



Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Josh Kurtz, Secretary
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

January 24, 2024

BILL NUMBER: House Bill 228 – First Reader

SHORT TITLE: Natural Resources - Maryland State Parks - Funds and Plan Alterations

DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: SUPPORT

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION

This Departmental makes a few strategic alterations to the Great Maryland Outdoors Act to ensure that DNR can implement the legislation to the greatest benefit possible to all Marylanders.

Firstly, this legislation provides additional flexibility in spending funds allocated to the “Park System Critical Maintenance Fund” and the “Park System Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund” in order to meet the needs of the Department and better serve the public. The bill includes language that:

1. Gives the Department additional time to expend the funds allocated to the Park System Critical Maintenance Fund to align with project schedules.
2. Allows the Park System Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund to be used on lands managed by the Department for public purposes instead of only state park projects.
3. Alters the language outlining how the first \$70 million received by the fund shall be used.
 - a. Adds “at least” before the following categories:
 - i. \$5 million for infrastructure projects that mitigate the effects of climate change.
 - ii. \$5 million for historic preservation
 - iii. \$20 million for transportation improvements
 - iv. \$10 million for increasing water access
 - b. Adds “up to” before \$30 million for land acquisition

Secondly, this legislation will expand the “Great Maryland Outdoors Fund” established in the GMOA to fund the Office of Outdoor Recreation. The proposed legislation will allow the fund to be used for environmental education purposes as well as outdoor recreation. The Department is excited at the opportunity to further develop environmental education opportunities for Marylanders and it is our hope that the Office of Outdoor Recreation will be able to lead on that effort at the Department.

Lastly, the bill also delays the Comprehensive Long Term Strategic Plan that was required for the Park Service under the GMOA. This is to better align this planning effort with other ongoing planning projects related to recreation. As an example, the delay will allow the Comprehensive Long Term Strategic Plan to be better aligned with the Land Preservation and Recreation Plan planning process.

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The bill does not alter total funding to any of the funds established in the GMOA so it will not have a specific fiscal impact; however, it will have an operational impact as it will provide greater flexibility to use the funding available.

The Department is also currently in the process of working with stakeholders to develop amendments to ensure clarity around the spending of funds from the Capital Improvement and Acquisition Fund.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Great Maryland Outdoor Act, Chapter 39 of 2022, addressed Department challenges with infrastructure, capacity, funding and accessibility needs within the Maryland Park Service and State Parks. The Act included establishing systems and processes for reviewing infrastructure, critical maintenance needs, staffing and required the Department to develop a capital improvement plan and a comprehensive long-range strategic plan.

BILL EXPLANATION

The bill provides the Department additional flexibility in spending funds allocated to the Park System Critical Maintenance Fund and the Park System Capital Improvements and Acquisition Fund in order to meet the needs of the Department and better serve the public. The bill allows the Office of Outdoor Recreation to provide for outdoor education, in addition to recreation. The bill better aligns ongoing planning projects related to recreation.