

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2009 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 831

(Montgomery County Delegation)

Environmental Matters

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Montgomery County - Steel Jaw Leghold or Body-Gripping Traps - Prohibition
MC 922-09

This bill prohibits the use, setting, placement, or maintenance of a steel jaw leghold trap or body-gripping trap in Montgomery County, expanding on an existing prohibition against the use, setting, placement, or maintenance of any steel jaw leghold trap on land in the county (with specified exceptions). The prohibition does not apply to a trap set by an authorized agent of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) who exercises the duties of the agent for wildlife control under guidelines established by the department.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2009.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill is not expected to materially affect State finances in the near term; however, DNR may require additional staff to the extent furbearer populations increase significantly as a result of the bill's prohibition.

Local Effect: Montgomery County may be affected to the extent the bill's prohibition results in an increase in furbearer populations and exposure of county residents to rabies. Any impact on Montgomery County operations or finances, however, is uncertain.

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

Analysis

Current Law: In Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Howard, Montgomery, and Prince George's counties, a person may not use, set, place, or maintain any steel jaw leghold trap on land,

but may use a steel jaw leghold trap to capture furbearing mammals in water. The prohibition, however, does not apply to traps set on farmland by the owner of the farmland, by the owner's agent or tenant, owner's lessee, or by any member of the owner's or tenant's immediate family who resides on the farmland. The prohibition also does not apply to traps set by an authorized agent of the Maryland Forest, Park and Wildlife Service (the functions of which, as DNR has been restructured, are now generally performed by the Wildlife and Heritage Service, Parks Service, and Forest Service) who exercises the agent's duties for wildlife control under guidelines established by DNR.

DNR may issue wildlife cooperator permits to specified persons with adequate training in the capture, handling, and care of wildlife who desire to assist in wildlife control.

Background: DNR indicates that populations of certain furbearers in Montgomery County are expected to increase due to the prohibition under the bill. Some furbearers may be harvested by means other than trapping, but are primarily trapped. DNR's *Maryland Guide to Hunting and Trapping* indicates that hunting and trapping seasons and bag limits for furbearers are established based on furbearer biology, distribution and abundance of each species, public interests and needs, and the incidence of furbearer damage complaints. Species that are managed as "furbearers" in Maryland include beaver, bobcat, coyote, fisher, gray fox, long-tailed weasel, mink, muskrat, nutria, opossum, raccoon, red fox, river otter, and skunk. A hunting license is required to hunt or trap furbearers and, with certain exceptions, a person must obtain or be authorized by a furbearer permit to hunt, chase, or trap any furbearer.

DNR contracts with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service to provide a nuisance wildlife hotline for Maryland residents. From October 1, 2007 to September 30, 2008 (federal fiscal 2008), the hotline received 9,140 calls for assistance from landowners experiencing wildlife conflicts, 1,667 (18%) of which were from Montgomery County. Of the complaints from Montgomery County residents, 351 were for raccoon, 281 for red fox, 36 for opossum, and 70 for coyote. DNR indicates leghold and body-gripping traps are the primary tools used to manage population densities of these species, the loss of which would allow populations and conflicts to increase significantly.

State Fiscal Effect: DNR indicates an additional natural resources technician will need to be hired due to an increased number of wildlife complaints, at a cost of \$59,012 in fiscal 2010. This assumes a 90-day start-up delay and accounts for a salary and fringe benefits, one-time start-up costs, and ongoing operating expenses. Future year expenditures would reflect a full salary with 4.4% annual increases, 3% employee turnover, and 1% annual increases in ongoing operating expenses.

Legislative Services advises, however, that it is unclear at this time whether additional staff will be needed, as wildlife complaints are currently primarily handled through the U.S. Department of Agriculture hotline and by wildlife control operators (holding wildlife cooperator permits), with DNR staff responding on occasion. Therefore, it is assumed, for the purposes of this fiscal and policy note, that the bill's changes can be handled with existing resources in the near term. However, to the extent complaints increase to a level where DNR will need to respond to more complaints and cannot do so with existing staff, additional resources may be needed.

Special/federal fund revenues may decrease minimally, to the extent the bill's prohibition results in a decrease in sales of furbearer permits and/or hunting licenses. DNR receives federal wildlife restoration funding, which is distributed to states based on a formula that includes the number of hunters in each state, based on the number of hunting licenses sold. According to DNR, 600 furbearer permits were sold to Montgomery County residents in 2007. The number of people that trap furbearers in Montgomery County, however, is unknown. The fee for a furbearer permit is \$5.00 and the fee for a resident hunting license is \$24.50.

Local Fiscal Effect: Montgomery County may be affected to the extent the bill's prohibition results in an increase in furbearer populations and exposure of county residents to rabies. DNR indicates that Montgomery County has led the State in confirmed rabies cases (in animals) for the last five years, logging 10% to 20% of the confirmed cases annually. DNR indicates that fox and raccoon are the primary carriers of rabies in Montgomery County and are the primary species that are trapped with leghold traps. Montgomery County's Public Health Service provides vaccines to persons exposed to rabies. It is uncertain, however, what effect the bill's prohibition will have on Montgomery County operations or finances, if any.

Small Business Effect: DNR indicates the farming community would be prohibited from controlling furbearer species as they have in the past, by enlisting the services of trappers for free. Under the bill, farmers would be required to hire wildlife control operators to control furbearer populations on their farms. Wildlife control operators, as a result of farmers and other landowners requiring their services, may experience an increase in business and revenue.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Natural Resources, Montgomery County,
Department of Legislative Services

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ncs/ljm

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