



Senate Fiscal Agency
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BILL ANALYSIS



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Senate Bill 803 (as passed by the Senate)
Sponsor: Senator John Cherry
Committee: Natural Resources and Agriculture

Date Completed: 10-15-24

RATIONALE

Currently, an individual may not hunt pheasants without an annual \$25 pheasant hunting license. A portion of each license fee is deposited into the Pheasant Subaccount, which is spent upon appropriation for the costs associated with the purchase and release of live pheasants on suitable State-owned land. Reportedly, these provisions were enacted to restore pheasant hunting in the State following a decline in pheasant populations. According to testimony before the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Agriculture, many people's first experience of hunting is pheasant hunting and without these provisions they may never be exposed. It has been suggested to extend these provisions to ensure that the State's hunting traditions are passed on.

CONTENT

The bill would amend Part 435 (Hunting and Fishing Licensing) of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act to extend, from January 1, 2026, to January 1, 2031, the requirement that a person purchase an annual pheasant hunting license to hunt pheasants in the State and the way that license revenue is used.

Under the Act, an individual 18 years of age or older may not hunt pheasants without a current annual pheasant hunting license. The fee for a license is \$25 and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) must deposit the fee collected for each license into the Pheasant Subaccount of the Game and Fish Protection Account. Except for requirements that certain amounts of the license fee be retained by an authorized seller or deposited into the Wildlife Resource Protection Fund, money in the Pheasant Subaccount must be spent, upon appropriation, only for the costs associated with the purchase and release of live pheasants on State-owned land suitable for pheasants. Additionally, money in the Pheasant Subaccount on January 1, 2026, must be transferred to the Game and Fish Protection Account. The above provisions sunset on January 1, 2026.

The bill would extend the sunset to January 1, 2031, and would specify that the money in the subaccount on January 1, 2031, would be transferred to the Game and Fish Protection Account.

MCL 324.43525c

BACKGROUND

Currently an individual must have a special pheasant license to hunt pheasants on Hunting Access Program enrolled lands in the Upper Peninsula or on any State public land in the lower peninsula unless the individual is a) a pheasant hunter on private land; b) hunting on public land in the Upper Peninsula; c) hunting on a game hunting preserve; d) is 17 years of age or

younger; or d) has a lifetime hunting license.¹ Generally, pheasant hunting season runs from late October to mid-November and from December to January depending on type and location.

The Hunting Access Program allows private landowners to allow hunters access to their land. Landowners are given financial incentives, such as up to \$25 per enrolled acre based on types of land and available hunting and management of wildlife on that land, among other things.²

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's pheasant hunting program is essential to preserving the State's outdoor heritage of hunting. Reportedly, the practice of hunting has declined as a whole in the State, and specifically, deer harvesting decreased 11% from 2022 to 2023.³ According to testimony before the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Agriculture, pheasant hunting releases are accessible opportunities to engage individuals who may have not yet decided to, or have not yet been exposed to, larger scale hunting, such as deer hunting. Many hunters who have been and are lifelong hunters had their first experience with hunting pheasants, and due to the declining natural pheasant population, this is no longer an option for new hunters. Reportedly, full parking lots at release locations have drawn in individuals who may have never considered hunting. Through pheasant hunting residents can enjoy the State's outdoor resources safely while learning and engaging with conservation practices and so the bill should continue the program.

Supporting Argument

The pheasant hunting licensing and release program should continue as it is self-sustaining and has continued interest from hunters throughout the State. According to testimony, the DNR purchased and released over 6,000 pheasants in 13 different State game areas in 2023, with license sales generating approximately \$175,000 annually to the Pheasant Subaccount. These funds are then used for future pheasant purchases and pheasant release management. Reportedly, license sales have remained consistent, and it is predicted that there will be approximately 12,000 pheasant hunting licenses purchased for the 2024 hunting season. The release of pheasants in these areas also positively affects the cities near the areas. Hunters visit local establishments to stock up on resources and to eat and drink before and after coming to hunt, which increases the sustainability of the program.

Opposing Argument

The program should not continue as it is a practice of canned hunting. Canned hunting involves the killing of animals bred in captivity and then released to enclosures small enough to ensure the animals can be found and hunted.

Response: Stocking animals is not the same as canned hunting. The DNR annually stocks fish, including walleye, muskellunge, northern pike, and sturgeon. According to testimony, like fishing, while an individual is pheasant hunting, a harvest is not guaranteed and often requires time and effort to accomplish. Many individuals with special hunting dogs take part in the pheasant hunting program and often return home without a harvest as with other types of hunting or fishing in the State. Testimony also indicated that, like other stocked animals,

¹ "License Types and Fees". DNR, <https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/managing-resources/laws/regulations/small-game/license-types-and-fees>, Retrieved 10-10-24.

² "Landowners – Earn Money by Enrolling", DNR. <https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/things-to-do/hunting/where/hap/landowners>, Retrieved 10-10-24.

³ Sergent, Katie, "Michigan DNR: State deer harvest dropped by 11% in Fall 2023", *UpNorthLive*, 12-22-23.

pheasants that are not caught remain in the natural habitat to which they are released as part of conservation efforts.

Legislative Analyst: Eleni Lionas

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would have a positive fiscal impact for the DNR. The bill would allow for continued collection of the \$25 pheasant hunting license fees, which equate to approximately \$175,000 annually. This fee revenue is deposited into the Pheasant Subaccount of the Game and Fish Protection Account. Current law ends the collection of these fees on January 1, 2026. The bill would extend the fee collection for five years, ending in 2031. Assuming that fee revenue remained consistent, this would total roughly \$875,000 in revenue over five years.

Fiscal Analyst: Jonah Houtz

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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.