



VERMONT LEGISLATIVE
Joint Fiscal Office

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Fiscal Note

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H.606 An act relating to community resilience and biodiversity protection

As passed by the General Assembly

URL for bill: <https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2022/Docs/BILLS/H-0606/H-0606%20As%20Passed%20by%20Both%20House%20and%20Senate%20Unofficial.pdf>

Bill Summary

The bill proposes to establish a conservation goal for Vermont of having 30 percent of land conserved by 2030 and 50 percent of land conserved by 2050. The bill proposes that conservation shall occur with a mix of three area types: ecological reserve areas, biodiversity protection areas, and natural resource management areas. These area types are defined in the bill.

Additionally, the bill would require the Agency of Natural Resources (Agency) to create a Conservation Plan by December 31, 2023, which would include, among other requirements, an inventory existing public and private conserved land.

All provisions of the bill would be effective on July 1, 2022.

Fiscal Impacts

The Agency of Natural Resources has stated that it would need a limited-service position to write the conservation plan and a consultant to perform the conserved lands inventory. The cost for a position and a consultant would be approximately \$125,000 to \$150,000 in FY 2023, and \$60,000 for a half-year of the position and additional consultant time in FY 2024.

The bill as passed by the House does not include an appropriation or an authorization for a new position.

Background and details

Conservation Plan

H.606, as passed by the House, requires the Agency to create a conservation plan with several components by December 1, 2023. This plan would require staff time and, per the agency, consultant time as well. The Agency is currently dealing with staffing challenges so it is unlikely that this work could be done without a

dedicated position. The Agency informed JFO that it would look to hire an early-career individual to the position who would be charged with coordinating with existing staff, performing public outreach, and writing the actual plan. The cost for the position, covering salaries and benefits, would be approximately \$100,000 per year. As noted above, this bill does not currently contain authorization for a new limited-service position and does not contain an appropriation to fund the position.

The Agency also informed JFO that a consultant would most likely be needed to perform an inventory of existing conserved lands. This inventory could draw from existing data, but it is possible that the three area types defined in the bill would not perfectly correlate with existing data, which would then require additional data collection and mapping. The Agency estimates that the one-time cost of a consultant would be from \$25,000 up to \$50,000. Ongoing updates to the inventory are estimated to be \$5,000 annually.

Without an appropriation and authorization for a new position, the Agency would likely have to perform the duties created in this bill with existing staff, which could result in a delay to the release of the conservation plan.

Land Conservation

Depending on the results of the conservation plan and the conserved lands inventory there could be pressures for new State funding in future years to provide additional incentives for the creation of conservation easements and other conservation mechanisms on private land, or for the State to attain fee simple ownership of land. However, this proposed bill does not create any definite new costs or new funding mechanisms for land conservation.