



VERMONT LEGISLATIVE
Joint Fiscal Office

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Fiscal Note

May 23, 2025

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H.231 – An act relating to technical corrections for fish and wildlife statutes

Senate Proposal of Amendment^{1,i}

Bill Summary

This bill proposes amendments to various statutes related to hunting, fishing, trapping, and the conservation of wildlife, including threatened and endangered species. The bill's provisions making Vermont residents with developmental disabilities eligible for a free permanent fishing license would have a fiscal impact on State revenue. The bill's other proposed changes to fees, fines, and wildlife crop damage reimbursements would have a de minimis fiscal impact on the State.

Fiscal Impact

The following sections of the bill could have a fiscal impact.

Section 7: Fishing license fees

Section 7 of the bill would amend 10 V.S.A. § 4255(c) to make Vermont residents with developmental disabilities eligible for a free permanent fishing license.² This would represent a cost to the State in the form of forgone fishing license fee revenue, the scale of which would depend on the number of individuals who apply for free licenses and the duration of that license. The Joint Fiscal Office (JFO) and the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) estimate this provision would represent approximately \$2,800 per year in forgone license revenue.

Section 9: Fishing tournament permit fees

Section 9 of the bill would change how DFW assesses fees for fishing tournament permits. The current flat fee of \$50 would be replaced with the following tiered structure:

- \$10 for tournaments with up to 25 participants;
- \$30 for tournaments with 26 to 50 participants; and
- \$100 for tournaments with more than 50 participants.

Additionally, the bill would require that multi-day tournaments held under a single permit occur on consecutive days. Multi-day tournaments held on non-consecutive days would require separate permits.

Fishing tournament permit fees are deposited to the Fish and Wildlife Fund. From fiscal year 2020 to 2023,

¹ The Joint Fiscal Office (JFO) is a nonpartisan legislative office dedicated to producing unbiased fiscal analysis – this fiscal note is meant to provide information for legislative consideration, not to provide policy recommendations.

² The bill would use the definition of “developmental disabilities” provided in 18 V.S.A. § 9302

revenue from these fees averaged approximately \$6,000 annually. DFW does not expect this bill to significantly change this revenue. While the bill would decrease fees for smaller tournaments, it would also end the practice of grouping multiple tournaments under one season-long permit.

Sections 10-12: Amendments to fish and wildlife enforcement provisions

Section 10 of the bill would increase fines for big game violations as follows:

- First violations: an increase to the minimum and maximum fine from \$400–\$1,000 to \$500–\$2,000
- Subsequent violations: an increase to the maximum fine from \$4,000 to \$5,000

The fiscal impact of this change is uncertain, as the number of violations charged can vary annually and fine amounts are subject to Court discretion within statutory parameters. For reference, DFW wardens charged a total of 202 big game violations in calendar years 2023 and 2024. Fines for big game violations are deposited in part to the Fish and Wildlife Fund, with the remainder going to the General Fund. DFW staff determine the portion allocated to each.

Sections 11 and 12 of the bill would reclassify various criminal fish and wildlife violations as “minor” violations.³ This would shift jurisdiction over these violations and the assessment of fines from the Criminal Division of the Vermont Superior Court to the Judicial Bureau.⁴ DFW expects the Judicial Bureau to reference existing criminal fines when setting civil penalties for minor violations. Assuming comparable penalties, the Joint Fiscal Office (JFO) does not expect a significant change to State revenue from fish and wildlife violations. Penalties for both criminal and minor fish and wildlife violations are split between the Fish and Wildlife Fund and the General Fund in the same manner as big game violations.

Section 19: Repeal of DFW payments to farmers for certain deer- and bear-related damage

Section 19 of the bill would repeal a reimbursement program for farmers who experience deer- or bear-related crop or livestock damage.⁵ Currently, eligible farmers can submit claims to DFW for up to \$5,000 annually, provided their land is not posted against deer or bear hunting. Claims are paid from DFW’s base budget.

This provision would eliminate future State expenditures for this program. However, JFO cannot estimate potential savings, as they depend on the value of future crop loss claims. For reference, from fiscal year 2022 to 2024, DFW reimbursed four farmers a total of approximately \$207,000, including one \$200,000 claim submitted before the \$5,000 annual maximum was established in Act 78 of 2023.⁶ Had the maximum been in place earlier, and assuming the applicant would have claimed the maximum allowable reimbursement, total reimbursements during this period would have been approximately \$13,200, or an average of about \$4,400 annually.

¹ *The full fiscal note history is available on the fiscal tab of the bill page on the General Assembly website and can be accessed through a bill number search on the JFO page.*

³ *“Minor violations” are defined at 10 V.S.A. § 4571*

⁴ *4 V.S.A. § 1102*

⁵ *10 V.S.A. § 4829*

⁶ *Hannah Smith, General Counsel, Department of Fish and Wildlife, 4/4/25 written testimony to the House Committee on Environment*