



SEPTEMBER
2006
BALLOT PROPOSAL
06-3

An Overview

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PROPOSAL 06-3

On November 7, 2006, Michigan voters will decide whether to approve legislation permitting the establishment of a mourning dove hunting season in the State. Public Act 160 of 2004 was enacted to allow the Natural Resources Commission to establish a dove hunting season, but that law has been suspended, pending a referendum by Michigan voters.

The referendum will appear on the ballot as follows:

A REFERENDUM ON PUBLIC ACT 160 OF 2004 – AN ACT TO ALLOW THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A HUNTING SEASON FOR MOURNING DOVES

Public Act 160 of 2004 would:

- *Authorize the Natural Resources Commission to establish a hunting season for mourning doves.*
- *Require a mourning dove hunter to have a small game license and a \$2.00 mourning dove stamp.*
- *Stipulate that revenue from the stamp must be split evenly between the Game and Fish Protection Fund and the Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund.*
- *Require the Department of Natural Resources to address responsible mourning dove hunting; management practices for the propagation of mourning doves; and participation in mourning dove hunting by youth, the elderly and the disabled in the Department's annual hunting guide.*

Should this law be approved?

If the majority of electors vote "yes" on the referendum, the law will take effect, permitting the establishment of a mourning dove hunting season in Michigan. If the majority of voters vote "no", dove hunting in the State will remain prohibited.

Public Act 160 of 2004

On June 18, 2004, Governor Granholm signed legislation permitting the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) to issue orders creating a dove hunting season in Michigan. Under State law, the NRC has the sole authority to regulate hunting in the State, and must consider sound scientific management practices and public input before issuing regulations on the taking of game. On September 9, 2004, the Commission approved a trial dove hunting season for a period of three years, limited to six counties on the Indiana border.

The first dove hunting season began on September 10, 2004, and extended through October 30, 2004. In June 2005, signed petitions were submitted, calling for a referendum on Public Act 160 of 2004. After the Board of State Canvassers certified the petitions and verified that a sufficient number of valid signatures had been submitted, the Act was suspended, and subsequent dove hunting seasons were cancelled until the matter could be brought before the voters in 2006.

Discussion

Dove hunting currently is permitted in most other states, including those bordering Michigan. Some argue that opening a dove hunting season in Michigan could draw hunters from neighboring states, benefiting the economy, as well as increase the popularity of hunting in general.

Mourning doves are plentiful in Michigan, and proponents claim that there is no ecological reason to protect the birds from hunting. As evidence, they point to states that permit dove hunting, where the dove population has not been adversely affected.

Proponents of dove hunting also say that doves are ideal birds for young, inexperienced, or disabled hunters to hunt, particularly because the birds may be hunted from a stationary location and do not require extensive tracking or stalking.

Opponents point out that mourning doves have been historically recognized in Michigan as songbirds rather than game birds, and that they are among the most popular and most recognized birds at feeders across the State. Some also have suggested that because of the dove's status as a symbol of peace, it should remain protected.

Because the mourning dove is a relatively small bird, there are disputes over whether doves contain enough meat to warrant their death, particularly if a bird is not shot cleanly. According to dove hunting opponents, the birds' size means that they would be used essentially for target practice.

Also, some opponents are concerned that the proposed hunting season could interfere with the mourning dove nesting period. According to the *Atlas of Breeding Birds in Michigan*, mourning doves nest from March until October, depending on the weather. The dove hunting season would occur during the latter part of that period, when a percentage of birds still are nesting, though no other game or bird is hunted during a similar period. Shooting parent birds before their young were able to survive on their own could lead to the death of the baby birds as well as the adults.

Some critics also believe that nontarget birds could be mistaken for doves. These include American kestrels and sharp-shinned hawks, which are protected under the Endangered Species Act. Hunting proponents point out, however, that Public Act 160 requires hunting guides to include tips for identifying the birds, and the mourning dove is one of the most recognized birds in the State.