

SENATE BILL 971

M1

6lr3662
CF HB 959

By: **Senator Hayes**

Introduced and read first time: February 14, 2026

Assigned to: Rules

A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Natural Resources – Establishment of Gwynns Falls State Park**

3 FOR the purpose of requiring the Department of Natural Resources to establish Gwynns
4 Falls State Park as a partnership park between the Department and Baltimore City;
5 altering the authorized uses of a certain part of the Park System Capital
6 Improvements and Acquisition Fund; prohibiting the Department from charging an
7 entrance fee to Gwynns Falls State Park; requiring that Gwynns Falls State Park
8 consist of a certain area; requiring the Department, in consultation with Baltimore
9 City, to hire an independent consultant to complete a certain comprehensive park
10 master plan; requiring the Governor to include certain appropriations in the annual
11 budget bill for a certain fiscal year; and generally relating to the establishment of
12 Gwynns Falls State Park.

13 BY repealing and reenacting, without amendments,
14 Article – Natural Resources
15 Section 5–221(a)(1) and (2) and (b) and 5–1012(a), (b), and (f–1)
16 Annotated Code of Maryland
17 (2023 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)

18 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
19 Article – Natural Resources
20 Section 5–221(l) and (n)
21 Annotated Code of Maryland
22 (2023 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)

23 BY adding to
24 Article – Natural Resources
25 Section 5–1012(f–2)
26 Annotated Code of Maryland
27 (2023 Replacement Volume and 2025 Supplement)

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.



1 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
2 That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

3 **Article – Natural Resources**

4 5–221.

5 (a) (1) In this section the following words have the meanings indicated.

6 (2) “Fund” means the Park System Capital Improvements and Acquisition
7 Fund.

8 (b) There is a Park System Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund.

9 (l) The first ~~[\$70,000,000]~~ **\$74,000,000** received by the Fund may be used only
10 as follows:

11 (1) At least \$5,000,000 for infrastructure projects that mitigate the effects
12 of climate change, including:

13 (i) Flood barriers;

14 (ii) Forest buffers;

15 (iii) Green spaces;

16 (iv) Building elevation;

17 (v) Stormwater infrastructure;

18 (vi) Wetlands restoration; and

19 (vii) Addressing environmental justice concerns;

20 (2) At least \$5,000,000 for historic preservation, in accordance with
21 subsection (m) of this section;

22 (3) At least \$20,000,000 for transportation improvements, including:

23 (i) Improving bike lanes and trails, increasing walkability, and
24 expanding parking availability; and

25 (ii) Targeting transportation investments to avoid capacity
26 shutdowns;

27 (4) At least \$10,000,000 for increasing water access, including kayak and
28 boat launches and areas for picnicking near water and swimming; [and]

1 (5) IN FISCAL YEAR 2028, \$4,000,000 FOR RENOVATION OF THE TRAIL
2 HEADQUARTERS OFFICE IN GWYNNS FALLS/LEAKIN PARK IN ORDER TO SERVE AS A
3 JOINT PARTNERSHIP PARK OFFICE AND VISITOR CENTER FOR GWYNNS FALLS
4 STATE PARK; AND

5 (6) Up to \$30,000,000 for land acquisition, including:

6 (i) Areas in the central and southern regions of the State that will:

7 1. Relieve overcrowding at existing State parks; and

8 2. Expand public access to State parks and outdoor
9 recreation;

10 (ii) Sites of significance to the history of African American, Asian,
11 Indigenous or Native American, and Hispanic or Latino populations in the State; and

12 (iii) Beachfront or waterfront property for public access.

13 (n) If the Fund receives more than ~~[\$70,000,000]~~ **\$74,000,000**, the Department
14 may use up to \$10,000,000 for any of the purposes identified under subsection (l) of this
15 section, including:

16 (1) Land activation;

17 (2) New structures;

18 (3) Any capital improvements necessary to make State parks accessible to
19 people with disabilities, including providing adult changing tables; and

20 (4) Up to \$100,000 for the Maryland Recreation Communication Boards
21 Pilot Program.

22 5–1012.

23 (a) In this section, “partnership park” means a unit of the State park system
24 managed by the Department in partnership with a local government, a bicounty agency, or
25 a nonprofit organization.

26 (b) The Department may enter into:

27 (1) A memorandum of understanding with a local government, bicounty
28 agency, or nonprofit organization to establish a partnership park in the State; or

1 (2) A partnership agreement with a local government, bicounty agency, or
2 nonprofit organization to manage a partnership park in the State.

