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State of Minnesota
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

EIGHTY-FIFTH
SESSION

HOUSE FILE NO. 2492

May 17, 2007
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The bill was read for the first time and referred to the Committee on Agriculture, Rural Economies and Veterans Affairs

A bill for an act
relating to veterans; providing for issuance of certain hunting and fishing licenses to eligible veterans without payment of fees; appropriating money; proposing coding for new law in Minnesota Statutes, chapters 97A; 197.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA:

Section 1. **[97A.467] VETERANS LIFETIME ELIGIBILITY.**

(a) In accordance with section 197.791, the commissioner must issue without fee annual hunting and fishing licenses to persons certified by the commissioner of veterans affairs as being eligible veterans.

(b) An eligible veteran is not exempt from applicable laws and rules governing hunting and fishing licenses other than the provisions relating to fees.

EFFECTIVE DATE. This section is effective July 1, 2008, and applies to hunting and fishing licenses issued on or after January 1, 2009.

Sec. 2. **[197.791] VETERANS OUTDOOR REINTEGRATION ACT.**

Subdivision 1. **Short title.** This section may be cited as the "Veterans Outdoor Reintegration Act of 2008."

Subd. 2. **Purpose.** The state of Minnesota recognizes the sacrifices of Minnesota residents who, as members of the United States armed forces, have served honorably for an extended period of time directly in harm's way in the global war on terror and recognizes that those veterans need and deserve the restorative health and wellness benefits that result from the ongoing enjoyment of Minnesota's natural resources.

Subd. 3. **Definitions.** (a) The definitions in this subdivision apply to this section.

(b) "Certificate of eligibility" means a certificate issued by the commissioner under subdivision 4, paragraph (c).

(c) "Combat service period" means the cumulative number of days that a person has spent on the land area of the nations of Iraq and Afghanistan or in the air space above those countries during the program eligibility period, while providing honorable service in the United States armed forces.

(d) "Commissioner" means the commissioner of veterans affairs, unless otherwise designated.

(e) "Eligible veteran" means a veteran who:

(1) was a Minnesota resident at the time of initial entry into the United States armed forces as indicated by the person's military records;

(2) at any time during the program eligibility period, is serving or has served honorably in active military service in the United States armed forces;

(3) is eligible for or has been awarded a qualifying military medal, as indicated by the person's Department of Defense form DD-214 or other discharge paper or by a valid written statement from the person's current or former commanding officer; and

(4) whose combat service period meets the criteria for the benefits specified in subdivision 5.

(f) "Program eligibility period" means the period between September 11, 2001, and a future date to be announced by the commissioner.

(g) "Qualifying military medal" means:

(1) the Iraq Campaign Medal;

(2) the Afghanistan Campaign Medal; or

(3) the Global War on Terror Expeditionary Medal for the same type of service as would qualify for the military campaign medal in clause (1) or (2).

(h) "Veteran" has the meaning given in section 197.447.

Subd. 4. **Determination of eligibility; certificate.** (a) The commissioner shall determine each applicant's eligibility for the benefits under this section by reference to any of the following documents as determined by the commissioner: the person's Department of Defense form DD-214 discharge papers, annual fitness reports, valid written statement or statements from the person's current or former commanding officer or officers, and any other information the commissioner may require to make a valid determination of the person's eligibility.

(b) A veteran who has previously applied for a certificate of eligibility may reapply if the veteran has acquired more qualifying military service or has collected more information about prior military service.

(c) Upon determining an applicant's eligibility and qualifying benefit level, the commissioner shall issue to each eligible veteran a certificate of eligibility, in the approximate size of the official Minnesota driver's license, stating the person's name, current address, eligibility status, qualifying benefit level, and any other information considered necessary by the commissioner to adequately control against fraud.

(d) The commissioner shall electronically certify each applicant's eligibility and qualifying benefit level to the commissioner of natural resources in a timely manner on an ongoing basis.

(e) Data collected under this section is classified as private data on individuals in accordance with section 13.02, subdivision 12.

Subd. 5. **Qualifying benefit level.** An eligible veteran qualifies for and is entitled to:

(1) one license annually, if the person's combat service period is at least 90 days, or any amount of time if the person had been ordered to serve at least 90 days in Iraq or Afghanistan and the person had been medically evacuated from the country prior to completion of that service; or

(2) two licenses annually, if the person's combat service period is more than 395 days, or the person had been injured or wounded in action at any time during hostilities in Iraq or Afghanistan, as indicated by the person's receipt of the Purple Heart Medal, and had been medically evacuated from that country as a result of that wounding.

Subd. 6. **License options; entitlement.** (a) The license options, as authorized in chapter 97A, from which an eligible veteran is entitled to choose include:

(1) an annual resident small game hunting license;

(2) a resident firearms deer hunting license;

(3) a resident archery deer hunting license; and

(4) an annual resident angling license.

(b) Notwithstanding any other provision of chapter 97A, upon proper application, a person who has been certified by the commissioner as being an eligible veteran is entitled to one or two of the licenses listed in paragraph (a), as determined in subdivision 5.

(c) Each year, an eligible veteran may request one or more of the license options listed in paragraph (a), up to the person's qualifying benefit level, as determined in subdivision 5. Within these limitations, there is no restriction regarding which license option or options the eligible veteran may select in any given year. An eligible veteran does not lose eligibility by declining in any year or in any number of years to select any license options to which the person is entitled. An eligible veteran who declines to select one or more license options in one year may not compensate in any subsequent year by selecting more license options than the person is entitled to based on the person's

qualifying benefit level. An eligible veteran is not entitled to exchange any selected license for any other license option during any year. An eligible veteran may not transfer any license or eligibility to any other person at any time.

(d) A person the commissioner has determined to be an eligible veteran and to whom the commissioner has issued a certificate of eligibility may apply for the benefits under this section in a manner determined by the commissioner of natural resources under the authority provided in section 97A.467. A separate application is required for each license requested.

(e) The commissioner and the commissioner of natural resources shall notify applicants that fraudulent application or violation of laws or rules regulating hunting and fishing may result in withdrawal of the eligibility certificate.

EFFECTIVE DATE. This section is effective July 1, 2008, and applies to hunting and fishing licenses issued to eligible veterans on or after January 1, 2009.

Sec. 3. **APPROPRIATION.**

$..... is appropriated from the general fund for fiscal year 2009 and is available until expended, as follows:

(1) $..... to the commissioner of natural resources for the cost of the licenses and permits issued under section 1; and

(2) $..... to the commissioner of veterans affairs for implementing the program in section 2.

EFFECTIVE DATE. This section is effective July 1, 2008.