

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2022 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader

House Bill 784 (Delegate Stein)
Environment and Transportation Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

**Department of Natural Resources - Irreplaceable Natural Areas Program -
Establishment**

This bill establishes an Irreplaceable Natural Areas Program in the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). **The bill takes effect June 1, 2022.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill can be implemented with existing resources.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The purpose of the program is to preserve Maryland’s native biodiversity on State-owned land managed by the department for current and future residents of the State. By July 1, 2023, DNR must adopt regulations to carry out the program, including regulations (1) designating irreplaceable natural areas on State-owned land managed by the department and (2) establishing management objectives for irreplaceable natural areas, including a map depicting boundaries for each area, a description of the unique features and threats for each area, and compatible and incompatible activities for each area.

“Irreplaceable natural area” means an area with habitat necessary to support (1) a unique natural community or (2) a plant or animal species listed as threatened or endangered under the Nongame and Endangered Species Conservation Act. “Unique natural community” means an area that (1) has an assemblage of native plants or animals that is rare or declining

in the State or (2) supports an unusually pristine example of a native ecosystem type. “Biodiversity” means the full range of living organisms native to a region.

Current Law: Existing statutory programs focused on preserving wildlife and plant species and natural areas in the State include:

- *Nongame and Endangered Species Conservation Act* – Under the act, statute and implementing regulations establish protections for endangered and threatened species and species in need of conservation, and statute requires the Secretary of Natural Resources to establish programs, including acquisition of land or aquatic habitat or interests in the land or aquatic habitats, necessary for the conservation of nongame, threatened, or endangered species of wildlife or plants. Regulations also establish natural heritage areas defined as natural communities of species that (1) contain one or more threatened or endangered species or wildlife species in need of conservation; (2) are a unique blend of geological, hydrological, climatological, or biological features; and (3) are considered to be among the best statewide examples of their kind.
- *State wildlands preservation system* – The State wildlands preservation system is established in statute for the purpose of securing for the people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of State wildlands. “Wildlands” are defined as limited areas of land or water which have retained their wilderness character, although not necessarily completely natural and undisturbed, or have rare or vanishing species of plant or animal life or similar features of interest worthy of preservation for use of present and future residents of the State.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Designated Cross File: None.

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

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