

SENATE BILL 325

M1, B1

71r1140

By: **Senators Conway, Hogan, Dyson, Brochin, Exum, Gladden, Kelley, Klausmeier, McFadden, Peters, Pugh, Raskin, and Stone**

Introduced and read first time: January 31, 2007

Assigned to: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Natural Resources – State Forests and Parks – Funding**

3 FOR the purpose of requiring the Governor to appropriate certain funds for the
4 operation of State forests and parks; and generally relating to funding for State
5 forests and parks.

6 Preamble

7 WHEREAS, Maryland's State parks provide access to ecological and biological
8 diversity, are significant scenic, historical, and cultural assets, and are a fundamental
9 element of our State's natural resources; and

10 WHEREAS, State parks are part of Maryland's heritage, provide an essential
11 public service, satisfy our need to connect with the natural world, give us a sense of
12 harmony, and help us better understand the world around us; and

13 WHEREAS, Maryland's parks are a treasure to the State and careful
14 stewardship of this public trust is critical if future generations are to continue to enjoy
15 them; and

16 WHEREAS, Our State parks and forests provide an educational resource that is
17 over 260,000 acres in size and provide lifelong learning opportunities for all citizens of
18 our State; and

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.



1 WHEREAS, Maryland State parks are home to a great variety of fish and
2 wildlife and, through proper stewardship of these species and their habitats, provide
3 hunters and anglers countless opportunities to experience and continue the rich
4 traditions of hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching; and

5 WHEREAS, Parks and forests provide a natural setting and inspiration for
6 exercise and activity that improve a person's physical fitness and therefore help with
7 the treatment and prevention of a variety of adult and childhood diseases; and

8 WHEREAS, Our State parks play an important role in many sectors of
9 Maryland's economy, including tourism industries, recreational activity, retail sectors,
10 and employment, to the extent that the economic benefit is tenfold – for every \$1
11 budgeted for a park, \$10 goes back into the State's economy; and

12 WHEREAS, During 2006, the centennial of the Maryland Park and Forest
13 Services, more than 12,000,000 visitors enjoyed the natural beauty and resources of
14 our parks; and

15 WHEREAS, In the current budget, park services are being insufficiently funded
16 and provided, in that only six employees are dedicated entirely to interpretive services
17 as naturalists and historians, a 66% reduction since 2003, and in 2006, 91 rangers
18 were transferred to the Natural Resources Police without replacements for all of them,
19 and any replacements that are being hired are being funded solely through Special
20 Fund revenues, not through General Fund appropriations, which means that the
21 money comes out of the park visitor's pocket rather than being funded as a public
22 service; and

23 WHEREAS, Programs by the Maryland Park Service that provide cultural,
24 educational, historical, and recreational resources have been downsized and
25 compromised, such as the Junior Ranger program, which will soon be a completely
26 self-guided program rather than having park rangers as role models and mentors as
27 originally intended; and

28 WHEREAS, Compared to other nearby states, Maryland has the highest day
29 use and camping service charges, which prevent many people from enjoying this public
30 resource; and

31 WHEREAS, The Department of Natural Resources has unilaterally changed the
32 objective for State parks and now wants to make the parks self-sufficient, generating
33 their own revenues through use charges, rather than providing the funds necessary to
34 maintain these public lands and public services for all residents of our State to enjoy;
35 now, therefore,

1 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF
2 MARYLAND, That, in addition to the allocation provided under § 13–209 of the Tax –
3 Property Article, the Governor shall include in the annual budget bill an increase
4 in the General Fund appropriation over the Governor’s proposed fiscal 2008
5 budget for the operation of State forests and parks as follows:

6 (a) for fiscal year 2009, \$5,500,000; and

7 (b) for fiscal year 2010, \$4,000,000.

8 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect
9 October 1, 2007.