

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2005 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 1262 (Delegate Cardin)
 Appropriations

**Consolidation of State Forest and Park Rangers and Natural Resources Police -
 Staffing of State Parks and Environmental Areas**

This bill requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to station at least one sworn law enforcement officer (LEO) in each park or environmental area for the protection and security of Maryland citizens. If a station does not exist, then the officer must be stationed near the park or environmental area. The bill also prohibits a reduction of law enforcement protection and services in the State parks and environmental areas after the consolidation of the Natural Resources Police (NRP) and the State Forest and Park Service (SFPS) rangers.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2005.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures could increase by \$20.6 million in FY 2006 to hire additional NRP officers in order to station LEOs in the parks and environmental areas. Future year estimates are annualized, adjusted for inflation, and reflect ongoing operating costs. No effect on revenues.

(in dollars)	FY 2006	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	20,590,700	17,912,400	18,823,900	19,798,100	20,840,500
Net Effect	(\$20,590,700)	(\$17,912,400)	(\$18,823,900)	(\$19,798,100)	(\$20,840,500)

Note:() = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate effect

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: The Secretary of Natural Resources is required to appoint NRP officers as deemed necessary for the efficient administration of the NRP force, within the limits of any related appropriations. NRP is responsible for enforcing a variety of State natural resources laws related to boating, hunting, fishing, pollution, and wildlife. Its duties range from boat inspections and issuance of boating certificates to hydrographic surveys, patrols of submerged aquatic vegetation, and hunter safety education. SFPS rangers are responsible for law enforcement activities in the State's parks, forests, and other public lands.

Background: DNR has two police forces, NRP and the SFPS rangers. In December 2003, the Governor's Commission on Structure and Efficiency of State Government (the Mandel Commission), in its final report, recommended that the law enforcement functions of SFPS and NRP be consolidated. On March 25, 2004, the State signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the State Law Enforcement Officers' Labor Alliance to merge the SFPS rangers into NRP and reclassify the rangers in corresponding NRP classifications. Pursuant to the MOU, the consolidation became effective January 1, 2005 and will be fully implemented by January 1, 2006.

Under the MOU, all sworn law enforcement employees whose positions are regularly classified as Ranger II, Park Service Specialist, Park Service Supervisor, and Park Ranger Supervisor, a total of 108 positions, would be transferred and assigned to NRP. According to DNR, as of March 14, 2005, 47 LEOs (39 ranger managers and 8 sergeants) will remain with SFPS and will continue to perform professional park management and certain LEO responsibilities. DNR advises that it plans to fill several civilian vacancies to complement the current SFPS civilian work force to take on the non-LEO functions currently performed by the rangers. Converting the SFPS workforce to a completely civilian status will only occur through attrition, as supervisory SFPS rangers vacate their positions.

During the transition year, transferring rangers will be reassigned to their originating park with little change to their current responsibilities and SFPS will work to hire civilian replacement staff.

The *2004 Joint Chairmen's Report* requested a report from DNR and the Department of Budget and Management describing the process, timeline, and potential cost savings from the merger. On October 1, 2004, DNR submitted the requested report, noting that the

merger is anticipated to result in a decrease in both personnel and operating expenditures once fully implemented (in SFPS, it will cost an estimated 40% less to hire civilian personnel rather than LEOs).

State Expenditures: General fund expenditures could increase by an estimated \$20.6 million in fiscal 2006, which accounts for a 90-day start-up delay. This estimate reflects the cost of hiring 226 NRP officers to be stationed in the parks and environmental areas. It includes salaries, fringe benefits, one-time start-up costs, and ongoing operating expenses. The information and assumptions used in calculating the estimate are stated below:

- according to DNR, sufficient personnel is not available to station LEOs at every public use area throughout the State; accordingly, full-time law enforcement presence is not currently provided in natural resource management areas, forests, or natural environmental areas;
- NRP is a mobile field force, with NRP officers assigned to specific patrol areas within regions throughout the State; these officers respond to calls for service as needed;
- according to DNR, there are 49 parks, 23 natural resources management areas, 12 forests, and 7 natural environmental areas, for a total of 91 areas;
- as of March 14, 2005, 47 LEOs will remain in SFPS after the merger;
- under the bill, the 47 remaining LEOs would be evenly distributed among the areas (one LEO per area);
- two additional LEOs would be needed in the 47 areas where LEOs will remain after the merger to provide for 16-hour protection, while taking into account shift changes and leave considerations;
- three LEOs would be needed for each remaining area to provide for 16-hour protection, while taking into account shift changes and leave considerations; and
- 15% overtime.

Salaries and Fringe Benefits	\$11,175,785
Automobile Purchase/Operations	6,928,030
Supplies (including uniforms and weapons)	1,469,000
Overtime	<u>1,017,916</u>
Total FY 2006 State Expenditures	\$20,590,731

Future year expenditures reflect: (1) full salaries with 4.6% annual increases and 3% employee turnover; (2) 1% annual increases in ongoing operating expenses; and (3) replacement uniforms.

Legislative Services advises that the number of LEOs that will remain in SFPS under the MOU is subject to change. At this time another collective bargaining session is neither anticipated nor scheduled prior to negotiations reopening in September. However, at the request of either labor or management, negotiations may be reopened at any time. Any change in the number of LEOs that will remain in SFPS after the merger would affect the number of additional LEOs that would need to be hired under the bill. In addition, in future years, as LEOs are attritioned out and replaced with civilians pursuant to the MOU, DNR would need to hire additional LEOs under the bill.

Legislative Services also advises that the bill applies to “each park or environmental area” but does not define the term “environmental area.” For the purposes of this fiscal note, it is assumed that the intent of the bill is to apply to all public use areas under SFPS (including parks, natural resource management areas, forests, and natural environmental areas). If, however, the intent of the bill is to apply only to parks and natural environmental areas, the bill would affect only 56 of the 91 areas. Under this assumption, an estimated 121 LEOs would need to be hired, at a cost of approximately \$11.0 million in fiscal 2006.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Natural Resources, Department of Legislative Services

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ncs/ljm

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