

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2018 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 1440 (Delegate Glass)
Environment and Transportation

Natural Resources - Hunter Safety Instructors - State Park Entrance Fee

This bill requires a person who has been authorized to give a course of instruction in conservation, competency, and safety in the handling of firearms by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to be admitted to any State park without having to pay an entrance fee.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Minimal decrease in special fund revenues from State park entrance fees beginning in FY 2019. Expenditures are not affected.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: Minimal or none.

Analysis

Current Law/Background:

Maryland Hunter Education Course and Certificate of Competency

DNR is responsible for prescribing the course of instruction in competency and safety in the handling of firearms and for designating authorized instructors. With specified exceptions, a person must obtain a Certificate of Competency in Firearms and Hunter Safety prior to obtaining a hunting license by successfully completing the Maryland Hunter Education Course.

The Maryland Hunter Education Course is administered by volunteers, and DNR reports that there are 950 volunteer instructors. DNR advises that after five years of service (in which an instructor teaches at least two classes per year), an instructor receives a free hunting license. DNR also advises that volunteers are reimbursed for mileage to conduct courses, attend training, and attend other relevant meetings.

State Park Entrance Fees

According to DNR, some, but not all, State parks charge day-use fees, which vary by park and by season. For example, there are no day-use fees at Martinak and Tuckahoe State parks. However, from the Friday before Memorial Day to Labor Day Monday, Assateague State park charges \$4 per person for residents and \$6 per person for nonresidents. The rest of the year, Assateague charges \$3 per vehicle for residents and \$5 per vehicle for nonresidents. Overnight camping fees also vary by park and by the amenities offered. For example, at Elk Neck State Park, a standard campsite is \$21.49 per night plus service charges, a campsite with electric is \$27.49 per night plus service charges, and a campsite with electric, water, and sewer is \$36.49 per night plus service charges.

The Secretary of Natural Resources has broad authority to establish State park fees. The Maryland Park Service currently offers reduced fees and fee waivers to a variety of State park visitors. For example, the Golden Age Pass, with a one-time fee of \$10, entitles adults age 62 and older free day-use entry to all State parks that charge service fees, among other benefits. Other passes/waivers are offered for specified youth, the disabled, and specified military/veterans.

State Revenues: Special fund revenues decrease beginning in fiscal 2019 due to the State park entrance fee exemption for hunter safety instructors. A reliable estimate of the decrease in revenues cannot be made, as it depends on numerous factors, including the number of instructors that otherwise would have visited State parks, the frequency with which those instructors would have visited the parks, and the fees that they would have paid in the absence of the bill. In addition, the bill refers to “entrance fees.” It is unclear if this applies only to day-use charges or if it also applies to other park charges, such as campsite charges. Regardless, the overall impact is not expected to be significant, since there are fewer than 1,000 instructors and not all instructors visit the parks. *For illustrative purposes*, if 20% of the 950 instructors otherwise would have paid \$4 to visit Assateague State Park twice each summer for the day, special fund revenues decrease by \$1,520.

State park fees are paid into the Forest and Park Reserve Fund within DNR. In fiscal 2016, more than \$15 million in revenue was generated from State park cabin, camping, and day-use charges.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Comptroller of Maryland; Department of Natural Resources;
Department of Legislative Services

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