

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2008 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Revised

Senate Bill 431

(Senator Pinsky, *et al.*)

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Environmental Matters

Task Force to Study a No Net Loss of Forest Policy

This bill requests that the Governor establish a Task Force to Study a No Net Loss of Forest Policy staffed by the Department of Natural Resources to develop • a specific plan, including programs and other necessary actions, to achieve and maintain a no net loss of forests; and • draft legislation for the 2009 session to ensure that there is a process to achieve a no net loss of forest in the State beginning in 2010. The task force must submit the plan and the draft legislation to the Governor and the General Assembly by December 1, 2008.

The bill takes effect June 1, 2008 and terminates May 31, 2009.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Any expense reimbursements for task force members and staffing costs for DNR are assumed to be minimal and absorbable within existing budgeted resources.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: Enacted in 1991, the Forest Conservation Act provides a set of minimum standards that developers must follow when designing a new project that affects forest land. Local governments are responsible for making sure these standards are met, but may choose to implement even more stringent criteria. If there is no local agency in place to review development plans, DNR does so. In general, the Act calls for a minimum amount of forest cover on development sites based upon the site's zoning.

Background: In its January 2007 report, the Maryland Transition Work Group on Environment and Natural Resources recommended that the State adopt a no net loss of forests goal through legislative and executive actions. Maryland loses 8,600 acres of forested land each year. The work group noted that the maintenance of forests is as key to restoring the Chesapeake Bay as any investments in sewage treatment or air quality controls. Trees absorb vast quantities of air pollutants, including greenhouse gases, and also filter nonpoint source pollution from farms and developed areas. The work group indicated that converting just 10% of the forest area in a watershed can increase nutrient runoff by 40%. Forests also generate billions of dollars for the hunting, recreational, and wood-products industries. The work group concluded that avoidance and minimization of forest loss should be a priority over reforestation.

In December 2007, the Chesapeake Executive Council signed a directive entitled *Protecting the Forests of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed*. Among other things, this Forestry Conservation Initiative committed the bay states to • permanently protect an additional 695,000 acres of forest from conversion by 2020; • accelerate reforestation and conservation in urban/suburban areas and riparian forest buffers by 2020; • work with local governments, legislative delegations, land trusts, or other stakeholders to create or augment dedicated sources of local funding by 2010; and • by 2009, establish and implement a mechanism to track and assess forest land cover change. Under the directive, Maryland has committed to protecting 96,000 acres by 2012 and 250,000 acres by 2020. Approximately 724,000 acres of forest lands in the State are already protected.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Natural Resources, *Maryland Transition Work Group Report on Environment and Natural Resources* (January 31, 2007), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (Chesapeake Bay Program), Department of Legislative Services

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