

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2009 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 1177

(Delegate Bartlett, *et al.*)

Environmental Matters

Maryland State Parks - Pet Access

This bill requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to adopt rules and regulations that mandate access to some portion of all State parks by a person accompanied by a pet.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: This bill is not expected to have a significant impact on State finances.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: DNR is authorized to make rules and regulations for the maintenance of order, safety, sanitation, traffic control, or for the protection of trees and other property and the preservation of the natural beauty within the State parks and forests, State reserves, scenic preserves, parkways, historical monuments, recreational areas, and any other lands under its control. The rules and regulations must be posted in conspicuous places upon the lands and enforced by the forest and park officers.

Background: State park regulations authorize park superintendents to designate areas where pets are allowed. These regulations seek to provide DNR with the authority and flexibility necessary to adjust rules on a site-specific basis to accommodate both pet owners and those who view pets in parks as a nuisance or public safety hazard.

Maryland State parks comprise developed areas and undeveloped areas that, due to differences in visitor use patterns and visitor expectations, require site-specific application of many rules and regulations. Developed areas within a State park have permanent facilities and include the areas surrounding the facilities. Undeveloped areas within a State park do not have permanent facilities.

In State parks, pets are not permitted in most developed areas but they are permitted on a leash in all undeveloped areas. The practical effect of this policy is that pets are allowed on the vast majority of State park acreage. Pets are not permitted in most developed areas due to concerns about adequate sanitation and public safety. DNR advises that most parks provide pet owners with recreation alternatives on undeveloped park property located in close proximity to developed areas. Service animals are permitted throughout the State parks.

The Choptank River Fishing Pier, which comprises entirely developed area, is the only current State park unit that does not allow pets. This small park comprises a road that leads to a fishing pier area, and it lacks adequate space to create a designated pet area.

Additional Comments: DNR advises that if it is required to accommodate pets in developed areas of State parks, to address issues related to sanitation, public safety, and user conflicts, expenditures increase significantly to build designated areas for pets. Development of designated pet areas includes erecting fencing and creating separate parking facilities, signage, pet waste collection and disposal systems, and water systems.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

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

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 11, 2009
mcp/ljm

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