



**House  
Legislative  
Analysis  
Section**

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**DNR DEER MANAGEMENT**

**House Bill 5655 as enrolled  
Public Act 425 of 1996  
Second Analysis (12-19-96)**

**Sponsor: Rep. Carl F. Gnodtke  
House Committee: Agriculture & Forestry  
Senate Committee: Natural Resources &  
Environmental Affairs**

***THE APPARENT PROBLEM:***

Michigan's deer herd is estimated to be one of the largest of any state east of the Mississippi, reaching nearly 2 million animals in recent years. While this many deer offer exciting opportunities for well over a million resident and non-resident hunters who buy both gun and bow and arrow deer licenses here each year, they also pose a serious threat to farmers and those who travel Michigan roads in areas where their numbers are highest—particularly in certain counties in the Upper Peninsula, in the "thumb" area, and in southern Michigan. The Department of Natural Resources has tried to alleviate the problem by encouraging the taking of more "antlerless" (i.e. female) deer in the most heavily populated regions through the issuance of special licenses and permits. (Under the current licensing system, anyone may buy a license allowing the taking of a male deer only, while a lottery system is used to select those who wish to take one or more antlerless deer in certain areas.) Apparently, however, hunters who get a so-called doe permit will, early in the season, often opt to pass up shooting a doe in hopes of eventually bagging a buck, which the department suspects may result in many hunters not taking any deer at all. The department believes a better approach to reducing the size of deer herds in select areas of the state would be to issue one or more antlerless-only deer licenses for such areas, which would allow hunters holding them to take only this type of deer in these regions.

***THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:***

The Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act currently allows the Department of Natural Resources to issue orders designating the kind of deer (i.e., male or female) that may be taken with either a gun or bow and arrow deer hunting license, and to limit the issuance of a second deer license (using a gun or bow) for use in specific areas where managing deer is necessary. The bill would amend the act to delete language pertaining to the department's ability to limit the issuance of a second license for purposes of managing deer, and replace it with

language that would permit it to designate the geographic area in which either a first or second deer hunting license, using a gun or bow, would be valid.

MCL 324.43526 and 324.43527

***FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:***

The Department of Natural Resources says the bill would not affect state or local budget expenditures. (12-17-96)

***ARGUMENTS:***

***For:***

Currently, someone issued a deer hunting license is limited to shooting only a buck anywhere that he or she decides to (legally) hunt in the state, although a hunter may also apply for a special permit to shoot an antlerless deer—generally speaking, a female deer—which is valid only in a specific area of the state. The DNR, however, feels this system may result in lower antlerless deer harvests in certain overpopulated areas than is desired since hunters often will forego early opportunities to shoot a doe in hopes of getting a buck instead, only to end up getting no deer at all. By issuing antlerless deer-only licenses that would apply to areas of the state where deer problems are the worst, the department believes it would have a better chance of paring large herds in these areas to acceptable levels. The bill would add language that would enable the department to move towards such a licensing system, and would delete from the act a provision that some feel actually limits it from being able to issue second gun or bow licenses in such areas.

***Against:***

An earlier version of the bill included language that generally would prohibit the department from requiring resident hunters to take only antlerless deer during either the gun or bow seasons, since traditionally many hunters' first choice is to shoot a buck. Moreover, the bill would

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grant the department too much leeway regarding the way in which it issues deer licenses, and could lead to a situation where someone who bought his or her license in, say, Pontiac would have no choice but to travel all the way to the Upper Peninsula to legally bag his or her deer. Using a lottery system with the first license purchased could discourage hunters stuck with them from hunting at all, which would only undermine the bill's intent. Moreover, other states that issue antlerless deer-only licenses for purposes of controlling deer populations reportedly have avoided the controversy that such a licensing system inevitably generates among resident hunters by limiting the issuance of such licenses to non-resident hunters only.

***Response:***

Unfortunately, large deer herds in some areas of the state probably could not be reduced if such a program were limited to non-resident hunters only. Hunters need to realize that the current overabundance of deer in many areas of the state conveys to many nonhunter residents of the state a sense that DNR has lost control of effectively managing the state's deer herds--which some people blame on hunters' undue influence over the department's wildlife management policies. The DNR's failure to adequately deal with this problem could undermine the role of hunters in helping to shape the state's approach toward managing its wildlife, and could harm public attitudes regarding the beneficial role hunting plays in game management.

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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.