

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2022 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 1304 (Delegate Mautz, *et al.*)
Environment and Transportation

Natural Resources - Offshore Blind Sites - Licensing Process

This bill alters requirements related to the application process to license riparian shoreline for the purpose of establishing an offshore blind site. The bill specifies that an application must be submitted to *the appropriate* Department of Natural Resources (DNR) regional service *center* or other designated *site on the day* designated by DNR (instead of being submitted to DNR regional services *centers* or other designated *sites on days* designated by DNR). When providing public notice of the licensing process, DNR must provide the dates and times during which applications will be accepted at each designated site or regional service center. Licensing days must differ for each county where licensing occurs. In addition, DNR must review applications and issue licenses on a first-come, first-served basis. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2022.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill is primarily anticipated to have an operational impact on DNR but may result in an increase in expenditures, as discussed below. The bill is not anticipated to have a direct impact on State revenues.

Local Effect: The bill is not anticipated to materially affect local finances.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Current Law: An offshore blind site is a specific location in the water where a person may hunt wild waterfowl from a boat that is tied to or anchored at a stake. An offshore

blind site must be licensed for a person to hunt wild waterfowl from the site. Subject to certain exceptions, an offshore blind site license enables any Maryland resident who possesses a current or prior year hunting license to license riparian shoreline for the purpose of establishing an offshore blind site. Stationary offshore blind site licenses have priority over offshore blind site licenses.

A Maryland resident who has a current or prior year hunting license is authorized to apply to DNR to license riparian shoreline for the purpose of establishing an offshore blind site. Applicants must submit (1) an application to DNR on a form provided by DNR; (2) a signed statement that the location of the blind site is at least 125 yards from all other previously licensed riparian shoreline and the site complies with all other pertinent law and regulations; and (3) a \$20 application fee for each license requested.

Completed applications must be submitted to DNR regional service centers or other designated local sites on days designated by DNR. DNR must (1) establish and adequately staff a site in each county where licensing occurs and (2) provide public notice of the licensing process through the media, Internet, and other sources. Licensing must begin on or before the first Tuesday in August each year on dates set by DNR. Each site or regional service center is required to have maps available by July 15 each year that show the location of all shoreline licensed by riparian landowners.

Other than a riparian landowner licensing his or her own property, a person is limited to obtaining two licenses per day. In Kent and Queen Anne's counties, and on the nontidal waters of the Potomac River and its tributaries, only a riparian landowner owning a specified amount of shoreline or a landowner's lessee, licensee, or assignee may erect and maintain a stationary blind or blind site. Each license applies to 250 yards of shoreline, and blind sites must be located equidistant from the boundaries set in the license. Licenses are valid until June 30 of the following year and must be issued in the order applications are received in person.

State Expenditures: DNR advises that for the last several years, it has been hosting online events for selecting offshore blind sites and licensing riparian shoreline. A person's "place in line" is determined by a lottery process. Under the bill, DNR must host these events in person and on different days in each county. Additionally, DNR anticipates that the requirement to review applications and issue licenses on a first-come, first-served basis likely results in individuals lining up days in advance, which was a common occurrence in the past when these events were held on a first-come, first-served basis. Thus, DNR expects that finding suitable local sites is likely a challenge under the bill and, as a result, increases DNR's workload. This may ultimately result in an increase in DNR's expenditures, but without actual experience under the bill, a reliable estimate of any such increase cannot be made at this time.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Designated Cross File: None.

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

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