

Department of Fiscal Services
Maryland General Assembly

FISCAL NOTE
Revised

House Bill 70 (Delegate Weir, et al.)

Environmental Matters

Referred to Economic and Environmental Affairs

Natural Resources - Phragmites - Cost Sharing Program

This enrolled bill requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to establish a cost sharing program for the control of phragmites on private land. The department is required to pay 50% of the control costs, and the private landowner any remaining costs. DNR must require verification of a landowner's expenses before providing financial assistance.

Moneys paid to a landowner may be paid from the Nontidal Wetlands Compensation Fund, the Wetlands Compensation Fund, the Wildlife Management and Protection Fund, or federal funds. DNR must coordinate such disbursements with the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE). In association with this program, DNR may not: (1) spend more than \$100,000 per year from the Nontidal Wetlands Compensation Fund; (2) use more than 30% of the Wildlife Management and Protection Fund; (3) pay any single landowner more than \$12,000 per year; or (4) spend more than \$60 per acre. DNR must establish priorities to target cost sharing assistance to specified areas and adopt regulations for eligibility criteria for landowners. In lieu of cash payments to landowners, DNR may substitute in-kind services of equal value. DNR must study the effectiveness of the cost sharing program.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Increase in special fund expenditures of approximately \$65,000 annually, assuming that DNR contracts with the Maryland Department of Agriculture to carry out the program and only up to 1,600 acres are treated annually. Expenditures would be greater if additional acreage is treated.

Local Effect: None.

Fiscal Analysis

Background: Phragmites is an introduced species of plant that colonizes disturbed soil. It is most common in the vicinity of tidewater, and frequently occurs in association with road construction and dredge soil impoundments. Phragmites is generally considered an undesirable plant species, particularly as compared to native wetland species. DNR currently provides technical assistance to private landowners on techniques for phragmites control.

State Expenditures: There are between 10,316 and 27,250 acres of phragmites in Maryland on private land; taking the average of these numbers gives an estimate of 18,783 acres statewide.

DNR advises that it plans to contract with the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) for phragmites control activities at a cost of approximately \$65,000 per year. MDA reports that while it is willing to carry out this project, no agreement has been reached. Generally, treatment costs for aerial spraying cost \$40 to \$50 per acre. Assuming that phragmites eradication would fall in this price range, given \$65,000 per year, 1,300 to 1,600 acres could be treated.

Earlier this year, DNR advised that 10% of phragmites-infested acreage would be treated each year, which would amount to 1,900 acres. Given the above treatment costs, this would result in expenditures of \$76,000 to \$95,000. The Department of Fiscal Services advises that while DNR's expenditures on the program could be limited to under \$65,000, this restriction is not written into the legislation. Therefore, expenditures could increase if DNR decides to treat additional acreage.

Information Source(s): Department of Natural Resources, Maryland Department of the Environment, Department of Fiscal Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - January 23, 1996
ncs Revised - House Third Reader - April 3, 1996
Revised - Enrolled Bill - April 24, 1996

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