

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2000 Session

FISCAL NOTE
Revised

Senate Bill 756 (Senator Hooper. *et al.*)

Economic and Environmental Affairs

Upland Wildlife Habitat Fund

This bill establishes the Upland Wildlife Habitat Fund in the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) as a special, non-lapsing fund consisting of voluntary contributions made at the time of purchase of a hunting license and other donations. The bill prohibits investment earnings from being transferred to the general fund and allows DNR to use the fund only to: (1) provide cost-share assistance to landowners for planting upland wildlife habitat; (2) provide matching funds to acquire grant funding for upland wildlife habitat programs; (3) hire contractual staff to implement upland wildlife habitat programs in the State; and (4) promote the fund and programs. The bill authorizes the Secretary to prioritize those duties to maximize the effectiveness of upland wildlife habitat programs. The bill provides that a designated person who sells hunting licenses and who collects donations for the fund may retain 10% of each donation.

The bill also clarifies the permissible uses of specified funds from the Wildlife Management and Protection Fund (WMPF) to allow DNR to use those funds only for reimbursing farmers for planting food *or cover* for *upland* game birds and mammals *and wetland* game birds in the State. The bill also clarifies the amounts of specified funds to be used for those purposes (\$10.50 of specified nonresident hunting license fees and \$10 of other specified fees).

The bill takes effect July 1, 2000.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Potential meaningful increase in special fund revenues and expenditures beginning in FY 2001 related to the new fund and its required uses.

Local Effect: This bill would not directly affect local government operations or finances.

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

Analysis

Current Law: No upland wildlife habitat special fund or program exists in statute. DNR is authorized to use funds generated by the increase in specified fees and \$10 of other specified fees paid into the WMPF to reimburse farmers for planting and leaving grains, grasses, and legumes unharvested in the fields in order to be used to provide feed for any game birds and mammals in the State. DNR advises that under the reimbursement program, it also provides reimbursements to farmers for planting cover for those animals.

State Fiscal Effect: The bill creates a new special fund and authorizes voluntary contributions and other donations to be made to the fund. Accordingly, special fund revenues would increase to the extent that donations and contributions are made, although a precise estimate of any donations and contributions cannot be made. In any event, any increase in revenues would be offset by an increase in special fund expenditures for the required uses of the fund as specified in the bill. Because the bill's requirements are linked to donations and contributions to the fund, the bill is not anticipated to increase general fund expenditures.

The provisions of the bill clarifying that \$10.50 of specified nonresident hunting license fees be used to reimburse farmers does not have any fiscal impact because that amount is currently equivalent to the funds generated by the increase in those fees.

Small Business Effect: Designated persons authorized to sell hunting licenses that also collect donations for the fund will be allowed to retain 10% of each donation. To the extent that this provision applies to any small businesses, those entities could benefit. Because it is difficult to predict the amount of donations that will be made to the fund, however, a precise estimate of any increase in revenues cannot be made at this time. The bill also could benefit farmers in the State by facilitating their participation in and receipt of federal funds from the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: HB 478 (Delegate Guns, *et al.*) - Environmental Matters.

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

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