

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader

House Bill 1181

(Delegate Baker, *et al.*)

Environment and Transportation

Education, Energy, and the Environment

Task Force on the Establishment of a State Park Dedicated to Veterans' Care

This bill establishes the Task Force on the Establishment of a State Park Dedicated to Veterans' Care to (1) study issues and estimate costs related to the establishment of a State park dedicated to providing recreational opportunities and therapeutic services to veterans; (2) make specified related recommendations; and (3) develop an action plan identifying next steps for the establishment of the park. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) must staff the task force. The task force must report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and specified committees of the General Assembly by December 1, 2026. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2025, and terminates June 30, 2027.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: It is assumed that DNR can staff the task force with existing budgeted resources and that expense reimbursements for task force members are minimal and absorbable within existing budgeted resources. State revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: Any costs for local government representatives to participate in the task force are assumed to be minimal and absorbable within existing resources. Local revenues are not affected.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The task force must study issues and estimate costs related to the establishment of a State park dedicated to providing recreational opportunities and therapeutic services to veterans and develop an action plan identifying next steps for the

establishment of the park. The task force must also make recommendations regarding (1) services and amenities provided by the park; (2) operational models for the park, including how operational and maintenance responsibilities could be shared between the Maryland Park Service and partner organizations; (3) options for funding the initial start-up costs of the park, including infrastructure and capital costs; and (4) self-sustaining funding models for ongoing operational costs.

Task force members may not receive compensation but are entitled to reimbursement for expenses.

Current Law:

State Park System and Partnership Parks

Pursuant to DNR regulations, the State park system is administered under the jurisdiction of the Maryland Park Service to preserve and protect the best of Maryland's natural and historic places for the enjoyment and appreciation of its citizens. The parks are managed to provide public benefits, including (1) natural resource conservation; (2) cultural and historic preservation; (3) watershed protection; (4) education and interpretation; and (5) nature-based outdoor recreation, including trails, picnicking, boating, camping, cabins, hunting, fishing, and swimming.

DNR is authorized to enter into a memorandum of understanding with a local government, bicounty agency, or nonprofit organization to establish a "partnership park" in the State and to enter into a partnership agreement with a local government, bicounty agency, or nonprofit organization to manage a partnership park in the State. "Partnership park" means a unit of the State park system managed by DNR in partnership with a local government, a bicounty agency, or a nonprofit organization.

Recreational Benefits, Privileges, and Initiatives for Service Members and Veterans

DNR recreational benefits, privileges, and initiatives for service members and veterans include the following:

- *Healing Hunting and Fishing Fund* – provides grants to organizations providing recreational hunting, fishing, and other outdoor opportunities to service members, veterans, and Gold Star recipients;
- *Governmental Entity or Nonprofit Organization Fishing License Exemption* – allows a governmental entity or nonprofit organization to take disabled service members and veterans fishing, or provide fishing clinics and instructional opportunities to service members and veterans, without the service members and veterans needing a recreational fishing license;

- *Complimentary Licenses for Certain Veterans* – provides complimentary recreational fishing and hunting licenses to (1) former prisoners of war; (2) American veterans determined to be unemployable; and (3) 100% service-connected disabled American veterans;
- *Required Plan to Increase Engagement of Veterans* – requires DNR, in consultation with staff of the Wildlife Conservation, Education, and Outreach Program, to develop a plan to increase engagement of communities that historically have not had access to hunting and conservation programs, and engagement of veterans, in (1) outdoor recreation and stewardship; (2) hunting; and (3) wildlife conservation; and
- *Free Entry to State Parks for Service Members and Veterans* – allows an active duty service member or veteran to enter a State park without paying a day-use entry fee or any per-vehicle fee.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: SB 781 (Senator Corderman) - Education, Energy, and the Environment.

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

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