



Maryland

DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET
AND MANAGEMENT

LARRY HOGAN
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Lieutenant Governor

DAVID R. BRINKLEY
Secretary

MARC L. NICOLE
Deputy Secretary

SENATE BILL 541 Natural Resources – Maryland Park Service and State Parks – Alterations (Elfreth)

STATEMENT OF INFORMATION

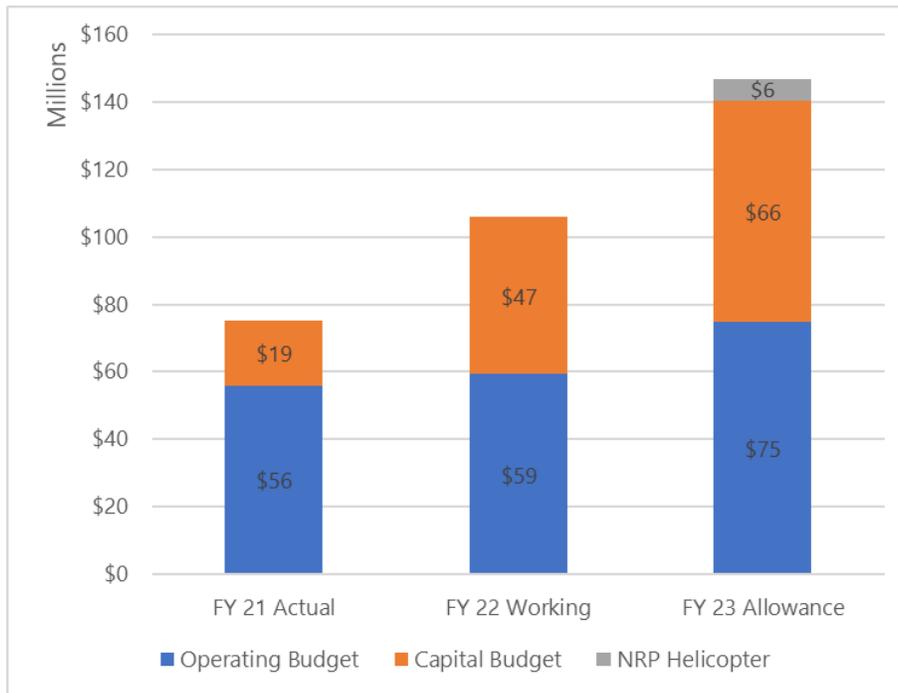
DATE: February 16, 2022

COMMITTEE: Senate Budget & Taxation and Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

SUMMARY OF BILL: SB 541, in part, establishes a Park System Critical Maintenance Fund and mandates a General Fund appropriation in FY 2024 in the amount of \$80 million; establishes a Park System Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund and mandates a General Fund appropriation in FY 2024 in the amount of \$70 million; requires the Department of Natural Resources to add 100 full-time classified employees to the Park Service by July 1, 2024 and dictates a specified number of these new employees to specific units; requires the Department of Budget and Management to conduct a staff adequacy review report every two years for the Park Service, as well as a salary review every three years for the Park Service; requires that Park Service Associates, Forest Rangers, Park Rangers, and Wildlife Rangers be recognized as Emergency Services Personnel and provides them with enhanced workers' compensation and tax benefits; establishes a nine member, legislative and Executive Parks and Recreation Commission to provide oversight of the Park Service and be staffed by the Department of Legislative Services; modifies the repayment and dedication of funds previously transferred from the transfer tax to the General Fund and modifies the dedication of funds; and expresses legislative intent authorizing the Governor by June 30, 2022 to transfer \$60 million from Program Open Space state land acquisition program to the Park System Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund created herein. Effective July 1, 2022.

EXPLANATION: The FY 2023 operating budget allowance for the Maryland Parks Service is \$74.7 million – a twenty year high. The FY 2023 capital development allocation for parks from transfer tax revenues is \$46.9 million. This is supplemented by \$25 million in critical maintenance funding in the Dedicated Purpose Account, thereby allocating a total of \$146.6 million for parks in the FY 2023 budget. The parks budget has grown 71% since the beginning of the Administration's tenure.

TOTAL BUDGET FOR THE PARKS SERVICE



The Administration has been committed to repaying the \$242.2 million in Program Open Space transfer tax revenues that was raided by prior Administrations – \$98.5 has been repaid, including \$30.5 million in the FY 2023 budget allowance. The legislation accelerates the remaining repayments through FY 2031 to FY 2024 (\$184 million), and FY 2025 (\$2.7 million) and dedicates or realigns those funds to specific programs, including:

- MARBIDO \$10 million
 - In FY 2025, MARBIDCO is allocated an additional \$2.7 million
- MALPF \$18 million
- Rural Legacy \$ 5 million

- Park System Capital Maintenance Fund \$80 million
- Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund \$70 million

Establishing the Park Service Capital Maintenance Fund and Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund as non-lapsing special funds allows the monies allocated in FY 2024 to remain in the Funds, regardless of how long it takes to spend down the mandated amounts and despite the provision that the \$80 million in the Parks System Critical Maintenance Fund must be spent before July 1, 2026. **A more nuanced analysis of how quickly this funding can realistically be spent is recommended.**

The FY 2023 Budget allowance for Park Service staffing has 261 full-time classified positions and 296 contractual positions. The bill requires the addition of 100 full-time classified positions by July 1, 2024, including: five positions in the Engineering and Construction unit; five positions in the Land Acquisition and planning unit; and one Volunteer Management Program Coordinator. Again, to recruit and hire 100 additional positions is dependent upon many factors outside the control of the agency, including current job market realities – a longer phase-in to ramp up staffing is recommended. **Further, the bill requires the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) to conduct a staff adequacy review of the Park**

Service every two years (no due date) and a staff salary review of the Park Service every three years (no due date), both of which should precede the mandate to hire 100 full-time classified positions. The extent to which staffing is increased should be better informed; the staff adequacy review and salary reviews are key elements in determining staffing needs.

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