some people expressed concern that the turkey license revenue has been concentrated in specific areas, and suggested that it should be distributed more equally throughout the State.

CONTENT

The bill amended Part 435 (Hunting and Fishing Licensing) of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act to expand the purposes for which the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) must use a portion of wild turkey hunting license fees; and require the DNR annually to report to the Legislature on expenditures of the fee revenue.

The bill took effect on April 1, 2012.

Under the Act, the fee for a resident wild turkey hunting license is \$15, and the fee for a nonresident license is \$69. A person who is at least 65 may obtain a senior wild turkey license for \$4. In addition, the DNR may charge a nonrefundable license application fee of up to \$4. Of the money collected from the fees, the following amounts must be used for scientific

research, biological survey work on wild turkeys, and wild turkey management:

- \$9.50 from a resident license.
- \$50 from a nonresident license.
- \$1 from a senior license.
- Up to \$3 of the application fee, if any, for a wild turkey hunting license lottery.

Under the bill, the money also must be used for the creation and management of wild turkey habitat on State land, national forestland, and private land; annual wild turkey hunter surveys; and disease testing for wild turkeys suspected of having a disease and voluntarily submitted to the DNR.

In addition, the bill requires the DNR, to the extent possible, to use the fee money to create and manage wild turkey habitat on State forestland, State game areas, national forestland, and private land, where appropriate.

Before January 1 of each year, the Department must give the standing committees in the Senate and House of Representatives that primarily consider natural resources issues a report detailing the expenditures for the previous year.

MCL 324.43524

ARGUMENTS

(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)

Supporting Argument

The DNR has used turkey license revenue to create habitat under its turkey management program for many years; some hunters voiced concerns, however, about the Department's strategy for habitat creation and the way the money has been used. For example, the DNR evidently advises private landowners who manage their land for turkeys that 5% should be dedicated to managed grassy openings, a key element of prime habitat due to the abundant insects, seeds, and other food for the birds. Reportedly, however, the Department has not followed this guideline on the millions of acres of State forestland that it manages, despite the vast stands of hardwoods that produce mast (the nuts and fruits that serve as a source of food for turkeys and other wildlife). Also, millions of dollars have been spent to establish turkey habitat on 400,000 acres of State game areas, primarily in southern Michigan, while very little has been spent on the 3.9 million acres of State forestland, all located in the northern part of the State. Given that hunting is one of the primary uses of State forestland, the concentration of turkey license revenue in the game areas of one region is ill-advised. In southern Michigan, land increasingly is lost to development or closed to hunting by private owners. Thus, State forestland is essential to preservation the sport. The DNR must properly manage public forests for game, including turkeys, to help reverse a troubling decline of hunting in Michigan.

The bill provides for a more equitable distribution of turkey funds while allowing the DNR to retain a measure of discretion in identifying the most suitable locations for habitat creation, and will promote transparency through the requirement that the Department report to the Legislature on expenditures of turkey license revenue. In addition, the requirements to spend the money on hunter surveys and voluntary disease testing will facilitate the timely identification of threats to turkey flock health. The bill will maximize the amount of revenue going directly to turkey management, rather than administration, and will contribute to the overall improvement of the turkey hunting experience in this State.

Response: The distribution of turkey dollars is not as lopsided as it might appear. The formula for disbursing the money is the result of a compromise reached several

years ago between the DNR and the National Wild Turkey Federation. Habitat created for turkeys also is favorable to deer, and vice versa. Under the agreement, turkey funds are used primarily to create habitat in southern Michigan and deer dollars are used in northern Michigan, so both deer and turkey benefit statewide.

Also, the bill's requirements for the DNR to do hunter surveys and voluntary disease testing might divert money from its habitat creation efforts. It is likely that factors such as adverse weather during the nesting season have contributed more than disease to the decline of some turkey populations; thus, redirecting money from habitat work in this manner might be imprudent.

Furthermore, to a large extent, the bill merely codified what was standard practice. For many years, the DNR has given an accounting of its use of turkey funds to the Legislature as part of the annual appropriations process. In addition, over the last few years, the Department has cooperated with groups such as the NWTF to implement a number of projects designed to create habitat and bolster the State's turkey population, and plans to continue these efforts in the future.

Legislative Analyst: Julie Cassidy

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill will not result in any net increase of overall expenditures. The Department's appropriation from the earmarked revenue for FY 2011-12 is \$1.3 million.

Fiscal Analyst: Bill Bowerman

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.