

Legislative Analysis



CREATE BEAR BACKUP HUNTING LICENSE

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House Bill 4937 (H-1) as reported from committee

Sponsor: Rep. Parker Fairbairn

Committee: Natural Resources and Tourism

Complete to 11-12-25

Analysis available at
<http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

SUMMARY:

House Bill 4937 would amend the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (NREPA) to create a bear backup hunting license and establish the terms of its use and cost.

The backup license would cost \$50 for Michigan residents and \$250 for nonresidents and could be purchased by the holder of a valid base hunting license. The bear backup hunting license would allow the holder to accompany a licensed bear hunter and do one of the following:

- Shoot a bear being harvested from a tree if the bear has been wounded by the licensed hunter and has not died when it reaches the ground.
- Shoot a bear that was wounded by a licensed hunter at a bait site, has left the bait site, and requires tracking to locate.

The bear backup hunting license would not allow the holder to shoot a bear while it is crossing a state or county road.

The backup license would be valid for the entire bear season and in all bear management units in Michigan. The holder of the backup license could use it to accompany an unlimited number of licensed hunters, and it could be used an unlimited number of times each bear hunting season.

MCL 324.43528

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:

Bear hunting in Michigan has a long waiting list, with individuals often having to wait 5 to 10 years to obtain a license through the current lottery system. For license holders who wish to hunt with dogs or who need additional assistance due to age or disability status, this means that, while they may have other individuals accompany them on the hunt, only a licensed individual can shoot a bear.

According to testimony offered in committee, if a bear is not accurately dispatched with the first shot taken by the licensed individual(s) in a group, a safety issue is created as nonlicensed individuals are not authorized to take a subsequent shot to defend themselves, their dogs, or other members of their group from the wounded bear. To remedy this, supporters of the bill want to create a backup license to legally allow those in a hunting group to take a subsequent shot to put down the wounded animal, if necessary, if they obtain the backup license.

Opponents of the bill say that only licensed hunters should be involved with the pursuit of a bear and that, if accommodations need to be made in law to allow individuals with additional

needs to still be able to hunt bear, the bill should be amended to only allow a more select group of individuals to obtain a backup license.

FISCAL IMPACT:

House Bill 4937 is likely to increase revenues for the Department of Natural Resources by establishing a new hunting license for bear backup hunters where no such license currently exists. The extent of this revenue increase is unclear at present and will depend on the number of licenses sold. Revenue collected from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses is deposited to the Game and Fish Protection Account, which primarily supports programs in the department's Wildlife Division and Fisheries Division. This revenue generated an estimated \$63.7 million in revenue in FY 2023-24. The bill is unlikely to directly affect departmental costs as the department already has the necessary infrastructure in place to sell a variety of hunting licenses. The bill is also unlikely to affect local government costs or revenues.

POSITIONS:

Representatives of the following entities testified in support of the bill (10-29-25):

- Michigan Hunting Dog Federation
- Michigan Bear Hunters Association

The Department of Natural Resources indicated a neutral position on the bill. (11-5-25)

A representative of the Michigan Bow Hunters Association testified in opposition to the bill. (10-29-25)

Human World Animals indicated opposition to the bill. (10-29-25)

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■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House Fiscal Agency staff for use by House members in their deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.