

Department of Legislative Services  
 Maryland General Assembly  
 2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE  
 First Reader

House Bill 1260 (Delegate Arentz, *et al.*)  
 Environment and Transportation

State Boat Act - Abandoned or Sunken Recreational Vessels - Identification and Removal

This bill authorizes the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to seize, remove, or take into custody specified abandoned or sunken recreational vessels that have remained in certain fixed locations for more than 60 days. DNR must consider and document specified factors in determining whether a recreational vessel meets the criteria for such abandoned or sunken vessels. The bill also authorizes DNR to use funds budgeted for the Natural Resources Police (NRP) to remove or store abandoned or sunken vessels. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2025.**

Fiscal Summary

**State Effect:** Special fund expenditures increase by \$229,500 in FY 2026. Future years reflect ongoing costs and inflation. Revenues are not materially affected.

(in dollars)	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
SF Expenditure	229,500	222,300	227,000	231,900	236,700
Net Effect	(\$229,500)	(\$222,300)	(\$227,000)	(\$231,900)	(\$236,700)

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

**Local Effect:** Local government expenditures may increase minimally to remove abandoned recreational vessels under delegated authority from DNR. Local revenues are not materially affected.

**Small Business Effect:** Minimal.

## Analysis

**Bill Summary:** For purposes of the State Boat Act, the definition of “abandoned or sunken vessel” is expanded to include a recreational vessel that (1) has remained tied to a privately owned apparatus used to secure, berth, or moor vessels in the waters of the State for more than 60 days without the consent of the owner or person in control of the apparatus or (2) has remained anchored and unattended in the same location for more than 60 days.

For the purposes of determining whether a vessel meets those criteria for an abandoned or sunken vessel, DNR must consider and document (1) whether the vessel has a valid, current registration; (2) any standing water in the vessel; (3) the condition of the vessel; (4) if the vessel is anchored, whether it is equipped with an anchor light; and (5) if the vessel is moored, the condition of the equipment used to moor the vessel.

**Current Law:** Under § 8-721 of the Natural Resources Article, DNR is authorized (1) to seize, remove, and take into custody any abandoned or sunken vessel, subject to requirements to provide certain notice to the registered owner (or last known registered owner) and each known secured party and (2) to dispose of the vessel, through public auction or otherwise, if unclaimed. The department may use its own personnel, equipment, and facilities or use other persons, equipment, and facilities for removing, preserving, or storing abandoned or sunken vessels. DNR may also delegate its authority to remove and dispose of abandoned or sunken vessels to any local jurisdiction that consents to the delegation.

The department is prohibited from using funds budgeted for NRP for the purpose of removing or storing abandoned or sunken vessels under § 8-721.

Under § 8-721, “abandoned or sunken vessel” means any vessel that:

- is left illegally or has remained without permission for more than 30 days on public property, including public marinas, docks, or boatyards;
- has remained for more than 60 days at a private marina or boatyard, or property operated by a private marina or boatyard, without the consent of the owner or person in control of the property;
- has remained for more than 30 days at a private dock or at or near waters’ edge on private property without the consent of the owner or person in control of the property;
- has remained on any other private property for more than 180 days without the consent of the owner or person in control of the property; or
- (1) has been found adrift or unattended in or upon the waters of the State; (2) is found in a condition of disrepair, presents a hazard or obstruction to the use of the waters of the State, or presents a potential health or environmental hazard; and (3) is not specified historic property.

**State Expenditures:** DNR estimates that an additional 30 vessels per year may need to be removed under the bill, at an estimated cost of \$5,000 per vessel. At that volume, the department advises that one additional staff is required. NRP can investigate pilings ownership and vessel conditions with existing budgeted resources. This estimate assumes special funds from the Waterway Improvement Fund are used to cover the additional costs; in the absence of sufficient special funds, general funds may be required.

Accordingly, special fund expenditures for DNR increase by \$229,461 in fiscal 2026, which accounts for the bill’s July 1, 2025 effective date. This estimate reflects the cost of hiring one hydrographic engineer to handle the administrative and operational requirements of abandoned vessel removal. It includes a salary, fringe benefits, one-time start-up costs, and ongoing operating expenses, including vessel removal costs.

Position	1.0
Salary and Fringe Benefits	\$71,816
Vessel Removal Costs	150,000
Other Operating Expenses	<u>7,645</u>
<b>Total FY 2026 State Expenditures</b>	<b>\$229,461</b>

Future year expenditures reflect a salary with annual increases and employee turnover as well as annual increases in ongoing operating expenses.

The bill’s authorization for DNR to use funds budgeted for NRP to remove or store abandoned or sunken vessels is not expected to directly affect State finances.

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### **Additional Information**

**Recent Prior Introductions:** Similar legislation has been introduced within the last three years. See HB 293 and SB 1168 of 2024.

**Designated Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Maryland Municipal League; Department of Natural Resources; Maryland Department of Planning; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - March 7, 2025  
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