

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2019 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE  
Third Reader - Revised

House Bill 1194

(Delegate Lierman, *et al.*)

Environment and Transportation

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

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Natural Resources Protection Program of 2019

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This bill requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to establish a Natural Resources Protection Program through a contractual relationship with a third-party organization to provide rewards of financial compensation to individuals or nonprofit organizations that report violations of natural resources or conservation laws that lead to a conviction. DNR must (1) adopt implementing regulations by October 1, 2019, and (2) appoint an ombudsperson to serve as a liaison between DNR and the third-party organization. The bill also establishes an annual reporting requirement. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2019.**

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Fiscal Summary

**State Effect:** The bill does not materially affect State operations or finances; it largely codifies a current program. DNR can adopt regulations and submit the required report using existing resources.

**Local Effect:** None.

**Small Business Effect:** Minimal.

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Analysis

**Bill Summary:** The purpose of the Natural Resources Protection Program is to (1) provide the Natural Resources Police (NRP) Force with additional assistance and resources to enforce criminal laws related to natural resources and conservation; (2) augment law enforcement activities for State parks, waters, forests, and land; and

(3) provide rewards of financial compensation to individuals or nonprofit organizations that report violations of natural resources or conservation laws that lead to a conviction.

By October 1 each year, DNR and the third-party organization must submit a joint report to the Governor and the General Assembly that details the following for the previous fiscal year:

- the aggregate value of the contributions collected and rewards of financial compensation distributed;
- the number and types of reports of violations provided;
- the number of violations reported that led to rewards;
- the methodology that the third-party organization used to make the rewards;
- the value of contributions by individual and corporate donations;
- the number of tips that led to arrests and adjudication;
- the cumulative value of natural resources and property involved in the cases; and
- a list of nonindividual donors.

DNR must select an employee of the department to be an ombudsperson to serve as a liaison between DNR and the third-party organization, as specified. The ombudsperson is also responsible for collecting and maintaining records and data for the reporting requirements, providing updates on the status of tips provided, marketing the program, and maintaining active communication with DNR, as specified.

**Current Law/Background:** DNR advises that in 2018, NRP established a [whistleblower program](#) in partnership with the nonprofit organization Maryland Wildlife Crimestoppers, Inc. Under the program, citizens may report a violation of natural resources law by text, email, or telephone to NRP, who will then investigate the reported activity. Callers may choose to remain anonymous or may choose to provide sufficient information that they can be contacted at a later time regarding a reward. Citizens who supply NRP with information leading to the arrest and conviction of a suspect are eligible to receive cash rewards. DNR notes that Maryland Wildlife Crimestoppers has the ability independently to raise funds to provide for rewards to reporting parties. NRP has received 94 calls from citizens reporting poaching activity since September 1, 2018. DNR reports that this far exceeds the annual calls to a former poaching tip hotline it once administered.

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## Additional Information

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** SB 760 (Senator Klausmeier) - Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs.

**Information Source(s):** Montgomery and Worcester counties; Maryland Association of Counties; Maryland State Commission on Criminal Sentencing Policy; Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Office of the Public Defender; Department of Natural Resources; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - February 26, 2019  
mm/lgc Third Reader - March 21, 2019  
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