

**Department of Legislative Services**  
 Maryland General Assembly  
 2016 Session

**FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE**  
**First Reader**

Senate Bill 688 (Senator Middleton)  
 Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

**Task Force to Develop a Strategic Plan for State Park Development**

This bill establishes the Task Force to Develop a Strategic Plan for State Park Development. The task force must (1) develop strategic principles and a policy framework for mid- to long-term decisions regarding the allocation of operating and capital funding for State parks; (2) develop a quality control mechanism for assuring and verifying adherence to the strategic principles and policy framework; (3) establish workgroups to investigate specified issues; and (4) make recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly regarding a comprehensive vision and strategic plan to restore State parks to their former top tier status. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) must provide staff for the task force. By December 31, 2017, the task force must report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly.

The bill terminates September 30, 2018.

**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** DNR general fund expenditures increase by \$20,000 in FY 2017 and \$50,000 in FY 2018 for contractual services to staff the task force, conduct research, develop recommendations, and write the required report. Revenues are not affected.

(in dollars)	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	20,000	50,000	0	0	0
Net Effect	(\$20,000)	(\$50,000)	\$0	\$0	\$0

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

**Local Effect:** None.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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## Analysis

**Current Law/Background:** In January 2013, the Maryland Park Service (MPS) and the Department of Budget and Management released a Five-Year Strategic Plan that identified priority funding needs for investment in State park operations and maintenance in fiscal 2014 through 2017. The strategic plan elaborated upon and updated recommendations contained in a 2007 report, *Maryland State Parks Funding Study: A Plan to Fully Fund the Operations of the Maryland Park Service*. The strategic plan also (1) discussed park system operations and management and the use of nationally recognized best management practices within the park system and (2) presented a sustainable, five-year resource plan. Specific recommendations in the strategic plan included additional funding for permanent and seasonal positions, new vehicles, supplies, and equipment. Recommendations also addressed capital infrastructure, including developing strategic plans to prioritize and fund restoration of historic sites and energy efficiency and alternative energy facility improvements.

DNR advises that the Five-Year Strategic Plan assumed that increased transfer tax revenues would be available in the future to fund implementation. However, transfer tax revenues have experienced a decline in recent years, severely limiting implementation of the plan. In fiscal 2015, MPS did allocate some new funding for seasonal staff and \$1.8 million to replace vehicles, supplies, and heavy equipment; however, no additional permanent staff positions have been established, as was recommended in the strategic plan.

In addition to the overall strategic plan, individual State parks are beginning to develop five-year strategic plans that involve (1) understanding core values; (2) identifying and assessing park resources; (3) developing big picture goals; (4) establishing a work plan; and (5) evaluating progress. To date, one park plan has been completed and submitted for internal review. Several more should be finalized this summer.

DNR further notes that MPS recently completed a comprehensive master planning process for Newtowne Neck State Park. This park planning effort involved the creation of a Master Plan Advisory Committee comprising a diverse array of community, government, recreational, and heritage stakeholder groups. Over the course of a year and a half, the advisory committee met 11 times with MPS staff, MPS hosted two open house events and a design charrette, and MPS staff participated in two community meetings. Two online surveys were part of the planning process, and participants in the survey were provided an opportunity to review three concept plans and select a preferred plan. The preferred plan was refined based on survey comments and is the basis for the master plan.

**State Expenditures:** Due to budget constraints, DNR does not have sufficient budget or staff resources to fulfill the bill's requirements with existing budgeted resources. Thus, general fund expenditures increase by \$20,000 in fiscal 2017 and \$50,000 in fiscal 2018 for contractual services to staff the task force, conduct necessary research, develop recommendations, and complete the required report.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** None.

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

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - February 26, 2016  
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