

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2007 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 1377 (Delegate Beitzel, *et al.*)
 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, 2014, 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 2008 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 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	20,000	181,300	115,000	120,700	126,800
Net Effect	(\$20,000)	(\$181,300)	(\$115,000)	(\$120,700)	(\$126,800)

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, estimated at more than 645, 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 closed the hunt after only one day due to concern that the target would be surpassed if hunting continued. Twenty bears were harvested. For the 2005-2006 season, the harvest target was 40 to 55 bears. The season was closed after 40 bears had been harvested in four days. In both 2004 and 2005, DNR received over 2,000 applications and issued 200 bear-hunting permits. For the 2006-2007 season, DNR opened all of Allegany County to bear hunting in order to stabilize the growing bear population and had a harvest target of 35 to 55 bears. The season was closed after 41 bears had been harvested in two days.

According to DNR, Maryland currently has a breeding population of black bears in the four westernmost counties (Garrett, Allegany, Washington, and Frederick); however, Maryland's black bear population is expanding its range eastward, and 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 2008. 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 2009. Fiscal 2009 expenditures are estimated at \$181,305. This estimate reflects the cost of hiring two natural resources 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. 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.

Positions	2
Salaries and Fringe Benefits	\$93,778
Automobile Purchase/Operations	58,090
Other Equipment/Operating Expenses	<u>29,437</u>
Total FY 2008 State Expenditures	\$181,305

Expenditures for fiscal 2010 through 2012 reflect: • 4.5% annual increases in salaries and 3% employee turnover; • additional radio telemetry equipment; and • 1% annual increases in ongoing operating expenses.

The two natural resources 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. 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: Similar legislation was introduced as HB 1436 of 2006 and HB 463 of 2005. Both bills were unfavorably reported by the House Environmental Matters Committee.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Garrett County, Montgomery County, Prince George's County, Department of Natural Resources, International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 22, 2007
bfl/ljm

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