

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2008 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 762

(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, 2015, 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 2009 for contractual services to conduct a habitat suitability study and mapping. Future year estimates reflect costs to hire two technicians in FY 2010 to conduct trapping and transplant activities. No effect on revenues.

| (in dollars) | FY 2009 | FY 2010 | FY 2011 | FY 2012 | FY 2013 |
|----------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Revenues | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| GF Expenditure | 20,000 | 188,200 | 121,000 | 126,700 | 132,800 |
| Net Effect | (\$20,000) | (\$188,200) | (\$121,000) | (\$126,700) | (\$132,800) |

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, the State's population of black bears, estimated at more than 600, 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, although in 2007, the number of nuisance complaints DNR received actually decreased by 17% from 2006.

DNR notes that the frequency of nuisance complaints can be influenced by a number of factors including the distribution and abundance of the black bear population; the level of acceptance/tolerance that the public has for bears; natural and artificial food source availability; and other social factors. DNR has responded to 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. In 2007, a four-day hunt was held resulting in the harvest of 51 bears.

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 2009. 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 2010, with expenditures estimated at \$188,179. 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 | \$98,442 |
| Automobile Purchase/Operations | 61,200 |
| Other Equipment/Operating Expenses | <u>28,537</u> |
| Total FY 2010 State Expenditures | \$188,179 |

Expenditures for fiscal 2011 through 2013 reflect • 4.4% annual increases in salaries and 3% employee turnover; and • 2% 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. A survey conducted by the Maryland Field Office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service reported that, in 2005, farmers in Allegany and Garrett counties lost just under \$92,000 in potential crop production income due to bear damage.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: Similar legislation was introduced as HB 1377 of 2007, HB 1436 of 2006, and HB 463 of 2005. HB 1377 of 2007 received a hearing in the House Environmental Matters Committee but no further action was taken. HB 1436 of 2006 and HB 436 of 2005 were unfavorably reported by Environmental Matters.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Montgomery County, Prince George's County, Kent County, Worcester County, Department of Natural Resources, Department of Legislative Services

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mll/lgc

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