

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

Senate Bill 968

(Howard County Senators)

Education, Energy, and the Environment

Environment and Transportation

Howard County - Patuxent River Wildland - Use of Mechanical or Motorized
Equipment
Ho. Co. 5-25

This bill authorizes the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to – within the Patuxent River Wildland and in order to preserve, maintain, study, research, and educate the public about the area’s ecological features and rare habitats – (1) retain, maintain, remove, or replace existing trails using mechanical or motorized equipment and (2) remove, replace, or dispose of nonnative species using mechanical or motorized equipment.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill does not directly affect State finances.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: There is a State wildlands preservation system established in statute for the purpose of securing for the people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of State wildlands. DNR’s Land Acquisition and Planning Unit is responsible for administering the State wildlands preservation system. “Wildlands” are defined as limited areas of land or water that have retained their wilderness character, although not necessarily completely natural and undisturbed, or have rare or vanishing species of plant or animal life or similar features of interest worthy of preservation for use of present and future residents of the State.

Under § 5-1203 of the Natural Resources Article, Patuxent River Wildland is designated as a Type 2 State wildland. A “Type 2 wildland” is a unit of importance for all the natural sciences, especially ecology, and with outstanding value for education, research, and appreciation of natural processes. Preservation in the desired natural condition is the prevailing purpose of Type 2 wildlands and visitation is regulated to ensure this preservation on a permanent basis.

Patuxent River Wildland (approximately 1,579 acres), in Howard and Montgomery counties, is 1 of 38 separate wildlands designated in statute, consisting of approximately 66,000 acres statewide. Generally, the wildland areas must be devoted to public purposes for recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use. Commercial enterprises and permanent roads (subject to existing private rights and apart from fire roads), temporary roads, use of motorized equipment/vehicles/boats, and structures or installations are not allowed in the wildland areas. Certain exceptions apply, however, including general exceptions (*e.g.*, minimum measures necessary to administer the area as a wildland; maintenance of boundary roads; normal maintenance and certain upgrades and expansions of utility lines; and measures to protect nearby private land) and exceptions specific to certain wildland areas.

Additional Information

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

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Montgomery County; Maryland Association of Counties; Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission; Department of Natural Resources; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 10, 2025
rh/sdk Third Reader - March 27, 2025
Revised - Amendment(s) - March 27, 2025

Analysis by: Beatrice F. Amoateng

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510