

Department of Fiscal Services  
Maryland General Assembly

FISCAL NOTE

House Bill 198 (Delegate Hubbard, *et al.*)  
Environmental Matters

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**Wildland and Open Areas - Belt Woods Wildland - Modification of Boundary**

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This bill expands the boundaries of the Belt Woods Wildland, increasing it from 109 to 610 acres. The bill provides that existing agricultural fields may be reforested and that existing structures may be allowed to remain. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) may remove nonnative or domesticated plant or animal species, and erect fencing, gates, and signs which may be used for protection and interpretation. Existing tenancies with the property may continue until December 31, 1997.

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** Potential minimal expenditure increase; revenues would not be affected.

**Local Effect:** Potential minimal expenditure increase; revenues would not be affected.

**Small Business Effect:** None. Small businesses would not be directly impacted by the bill, as discussed below.

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**Fiscal Analysis**

**Background:** Wildland designations limit the types of activities that may occur on State lands to those activities that do not leave a lasting imprint of human activity. Prohibited activities include use of motorized vehicles and mechanical equipment (including bicycles), harvesting of timber, and construction of new roads, buildings, and structures.

The following recreational activities would be allowed in these areas: hiking, hunting/trapping, rafting, fishing, and horse-back riding.

The Maryland wildlands preservation system was established with the passage of the

Maryland Wildlands Act in 1971. The first wildland, Big Savage Mountain, was officially designated by the General Assembly in 1973. As of October 1996, 24 separate wildlands have been designated on over 35,400 acres of land in 14 counties throughout Maryland.

Wildlands designated in legislation enacted during the 1996 session (SB 517/Chapter 350) comprise over 21,000 of the acres currently in the system. Provisions of that bill require that an additional 1,800 acres of other wildland sites be designated east of Allegany County in either 1997 or 1998; failure to do so means that the Big Savage/Little Savage site originally designated in that bill will become a wildland. High Rock, which was used to partially substitute for Big Savage/Little Savage, will have its wildlands designation rescinded if Big Savage/Little Savage were to become a wildland.

**State Effect:** The Belt Woods property designated as wildlands in this bill is in the process of being purchased for use as State lands. The total land acquisition cost of \$4.7 million has been approved by the Board of Public Works (BPW); the closing date for the purchase is currently scheduled for February 7, 1997. The equitable title for the property is already held by the State due to the contracts signed prior to closing.

According to documents submitted by DNR to BPW, the following funding sources are being used for the purchase:

|   |                  |
|---|------------------|
| State Program Open Space (POS) funds:           | \$2,830,000      |
| Prince George's County (City of Bowie) POS:     | \$400,000        |
| Maryland Bond Legislation (Chapter 90 of 1996): | \$500,000        |
| City of Bowie:                                  | \$100,000        |
| Prince George's County:                         | \$500,000        |
| Private Funding:                                | <u>\$320,000</u> |
| Total   | \$4,650,000      |

An additional \$120,000 in administrative fees are being incurred payable through POS funds. This money is to reimburse the Trust for Public Land for its expenses for such items as appraisal fees.

Regardless of this legislation, this purchase is expected to occur. Therefore, the costs attributable to the purchase of the property are not a result of the bill. In addition, the deeds attached to the land purchase already incorporate many of the same protections, and in fact, have the wildlands regulations attached as being applicable to the property.

The only potential impact of the bill is the direct mention of reforestation; it is not clear who would be responsible for funding this activity. However, the groups involved in the purchase

of the land are forming a management council to decide how the property will be managed, and by whom. These groups include DNR, Prince George's County, the City of Bowie, the Nature Conservancy, the Trust for Public Lands, and the Western Shore Conservancy. It is assumed that volunteers would comprise a large part of effort; some minimal State funds could be involved in providing materials.

**Local Effect:** As discussed above, Prince George's County and the City of Bowie are involved in the purchase of this property and the management plan being developed. The City of Bowie has expressed interest in being directly involved in day-to-day management activities, however, no plan has yet been formalized. While the bill would not directly impact the purchase plans or the allocation of management responsibilities, the city or the county could incur minimal costs associated with reforestation.

**Small Business Effect:** There are tenant farmers currently located on the property; existing tenancies may continue until December 31, 1997. After this point, agricultural activities would not be allowed on the Belt Woods property being converted to wildland. In addition, other activities prohibited under the wildlands statute such as timber harvests would not occur. However, under the terms of the Program Open Space purchase of the property described above, the deed restrictions would have imposed the same conditions regardless of the official wildlands designation. Therefore, this bill would not directly affect any small businesses.

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**Information Source(s):** Department of Natural Resources, City of Bowie, Prince George's County, Nature Conservancy, Department of Fiscal Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - February 4, 1997  
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