

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly

FISCAL NOTE

House Bill 576 (Chairman, Environmental Matters Committee)
(Departmental - Natural Resources)

Environmental Matters

Natural Resources - Forest Fires

This departmental bill broadens the prohibition against setting or causing a fire (willfully, maliciously, or with intent) on any woods, brush, grass, grain, stubble, or marsh to apply to land that is owned by the person causing the fire. Fires set in violation of this provision is prima facie proof of malice. Under current law the prohibition only applies to land not owned by the person. Violations are subject to a fine of between \$25 and \$2,000 and/or a jail term of 30 days to 5 years. The bill also allows the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to recover costs for fire suppression for any fire that is started in violation of the bill, not just those fires that damage another person's property.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Potential cost recovery of \$30,000 annually, of which \$18,800 is general fund revenue and \$11,200 is special fund revenue (Forest and Parks Reserve Fund). Indeterminate increase in State general fund revenues due to the bill's criminal penalty provision. No effect on expenditures.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: The Department of Natural Resources has determined that this bill has minimal or no impact on small business (attached). Legislative Services concurs with this assessment.

Fiscal Analysis

State Effect: DNR's Forest Service is responsible for protecting over 3.2 million acres of public and private forest, grasslands, and marshes from fire. DNR responds to approximately 620 wildfires annually that affect 3,000 acres across the State. It is estimated that fire suppression costs for these fires are \$68,000 annually. Under current law, DNR is unable to recover the costs associated with fire suppression if the fire stays in a person's property. DNR is only able to recover between \$10,000 and \$15,000 annually in fire suppression costs for fires that spread outside of a person's property. The bill will allow DNR to recover the costs associated with suppressing fires whether or not they spread outside of a person's property. It is estimated that DNR will be able to recover approximately 60-70% of fire suppression costs resulting in an additional \$25,000 - \$30,000 in increased revenue annually (62.5% to the general fund and 37.5% to the Forest and Parks Reserve Fund).

Information Source(s): Department of Natural Resources, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 16, 1998

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