

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2005 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 463 (Delegate Edwards)
 Environmental Matters

Natural Resources - Black Bears - Establishment of Population in Each County

This bill requires the Secretary of Natural Resources to establish a program to ensure that, by October 1, 2012, a black bear population is introduced into each county in the State.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditure increase of \$20,000 in FY 2006 for contractual services to conduct a habitat study and mapping. Future year estimates reflect costs to hire two technicians to conduct trapping and transplant activities. No effect on revenues.

(in dollars)	FY 2006	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010
GF Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	20,000	120,700	94,700	100,700	107,200
Net Effect	(\$20,000)	(\$120,700)	(\$94,700)	(\$100,700)	(\$107,200)

Note:() = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate effect

Local Effect: The bill does not directly affect local government operations or finances.

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

Analysis

Current Law: Black bears are classified as forest game mammals in Maryland.

Background: According to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the State's population of black bears, which is approaching 500, has increased significantly since the

early 1990s. Until the 2004-2005 hunting season, a regulatory ban on hunting black bears had been in effect since 1953. Also adding to the population's steady increase is the absence of natural predators and improved habitats. As the population has grown, so has the number of sightings and complaints. DNR has responded to these complaints by providing technical assistance and educational materials to landowners and electric fencing to beekeepers. Since 1996, the sale of black bear conservation stamps has generated funds to compensate farmers and other landowners who report damage to agricultural crops caused by black bears.

Maryland's Black Bear Management Plan for 2004-2013 outlines several management goals and objectives. Major goals include ensuring the long-term viability of Maryland's black bear population through comprehensive research and monitoring; conserving black bear habitat in the State; and addressing human-bear conflicts. One plan objective is to use regulated hunting to achieve and maintain the black bear population at a level compatible with land use goals and to minimize potential nuisance situations.

For the 2004-2005 season, DNR established regulations instituting a limited black bear hunt, with a harvest target of 30 bears. DNR received over 2,000 applications and issued 200 bear-hunting permits. DNR closed the hunt after only one day due to concern that the target would be surpassed if hunting continued. Twenty bears were harvested.

According to DNR, Maryland currently has a breeding population of black bears in the four westernmost counties (Garrett, Allegany, Washington, and Frederick); however, DNR receives bear sightings and complaints in central and southern Maryland counties each year.

State Expenditures: General fund expenditures could increase by an estimated \$20,000 in fiscal 2006. This estimate reflects the cost of contractual services to conduct a black bear habitat suitability study and mapping.

However, the Department of Legislative Services advises that a significant portion of the costs associated with this bill would be incurred beginning in fiscal 2007. Fiscal 2007 expenditures are estimated at \$120,713. This estimate reflects the cost of hiring two natural resource technicians to trap black bears and transplant them to the 19 counties that currently do not have a breeding population of black bears. It includes salaries, fringe benefits, one-time start-up costs, and ongoing operating expenses, including travel. The estimate assumes that DNR would need to transplant at least five males and five females in each county that does not currently have a breeding population.

Salaries and Fringe Benefits	\$85,800
Automobile Purchase/Operations	20,400
Other Equipment/Operating Expenses	<u>14,513</u>
Total FY 2007 State Expenditures	\$120,713

Expenditures for fiscal 2008 through 2010 reflect: (1) 4.6% annual increases in salaries and 3% employee turnover; and (2) 1% annual increases in ongoing operating expenses.

The two natural resource technicians hired to conduct trapping and transplant activities would need to be retained in the out-years to respond to the anticipated increase in nuisance complaints that would result from establishing a breeding population of black bears in each county. In fact, it is likely that DNR would need to hire additional staff in the out-years to address nuisance complaints.

Small Business Effect: With the establishment of a black bear population in each county, farmers and other small businesses could incur increased costs to address damage caused by black bears. According to a 2004 report by the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, bears can cause a wide range of economic damage, including damage to timber, beehives, agricultural crops, and various livestock and poultry.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Natural Resources, International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 20, 2005
ncs/ljm

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