

ONE HUNDRED NINTH LEGISLATURE - SECOND SESSION - 2026
COMMITTEE STATEMENT
LB979

Hearing Date: Thursday January 22, 2026
Committee On: Natural Resources
Introducer: Brandt
One Liner: Change provisions of the Game Law and the State Boat Act

Roll Call Vote - Final Committee Action:

Advanced to General File with amendment(s)

Vote Results:

Aye:	7	Senators Brandt, Clouse, DeKay, Hughes, Juarez, Moser, Raybould
Nay:		
Absent:		
Present Not Voting:	1	Senator Conrad

Testimony:

Proponents:

Senator Tom Brandt
Timothy McCoy

Representing:

Opening Presenter
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Opponents:

Representing:

Neutral:

Representing:

* ADA Accommodation Written Testimony

Summary of purpose and/or changes:

LB979, introduced by Senators Brandt and DeKay, updates Nebraska's Game and Parks Commission statutes found in Chapter 37. The bill revises a definition related to wildlife damage abatement, defining "wildlife abatement" and also clarifies the agency's authority to conduct abatement activities on private lands.

LB979 updates statutory language regarding the use of funds received for abatement and investigative purposes and expands authorized uses of investigative funds to include investigative vehicles, training, equipment, and digital services.

The bill authorizes the Game and Parks Commission to charge cost-based fees for wildlife education programs requested by outside groups and to accept donations for wildlife education. It increases and adjusts fee caps for various licenses, permits, applications, stamps, registrations, and related programs, including lifetime permits, big game permits, specialty permits, game breeding and controlled shooting areas, and motorboat registrations.

Finally, the bill creates a new statutory section addressing wildlife commercialization and trafficking, including aggregation of violations and enhanced penalties for qualifying offenses.



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Section by Section Summary:

Sec. 1. Amends Section 37-201 to include new sections 6 and 17 of this bill to the state's Game Law.

Sec. 2. Amends Section 37-247.01 to update the definition of "wildlife abatement" to delete the use of a trained raptor.

Sec. 3. Updates language in section 37-324 regarding the State Game Fund to reflect that the Commission has no statutory program authority to pay claims of landowners, but provides for the use of funds for abatement that are received from special depredation seasons.

Sec. 4. Amends section 37-327.01 to update uses for the Game Law Investigation Cash Fund, which receives funds from fines under the Game Law. This change would allow the commission to use these funds to support successful investigations. This change also requires the commission to include related investigatory expenditures in an annual report to the Legislature.

Sec. 5. Amends Section 37-327.04 to update language for the Game and Parks Commission Educational Fund to allow the commission to accept donations, grants, or other contributions. In addition, it would allow any fees collected from new Section 6 of the bill to be placed into the fund to be used for fish and wildlife education programs.

Sec. 6. A new section of law which authorizes the commission to charge for fish and wildlife education programs that are done at the request of groups and organizations at their locations. Fees would be limited to costs of staff time for the program and materials provided to program participants. Such fees shall be credited to the Game and Parks Commission Educational Funds.

Sec. 7. Amends section 37-406 to increase the issuing fee cap from \$3 to \$4 for licenses, permits, and stamps issued under the Game Law.

Sec. 8. Amends section 37-415 to change the separate caps for resident and nonresident lifetime permits to instead index the caps to be not more than 20 times the fee for the annual permits. This matches the fee caps in section 37-426 (not amended in this bill) for lifetime habitat and waterfowl stamps. Lifetime permit fees would continue to be set in regulations by the commission.

Sec. 9. Amends section 37-431 to remove redundant language regarding how habitat funds and aquatic habitat funds can be spent. Such language is duplicative with section 37-432, which is not amended by this bill, and removes references to presenting plans to the Legislature that were put in place when the habitat stamp and aquatic habitat stamps were first introduced. Those plans are approved and reported on to the Commission. For funds from lifetime aquatic habitat stamps, the language is changed to restrict the commission from expending 25% of those funds.

Sec. 10. Increases the fee caps in section 37-447 for deer permits. The application fee for permits that require a drawing at the current cap of \$7 is increased to \$9. Both the resident and nonresident deer permit statutory caps (resident \$39, and nonresident \$369) are increased (resident \$50, and nonresident \$480). This section also gives rulemaking authority to the commission to issue a preference point.

Sec. 11. Increases the fee caps in section 37-449 for antelope permits. The application fee for permits that require a drawing at the current cap of \$7 is increased to \$9. Both the resident and nonresident antelope permit statutory caps (resident \$39, and nonresident \$257) are increased (resident \$50, and nonresident \$480, but not less than \$369). This section also gives rulemaking authority to the commission to issue a preference point.



Sec.12. Amends section 37-450 to allow the commission to adopt rules and regulations for issuing a preference point and bonus point for elk.

Sec. 13. Amends section 37-451 to increase the application fee for the random drawing for a bighorn sheep hunting permit (only issued to residents). The new cap is set at \$44 dollars.

Sec. 14. Amends section 37-456.01 to change language regulating issuance of free earned landowner elk permits and accumulation of antlerless elk harvests and changes language so that the commission may, instead of shall, adopt rules and regulations for this.

Sec. 15. Amends section 37-484 to increase the fee cap for a game breeding and controlled shooting areas license fee from \$198 to \$258.

Sec. 16. Amends section 37-4,111 to increase the application fee for paddlefish permits that require a drawing from the current cap of \$7 to \$9. The section also gives the commission rulemaking authority to issue a preference point.

Sec. 17. Creates a new statute to help the Commission address wildlife commercialization and trafficking of wildlife that involves the sale, purchase, barter, or trade of wildlife. Creates a misdemeanor penalty and an enhanced felony penalty that would apply to those engaged in sustained, high-value, or organized commercialization schemes that exploit Nebraska's wildlife resources for profit, triggered by unlawful transactions having an aggregate value of \$10,000 or more within a period of three consecutive years.

Sec. 18. Updates motorboat registration fees in section 37-412. Increases the fees for the 3-year registration of motorboats which are divided into 4 classes: Class 1 (under 16 feet) — current fee of \$28 and a new fee of \$40; Class 2 (16 feet to under 26 feet) — current fee of \$51 and new fee of \$60; Class 3 (26 feet to under 40 feet) — current fee of \$72.50 and new fee of \$80; and Class 4 (40 feet to 120 feet) — current fee of \$120 and new fee of \$130.

Sec. 19. Amends Section 37-1241.02 to require that a personal watercraft may only be operated on the waters of Nebraska if each person aboard the personal watercraft is wearing a United States Coast Guard-approved floatation device approved for use on personal watercraft.

Sec. 20. Repealer.

Explanation of amendments:

The committee adopted AM1877 which eliminates the felony provision found in new section 17 of the bill.

Tom Brandt, Chairperson