3 (f-1) (1) The Department and Baltimore City shall:

4 (i) Convene focus group meetings on the establishment of the
5 Gwynns Falls State Park with community members and stakeholders that reside or operate
6 in the vicinity of the proposed State park;

7 (ii) Develop a list of priority needs and associated cost assessments
8 for park operations and improvements, including:

9 1. Capital improvements;

10 2. Critical maintenance;

11 3. Enhanced natural resource management and restoration,
12 including implementation of a biohabitats study;

13 4. Historic site restoration;

14 5. Enhanced outdoor recreation amenities, including trail
15 improvements;

16 6. Adding park staff and procuring equipment and supplies;
17 and

18 7. Law enforcement and public safety; and

19 (iii) Establish a stakeholder advisory committee to advise the
20 Department and Baltimore City on the scope and management of Gwynns Falls State Park
21 that consists of:

22 1. At least one member of the Friends of Gwynns
23 Falls/Leakin Park;

24 2. At least six members representing local park advocacy
25 organizations, local environmental organizations, local historic preservation organizations,
26 neighborhood organizations from neighborhoods that border the future Gwynns Falls State
27 Park site; and

28 3. Any additional members as determined by the
29 Department and Baltimore City.

30 (2) On or before December 1, 2025, the Department shall submit a report
31 to the General Assembly, in accordance with § 2-1257 of the State Government Article, on:

1 (i) Property owned by the State in Baltimore City that is suitable
2 for inclusion in Gwynns Falls State Park;

3 (ii) Property owned by Baltimore City or a nonprofit organization in
4 Baltimore City that is suitable for inclusion in Gwynns Falls State Park and for which the
5 landowners are willing to enter into a partnership agreement; and

6 (iii) The funding needed to establish and promote Gwynns Falls State
7 Park.

8 **(F-2) (1) THE DEPARTMENT SHALL ESTABLISH GWYNNNS FALLS STATE**
9 **PARK AS A PARTNERSHIP PARK BETWEEN THE DEPARTMENT AND BALTIMORE CITY**
10 **THAT SEEKS TO PROVIDE VISITORS WITH ACCESSIBLE OUTDOOR, NATURE-BASED**
11 **RECREATION AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES.**

12 **(2) GWYNNNS FALLS STATE PARK SHALL BE HELD BY THE STATE AS A**
13 **STATE PARK UNDER THE PROTECTION AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE**
14 **DEPARTMENT.**

15 **(3) THE DEPARTMENT MAY NOT CHARGE ANY ENTRANCE FEE TO**
16 **GWYNNNS FALLS STATE PARK.**

17 **(4) (I) SUBJECT TO SUBPARAGRAPH (II) OF THIS PARAGRAPH,**
18 **GWYNNNS FALLS STATE PARK SHALL CONSIST OF THE AREA OF LAND IDENTIFIED**
19 **UNDER SECTION 7 OF BALTIMORE CITY'S GWYNNNS FALLS STATE PARK REPORT**
20 **SUBMITTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH SUBSECTION (F-1)(2) OF THIS SECTION.**

21 **(II) THE DEPARTMENT, IN CONSULTATION WITH BALTIMORE**
22 **CITY, SHALL HIRE AN INDEPENDENT CONSULTANT TO COMPLETE A**
23 **COMPREHENSIVE PARK MASTER PLAN FOR GWYNNNS FALLS STATE PARK THAT**
24 **WILL:**

25 **1. DEFINE THE EXACT BOUNDARIES OF GWYNNNS FALLS**
26 **STATE PARK; AND**

27 **2. INCLUDE ENGAGING CITIZENS IN THE PLANNING OF**
28 **GWYNNNS FALLS STATE PARK.**

29 **(5) THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING ESTABLISHING THE**
30 **GWYNNNS FALLS STATE PARK SHALL DEFINE:**

31 **(I) THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES, INCLUDING FINANCIAL**
32 **RESPONSIBILITIES, OF THE DEPARTMENT AND BALTIMORE CITY IN MAINTAINING**
33 **AND OPERATING THE STATE PARK; AND**

1 **(II) A PARTNERSHIP ROLE FOR THE FRIENDS OF GWYNNNS**
2 **FALLS/LEAKIN PARK IN SUPPORT OF THE STATE PARK'S MISSION AND**
3 **VOLUNTEERS.**

4 **(6) THE GWYNNNS FALLS STATE PARK STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY**
5 **COMMITTEE ESTABLISHED UNDER SUBSECTION (F-1) OF THIS SECTION SHALL:**

6 **(I) MEET QUARTERLY; AND**

7 **(II) ADVISE THE DEPARTMENT ON THE SCOPE, MANAGEMENT,**
8 **AND IMPROVEMENTS TO GWYNNNS FALLS STATE PARK.**

9 **(7) FOR FISCAL YEAR 2028, THE GOVERNOR SHALL INCLUDE IN THE**
10 **ANNUAL BUDGET BILL:**

11 **(I) AN APPROPRIATION OF \$2,880,354 FOR THE**
12 **ESTABLISHMENT AND OPERATION COSTS OF GWYNNNS FALLS STATE PARK; AND**

13 **(II) AN APPROPRIATION OF \$280,000 FOR THE HIRING OF THE**
14 **INDEPENDENT CONSULTANT REQUIRED UNDER PARAGRAPH (4) OF THIS**
15 **SUBSECTION.**

16 **SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect June**
17 **1, 2026.**