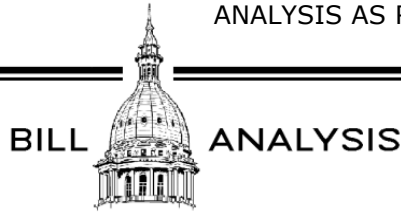




Senate Fiscal Agency
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Senate Bill 759 (as reported without amendment)
Sponsor: Senator Tom Casperson
Committee: Outdoor Recreation and Tourism

(as enacted)

Date Completed: 3-10-14

RATIONALE

In the early 1900s, due to concerns that the beaver population was too low, the State implemented a number of restrictions on beaver trapping, including legislation to prohibit licensed fur dealers from obtaining a trapping license. Over the years, the beaver population grew, and most of the restrictions were lifted in the 1980s. The trapping prohibition for fur dealers, however, remains in statute. Because the beaver population is no longer considered vulnerable to overharvesting, it has been suggested that this prohibition should be eliminated.

CONTENT

The bill would amend Part 425 (Furs, Hides, and Pelts) of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act to eliminate a prohibition against a licensed fur dealer's holding a license to trap beaver.

Under Part 425, a person must obtain a fur dealer's license from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in order to engage in the business of buying, selling, dealing, or the tanning and dressing of raw furs, hides, or pelts of beaver, otter, fisher, marten, muskrat, mink, skunk, raccoon, opossum, wolf, lynx, bobcat, fox, weasel, coyote, badger, deer, or bear and the plumage, skins, or hides of protected game birds or game animals.

Part 425 provides that a person who holds a fur dealer's license is not eligible to secure or hold a license to trap beaver. The bill would delete this restriction.

MCL 324.42501

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 fur dealers' ineligibility for a beaver trapping license was enacted many years ago in response to valid concerns about beaver numbers; today, however, the beaver population is sufficiently large and healthy, rendering the prohibition obsolete. According to the DNR's 2012 Michigan Furbearer Harvest Survey, nearly 3,000 licensed trappers took more than 17,000 beavers in that year. At this time, the beaver population is so robust that enforcement of the prohibition evidently is not a current priority of the DNR. Under these circumstances, extending to fur dealers the opportunity to trap beavers would not have a negative impact on the population's viability; in fact, it could actually be beneficial in terms of preventing overpopulation and its resulting environmental and nuisance problems. Beaver is the only animal that fur dealers are not allowed to trap. This prohibition creates unnecessary difficulty for those who make their living from fur. The bill would remove a barrier to economic activity, facilitating trade both domestically and internationally.

Response: In addition to removal of this restriction, changes to several other fur dealer license provisions also should be considered. For example, Part 425 prescribes separate license fees for buying and selling, manufacturing, and custom tanning and dressing. Part 425 also requires a licensed fur dealer to submit to the DNR a notarized report regarding sales and purchases on a monthly basis. Consolidating the license categories and eliminating the notarization requirement would streamline the license program.

Opposing Argument

Increased trapping could be detrimental to the State's beaver population, which plays an important role in the ecosystem. Furthermore, some people consider the practice of trapping to be inhumane. Concerns about conservation and animal cruelty should take precedence over the potential to increase fur dealers' profits.

Legislative Analyst: Julie Cassidy

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would have very small, but likely positive, fiscal impact on the Department of Natural Resources, and no fiscal impact on local units of government. Under the bill, people holding fur dealer's licenses would be eligible to purchase licenses to trap beaver. There are approximately 280 individuals who possess fur dealer's licenses. Assuming that none of these individuals currently purchases fur harvester licenses or intends to purchase base licenses under the new game and fish licensing structure that takes effect in April, the bill could generate a maximum of \$7,280 in new license fee revenue. It is likely, however, that the bill would generate significantly less new revenue, as some fur dealers would elect to purchase fur harvester licenses for the purposes of trapping species other than beaver anyway. Additionally, under the new hunting fee structure, many dealers may elect to purchase a base license in order to hunt deer and other game species irrespective of the bill. This would further reduce any new revenue generated.

Fiscal Analyst: Josh Sefton