



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

February 11, 2025

BILL NUMBER: Senate Bill – 477 – First Reader

SHORT TITLE: Port of Deposit State Historical Park - Size and Scope

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: LETTER OF INFORMATION

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT'S POSITION

The proposed legislation would have significant impacts on the Department of Natural Resources.

It is unclear in the bill's language precisely which areas would convey to the state to comprise the new partnership park. The Snow Hill Archeological Site comprises ~8.3 acres of the 12-19 total acres as described in the bill. Considerations will need to be made for operational efficacy including having the additional acreage contiguous to the Snow Hill site; establishing a feasible point of access; if the park parcel will have contiguous boundaries; if parcel size and topography will severely limit capacity to develop roads, parking, accessibility, and areas for visitor services; and whether the park's direct adjacency to a developed industrial site may negatively impact the visitor experience. Partners should give consideration to whether the goals for the proposed 12-19 acre property are to preserve and protect it as an archeological site (whereby public use may be limited), or develop for recreation and interpretation as a historical resource (whereby public use may be expanded).

The proposed reduction in total acreage to be transferred to the state and the associated omission of the Tome School site will decrease the state's anticipated expenditures. Site remediation and razing of derelict structures to provide safe public access to that portion of the property accounts for a significant portion of the budget requested in the December 2024 report prepared for the legislature. The anticipated expenditures associated with the development of the Port of Deposit State Historical Park were detailed in the fiscal note previously submitted. The estimated budget assumes the development of a complete state park providing full visitor amenities as originally proposed, but within the modified acreage eliminating the remediation of the Tome School site and accounting for the one-year delay in transferring the property.

Regardless of proposed revisions to the property boundaries and total acreage, the proposed extension of the deadline for property transfer would give all parties additional time to work through the details of establishing the new state historical park, particularly with regard to planning and archeological efforts, staffing, and budgetary considerations.

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Great Maryland Outdoors Act of 2022 mandated that the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) shall “establish the Port of Deposit State Historical Park as a partnership park that seeks to educate the public about and preserve and interpret the lives and experiences of Black Americans both before and after the abolition of slavery.” The Act went on to require that the “Port of Deposit State Historical Park shall consist of a portion of the Bainbridge Naval Training Center Site, measuring not less than 120 acres and not more than 150 acres...including: the historic Tome School, Snow Hill Archaeological Site, and the Adjacent Wooded Conservation Area.”

In coordination with identified stakeholders, DNR prepared a report for the legislature in December 2024 to outline opportunities, challenges, and next steps toward the establishment of the Port of Deposit State Historical Park. The final report may be found [here](#).

BILL EXPLANATION

This bill aims to reduce the acreage of Port of Deposit State Historical Park (PDSHP) from the 120-150 acres identified in the original legislation to 12-19 acres, eliminate the Tome School site from the partnership park entirely, and extend the deadline for property transfer from June 1, 2025, to June 1, 2026.