

MINUTES OF THE HOUSE TOURISM AND PARKS COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Becky Hutchins at approximately 3:30 p.m. on February 11, 2004 in Room 241-N of the Capitol.

All members were present except:

Representative Candy Ruff- excused

Committee staff present:

Hank Avila, Legislative Research Department

Mary Torrence, Office of Revisor of Statutes

Lura Attig, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee:

Representative Clay Aurand

Representative Sharon Schwartz

Chris Tymeson, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks

Dan Ward, Kansas Wildlife Federation

Others attending:

See Attached List.

HB 2668-Special deer season in a county where 25% of traffic accidents are deer related.

Proponents:

Representative Clay Aurand testified in favor of this bill, using a 1998 map and a 1990-2002 deer population chart (Attachment 1). More than 40-50 percent of traffic accidents in his district are deer related. There has been an effort to lower the deer population that has decreased the herds in the past few years. There remains a large deer population in his district. Adding an additional seven days to the current hunting season should decrease the deer population enough to lower the accident rate. Costs and human safety should override the need to maintain deer population.

Representative Sharon Schwartz proposed the need to control deer overpopulation in rural counties where 25 percent or more of the county's reported auto accidents are caused by deer (Attachment 2). In 2003, out of all the car accidents in Washington County, 45 percent were deer related. In addition, many accidents are not reported due to higher insurance premium concerns. Insurance industry figures were not available. Many deer are hit by truckers who do not stop to make reports. Residents are hesitant to make short trips, fearing an encounter with a deer.

Questions for proponents:

Representative Scoggins-Waite inquired regarding the percent of vehicle accidents, and the map, where did the figures come from? Representative Aurand replied they were furnished by The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.

Representative Osborne- the map is from 1998, and according to the graph, we *are* getting the job done. We have had the extra season for the past three years and the graph shows the program is working. He thanked the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks for the work they have done in controlling deer population.

Other questions and comments from the committee were regarding deer herds being on the move due to expanding urban areas, relating details of deer related accidents occurring in the various districts, and how would the procedure to obtain a hunting license differ from the current procedure?

Written testimony:

Chairperson Hutchins called the attention of the committee to written testimony submitted by the Washington County Commissioners (Attachment 3), and the Marshall County Commissioners

CONTINUATION SHEET

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(Attachment 4), submitted as proponents of the bill.

Chairperson Hutchins asked for further proponents. There were none.

Opponents:

Chris Tymeson, Chief Legal Counsel, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, stated that this bill is unnecessary because deer population is on a slow downward trend, mainly due to the current program of deer management (Attachment 5). It takes several years to see the results of deer management. The Department (KDWP) already has regulatory authority to set special seasons and make adjustments to current seasons as necessary to meet the demands of society. It is important to maintain the age structure of the herd as well as the trophy potential to sustain the struggling rural economy relying on hunting as alternative income. Deer vehicle accidents decreased from more than 10,000 to 9,287 statewide in 2002. Currently, less than one half of rural counties has deer population large enough to support the hunting industry. Deer hunting brings \$51 million to this state annually (based on statistics from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service).

Dan Ward, Executive Director, Kansas Wildlife Federation agrees that deer related accidents are a big problem (Attachment 6). The problem should be addressed by professionals, such as the biologists at the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP). This bill works against decision-making around the issue by putting the counties in the position of telling the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks how to do its job. This could conceivably add 105 more supervisors to the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks chain of command. Kansas Wildlife Federation believes the best deer management is to stand back and allow KDWP to do its job.

Committee questions followed.

Lloyd Fox, Biologist, Big Game Program, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks answered questions from the committee. Hunters alone cannot be responsible for herd reduction, largely due to limited access to private land and the fact that deer are not always located on the particular land on which the hunter has a permit to hunt. A large percentage of hunters with permits do not bag one deer. This is due to that lack of land access. Traffic speed is another large problem contributing to the accidents. For several years the speed limits were 55 mph, when the speeds were increased in 1996 or 1997, deer accidents increased, further proving some accidents are speed related.

Chairman Hutchins asks for further opponents. There were none.

Chairman Hutchins closed the hearing.

Approval of the Feb. 4, 2004 minutes was postponed until the next meeting, Feb. 16, 2004.

Chairperson Hutchins adjourned the meeting at 5:00 p.m.