



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #649

Venison Processing Donation Program (DNR -- Fish, Wildlife and Recreation)

[LFB 2001-03 Budget Summary: Page 472, #8]

CURRENT LAW

A surcharge is added to most resident and non-resident hunting licenses to fund wildlife damage program activities. A \$1 surcharge is added to deer, bear, turkey, small game, and sports licenses. In addition, a \$2 surcharge is included in the cost of a conservation patron license. The wildlife damage program also receives all DNR revenue generated from the sale of bonus deer permits (\$12 for residents, \$20 for nonresidents). Together, these sources generated almost \$6.4 million for the wildlife damage program in 1999-00.

Previous to 1999, revenue from the wildlife damage surcharge was statutorily directed to be expended on three programs related to wildlife damage: (a) the wildlife damage claims and abatement program; (b) control of wild animals; and (c) the urban wildlife abatement and control grant program. The 1999-01 biennial budget included a provision that allowed DNR to use funds from the wildlife damage program to pay participating counties for the processing of venison that was donated to food pantries or charitable organizations during a deer herd control season established by the DNR to abate deer damage. These cost are to be paid after other wildlife damage program expenditures, and the DNR is directed to prorate payments if available funding is not adequate to fully reimburse counties.

GOVERNOR

Allow any applicant for a deer, bear, turkey, or small game hunting license to elect to make a voluntary contribution of at least \$1 to be used for the venison processing and donation program, including promotional and educational activities.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. Under the bill, monies received would be used to reimburse counties for the cost of processing donated venison (including processing, county administration costs, advertising, and donating costs incurred) during a deer damage management season for use by food pantries and charitable organizations. If donations were not sufficient to reimburse counties for their expenditures on the venison donation program, monies from the wildlife damage program could continue to be used (after payments were made for county administrative costs, wildlife damage abatement assistance, and wildlife damage claim payments). DNR would prorate reimbursement to counties if funds were insufficient for full payment. Donated funds would also be available for promotional and educational activities and materials to encourage voluntary contributions to the venison processing program. Counties would be required to make reasonable efforts to donate the venison (rather than required to donate it, currently) to be eligible for reimbursement.

2. During the fall 2000 deer herd control hunts, almost 7,800 deer were donated to be processed for food pantries statewide. The program cost the state an estimated \$489,000 and resulted in approximately 350,000 pounds of meat being donated to food pantries. Approximately 20% (or \$97,800) was used to fund county administrative efforts and advertising expenses to increase public awareness of the program; the remaining \$391,200 compensated processing and donation costs.

3. A similar donation program initiated in Maryland received donations of at least \$1 from 30% of hunters. If 30% of all hunters (resident and non-resident) purchasing deer, bear, turkey, or small game licenses in Wisconsin donated \$1, approximately \$423,000 would be raised. Based on license sales totals from fiscal year 2000, 35% of hunters purchasing deer, bear, turkey, or small game licenses would need to donate \$1 each in order to generate sufficient monies to fully fund the venison donation program (assuming a similar season and donation structure as in 2000). Wisconsin currently has a similar check-off option on applications for fishing licenses and boat registrations. Individuals have the option of donating \$1 or more for DNR lake research activities. The voluntary checkoff generated \$69,500 in 1999-00; for comparison, over one million fishing licenses were sold in 1999-00, and approximately 370,000 boat registrations or renewals took place. This represents a less than 5% participation rate. If similar results were applied to the venison donation program, it would be expected generate about \$70,000 annually.

4. At this time, DNR estimates that Zone T hunts will be held in 82 of the states 125 deer management units (66%). This would represent a decrease from 2000, when Zone T hunts were held in 97 of the 125 deer management units (78%). Funding required to support the venison processing program is expected to remain similar to 2000 levels – county administrative expenses are predicted to decrease, as many of the donation agreements were established in 2000, but processing costs may increase as public awareness of the program may grow over time.

5. It may be argued that the venison donation program encourages hunters who would not otherwise harvest additional deer to do so, thereby decreasing the number of surplus deer and (with the reduction of the deer herd) contributing to lower wildlife damage payments. From this perspective, it would be considered appropriate to use wildlife damage revenues to fund the venison

donation program.

6. Alternatively, the cost of the venison donation program may create a substantial long-term demand on the wildlife damage program. Revenues to the wildlife damage program exceeded expenditures by almost \$3.7 million in fiscal year 2000. This was due to sales of deer hunting licenses and bonus deer permits associated with a large deer herd. During fiscal year 1999-00, the wildlife damage surcharge on licenses generated \$996,500 in revenue, while sales of bonus deer permits generated almost \$5.4 million. For comparison, it is estimated that the wildlife damage surcharge will generate over \$1.0 million in revenue for 2000-01, but revenues from sales of bonus permits declined by 86% to approximately \$740,000. Special Zone T hunts (and the associated free permits) occurred over the vast majority of the state last year, contributing to the decline in bonus permit sales. As Zone T hunts are again expected to be widespread for the 2001 deer hunt, bonus permit revenues could continue to be substantially reduced. Therefore, the viability of long-term funding of the venison donation program from wildlife damage revenues may be uncertain (payments would be prorated if funds were insufficient). Further, agricultural interests and DNR's Deer Management for 2000 and Beyond initiative have suggested a number of changes to the wildlife damage program that could significantly increase the state costs of the program. A review of the scope of the program may be appropriate, given that when funding for this program was approved under 1999 Act 9, its current magnitude may not have been anticipated.

ALTERNATIVES TO BASE

1. Approve the Governor's recommendation to allow any applicant for a deer, bear, turkey, or small game hunting license to elect to make a voluntary contribution of at least \$1 to be used for the venison processing and donation program, including promotional and educational activities. (Payments for the program would also continue to come from the wildlife damage program, if available, and be prorated if donations and damage funds are insufficient.)

2. Approve the Governor's recommendation, but prohibit the use of funds from the wildlife damage program for the venison donation program. (This would have the effect of funding the venison processing donation program solely through voluntary contributions.)

3. Maintain current law. (The donation program would be funded entirely from wildlife damage revenues, if available.)

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