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BILL



ANALYSIS

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Senate Bill 1350 (as introduced 10-17-12)
Sponsor: Senator Tom Casperson
Committee: Natural Resources, Environment and Great Lakes

Date Completed: 11-7-12

CONTENT

The bill would amend Parts 401 (Wildlife Conservation) and 435 (Hunting and Fishing Licensing) of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act to do the following:

- **Include wolf in the definition of "game".**
- **Authorize the establishment of the first open season for wolf, and allow the Natural Resources Commission to establish annual wolf hunting seasons.**
- **Prohibit an individual from hunting wolf without a wolf hunting license, and establish a license fee of \$100 for a resident and \$500 for a nonresident.**
- **Make it a misdemeanor to illegally possess or take wolf, and prescribe penalties.**
- **Specify legislative findings regarding wildlife management.**

Wolf Hunting Season & Penalties

Under the Act, a person may not take, release, transport, sell, buy, or possess game, whether living or dead, or parts of game, from the State or from outside of the State, except as provided for in Part 401 or by an order or interim order of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The bill would include wolf in the definition of "game".

The bill states, "The legislature hereby authorizes the establishment of the first open season for wolf." In addition, the bill would allow the Natural Resources Commission to issue orders establishing annual wolf hunting seasons throughout the State.

A person who violates a provision of Part 401 or an order or interim order regarding the possession or taking of deer, bear, or wild turkey is guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by imprisonment for at least five days but not more than 90 days and a fine of at least \$200 but not more than \$1,000, plus the cost of prosecution. Under the bill, these penalties also would apply to the illegal possession or taking of wolf.

The bill provides that a person could not be punished for lawfully removing, capturing, or destroying a wolf under Public Act 290 of 2008. (That Act governs the control of gray wolves, and allows a livestock owner to remove, capture, or, if deemed necessary, kill a gray wolf that is in the act of preying upon the owner's livestock. The owner must report the taking to a DNR official as soon as possible, and retain possession of the wolf until an official is available to take possession of and transfer it to the appropriate personnel for examination.)

Wolf Hunting License

The bill would prohibit an individual from hunting wolf without a wolf hunting license. The fee would be \$100 for a resident license and \$500 for a nonresident license. The DNR could establish a nonrefundable application fee of up to \$4 for each person who applied for a wolf hunting license.

The DNR could issue a kill tag with, or as part of, a wolf hunting license. The provisions of Section 43526(2) regarding kill tags would apply with respect to a wolf hunting license. (Under that subsection, the DNR may issue a kill tag with or as part of each deer license. The tag must bear the license number, and also may include space for other pertinent information required by the Department. The kill tag, if issued, is part of the license.)

The bill would delete wolf from the definitions of "fur-bearing animals" and "small game" in Part 435. (As a rule, an individual may not trap or hunt fur-bearing animals without a fur harvester's license, or hunt small game without a small game license.)

Legislative Findings

The bill contains the following legislative findings:

- "The wildlife populations of the state and their habitat are of paramount importance to the citizens of this state."
- "The sound management of wolf populations in this state is necessary, including the use of hunting as a management tool, to minimize negative human and wolf encounters and to prevent wolves from threatening or harming humans, livestock, and pets."

MCL 324.40103 et al.

Legislative Analyst: Julie Cassidy

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill by itself would have no fiscal impact on the Department of Natural Resources as it would merely authorize the Natural Resources Commission and the DNR to establish a wolf hunting season; it would not require such a season to be established. The bill would establish a \$100 license fee for a resident wolf hunting license, and a \$500 fee for nonresidents, as well as a \$4 maximum application fee. In practice, the DNR could charge an applicant this fee to enter into a wolf license lottery.

If a wolf hunting season were established, it is unknown how many of these licenses would be sold, but according to figures from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) website, approximately 700 wolves live in Michigan. Minnesota currently has a wolf hunting season, and based on information from the Minnesota DNR and the USFWS, it appears that the target harvest for 2012 is approximately 400 of the state's 2,900 wolves, or about 13.8% of the population. Minnesota offered 6,000 licenses through its lottery system in 2012, or about 15 licenses for every wolf targeted for harvest. If Michigan were to adopt a similar approach with a similar percentage of the wolf population targeted for harvesting, approximately 1,450 licenses would be sold, yielding between \$145,000 and \$725,000, depending on the number of resident versus nonresident licenses sold. An amount of additional revenue would be realized from application fees as well. In 2012, 51,710 hunters paid \$4 to enter the lottery to receive black bear licenses. If a similar number of hunters entered a wolf lottery, approximately \$200,000 also would be received. All revenue raised under the bill would be credited to the Game and Fish Protection Fund.

The establishment of a wolf hunting season would result in new, but indeterminate costs that would likely be to some extent offset by additional revenue from license sales. These costs would be related to the establishment of a wolf hunting season, law enforcement, and

administration of the season. It is unknown whether these costs would be greater or less than the amount of new revenue received, so the fiscal impact is indeterminate.

Fiscal Analyst: Josh Sefton

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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.