

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2016 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
 First Reader

House Bill 1256 (Delegate Hornberger)
 Environment and Transportation

Natural Resources - Cecil County - Elk

This bill requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to study the biological carrying capacity and cultural carrying capacity of elk in Cecil County. By October 1, 2017, DNR must report to the Governor and the General Assembly its findings and recommendations on whether elk should be reintroduced in Cecil County.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures increase by \$50,000 in FY 2017 only for DNR to contract with an outside vendor to study the cultural carrying capacity. Existing DNR staff can study the biological carrying capacity, conduct a final review of the cultural carrying capacity study provided by the contractor, and complete the required report with existing budgeted resources. No effect on revenues.

| (in dollars) | FY 2017 | FY 2018 | FY 2019 | FY 2020 | FY 2021 |
|----------------|------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Revenues | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| GF Expenditure | 50,000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Net Effect | (\$50,000) | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |

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

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law/Background: According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Eastern Elk, which was formerly found in the United States east of the Great Plains, became extinct in 1880. As such, there are no elk in Maryland; thus, there are no current laws or regulations relating to elk population management or hunting.

DNR advises that in 2011, the Maryland Legislative Sportsmen's Foundation, DNR, and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation formed a partnership to determine the viability of elk reintroduction to Western Maryland. A three-fold feasibility assessment was required: biological, social, and economic. Of critical interest to the partnership was the expressed willingness of the local citizens to support the reintroduction of elk.

DNR further advises that, in 2012, the results of a statewide public opinion survey found that nearly three out of four Maryland residents (72%), including two-thirds of Western Maryland residents (68%) specifically, supported the reintroduction of elk into the western part of the State. Coupled with the public opinion survey was an economic assessment that determined that Western Maryland could realize a projected \$4 million annually in visitor spending should elk be reintroduced there.

DNR advises that despite these findings, discussions with local stakeholder groups found little support for elk reintroduction. The principal concerns surrounded vehicle collisions, crop damage, and potential for disease. Efforts to mitigate such concerns through experiences shared by other states were unsuccessful. Consequently, the partnership agreed that local support did not exist to pursue continued efforts to reintroduce elk in Western Maryland.

According to the Pennsylvania Game Commission, elk once thrived in great numbers in Pennsylvania and were reintroduced in Pennsylvania in 1913 and 1926. Since the 1980s, a renewed interest, along with a better understanding of elk management, has enabled an elk herd in Pennsylvania to grow and its range to expand. In 2004, the herd was more than 900 elk strong. A 2014 report from the Pennsylvania Game Commission advises that elk inhabit grassy meadows, reclaimed strip mines, and forest clear cuts. Although clearings are essential, elk also rely heavily on forests for shelter and even some food. Elk are primarily grazers and eat a variety of grasses and plants. Elk typically shy away from populated areas but will visit farms and backyards to obtain some favored food, especially corn, alfalfa, and wheat. In Pennsylvania, elk can be found in five counties.

State Expenditures: General fund expenditures increase by \$50,000 in fiscal 2017 only for DNR to contract with an outside vendor to conduct a public opinion survey to determine the cultural carrying capacity of elk in Cecil County. This estimate is based on the actual cost incurred to conduct the public opinion survey regarding the reintroduction of elk in

Western Maryland. DNR advises that existing game mammal program biologists can study the biological carrying capacity of elk in Cecil County, conduct a final review of the cultural carrying capacity study provided by the contractor, and complete the required report.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Natural Resources, Pennsylvania Game Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 7, 2016
kb/lgc

Analysis by: Kathleen P. Kennedy

Direct Inquiries to:

(410) 946-5510

(301) 970-5510