

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
 First Reader

House Bill 1299 (Delegates Hornberger and Ciliberti)
 Environment and Transportation

Natural Resources - Western Maryland - Elk

This bill requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to study the biological carrying capacity and cultural carrying capacity of elk in Western Maryland (defined in the bill as Allegany and Garrett counties). By October 1, 2026, DNR must report to the Governor and the General Assembly its findings and recommendations on whether elk should be reintroduced in Western Maryland.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Federal fund expenditures increase by \$107,300 in FY 2026 and \$13,900 in FY 2027. Special fund expenditures increase by \$35,800 in FY 2026 and \$4,600 in FY 2027. Revenues are not affected.

(in dollars)	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
SF Expenditure	35,800	4,600	0	0	0
FF Expenditure	107,300	13,900	0	0	0
Net Effect	(\$143,100)	(\$18,600)	\$0	\$0	\$0

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

Local Effect: The bill does not directly affect local government finances.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Current Law: The Secretary of Natural Resources is responsible for conservation and management of wildlife and wildlife resources of the State. A wildlife management area

system is established in DNR regulations, consisting of wildlife management areas across the State that were acquired to protect, propagate, or manage wildlife, or for hunting purposes. DNR may open the areas to nature-based outdoor recreational activities, including hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, and wildlife watching.

The State Wildlife Management and Protection Fund (WMPF) receives revenues from hunting license, stamp, and other fees, as well as certain fines and restitution, and is used for the scientific investigation, protection, propagation, and management of wildlife.

State Expenditures: Federal fund expenditures increase by \$107,327 and special fund expenditures increase by \$35,776 in fiscal 2026, which accounts for the bill's October 1, 2025, effective date. This estimate reflects the cost for DNR to:

- hire one temporary contractual natural resources biologist to oversee and conduct the elk reintroduction study, including, among other things, (1) procuring and managing the public opinion survey (below) and interpreting its results; (2) studying the biological carrying capacity of the region, including conducting geographic information system analyses to identify possible locations where elk could be released and a literature review of what elk require; (3) working with surrounding states to gather information and gauge their acceptance of introduction of elk in Western Maryland; and (4) completing the required report; and
- contract with an outside vendor to conduct a public opinion survey to determine the cultural carrying capacity of elk in Western Maryland.

The estimate assumes the cost of the contractual natural resources biologist and public opinion survey is supported by federal Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration grant funding the State receives, and 25% State matching funding from WMPF. It includes a salary, fringe benefits, one-time start-up costs, and ongoing operating expenses.

Contractual Position	1.0
Salary and Fringe Benefits	\$58,233
Public Opinion Survey	75,000
Operating Expenses	<u>9,869</u>
Total FY 2026 State Expenditures	\$143,102
Federal Fund Expenditures	107,327
Special Fund Expenditures	35,776

Future year expenditures reflect termination of the contractual position on October 1, 2026, when the findings and recommendations are due.

This estimate does not include any health insurance costs that could be incurred for specified contractual employees under the State's implementation of the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

Additional Information

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

Designated Cross File: None.

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

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 3, 2025
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Analysis by: Beatrice F. Amoateng

Direct Inquiries to:

(410) 946-5510

(301) 970-5510