



Report of the State Park Investment Commission

Annapolis, Maryland
December 2021

Report of the State Park Investment Commission

**Department of Legislative Services
Office of Policy Analysis
Annapolis, Maryland**

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THE MARYLAND GENERAL
ASSEMBLY
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401-1991

December 17, 2021

The Honorable Bill Ferguson
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

The Honorable Adrienne A. Jones
Speaker of the House
H-101 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear President Ferguson and Speaker Jones:

It is an honor to submit the report of the State Park Investment Commission (Commission). We have tremendous appreciation of your foresight to convene this group to address capacity shutdowns and access equity concerns in our State parks.

During 2020, our country faced the historic COVID-19 pandemic, which has highlighted the vital importance of our State park system for the health and well-being of our citizens. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and demographic changes, the State park system experienced a substantial visitation increase that forced park capacity shutdowns and exposed equity of access concerns.

When the Commission convened in September 2021, we recognized the need to hear from diverse stakeholders both within State government and the wider community. The Commission heard from the following panels: the Department of Natural Resources, local and federal government representatives, equity stakeholders, environment and allied stakeholders, national experts, and the Baltimore City Recreation and Parks Department. The Commission also received written testimony from a wide array of stakeholders, including current and former government officials, non-profit organizations, "friends of" parks groups, and engaged individuals, each of whom expressed an affinity for the State park system and thoughtful ideas for how it may improve.

In addition, feedback on draft recommendations was explicitly requested from the following: State agencies noted in the recommendations (the Department of Budget and Management, the Department of General Services, the Department of Natural Resources, the Maryland Department of Transportation, and the Maryland Stadium Authority), the Maryland Rangers Association, and the City of Baltimore.

As you requested, the Commission largely focused on capacity shutdowns and access equity concerns in our State parks, with the addition of citizen health and well-being and climate change. In the pages that follow, you will find recommendations based on hours of meetings, research, analysis of prior State park reports, deliberations, conversations, and some difficult decisions by Commission members.

Thank you to my two co-chairs, Senator Sarah Elfreth and Delegate Eric Luedtke, as well as the Commission members – Senator George Edwards, Senator Obie Patterson, and Senator Craig Zucker and Delegate Regina Boyce, Delegate Mark Chang, and Delegate Jefferson Ghrist – along with their staff, who all gave a tremendous commitment to this work. Each spent hours reviewing and considering both written and oral testimony from a number of stakeholders and brought their insight to bear on this important work. I especially thank your staff, Sally Robb and Jody Sprinkle in the Senate and Alexandra Hughes and Patrick O’Leary in the House for crucial guidance and support. I also must acknowledge the wonderful staff of the Department of Legislative Services, specifically Andrew D. Gray and Jeremy D. Baker, who staffed the Commission and contributed to and helped finalize the report. It is our hope that our recommendations will influence the State moving forward, including through legislation that will be considered during the upcoming 2022 session, and contribute to a healthier and more inclusive and equitable Maryland for all of our citizens.

Chairing this Commission has been a great honor. I am grateful for your leadership and wisdom in creating the Commission. The State’s surplus funding and your leadership in prioritizing legislation and actions noted in this report provide a once in a generation opportunity to ensure that our State park system is positioned not only as a national leader but also as a model for linking park considerations with climate change, equity, and human health.

Sincerely,



Parris N. Glendening
Governor (1995-2003)
Chairman,
State Park Investment Commission

PNG:ADG/JDB/acl

General Assembly of Maryland State Park Investment Commission

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Delegate Eric G. Luedtke, Co-Chair

District 14

Senator George C. Edwards

District 1

Senator Obie Patterson

District 26

Senator Craig J. Zucker

District 14

Delegate Regina T. Boyce

District 43

Delegate Mark S. Chang

District 32

Delegate Jefferson L. Ghrist

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Executive Summary

This report describes the recommendations of the State Park Investment Commission (Commission). The Commission has made specific recommendations, many of which will be introduced as legislation during the 2022 Legislative Session of the Maryland General Assembly, as well as nonstatutory steps to decrease park capacity shutdowns and improve the equity of access.

In August 2021, the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House jointly appointed a commission to investigate and make recommendations regarding overcrowding in Maryland State parks, including: the adequacy of existing State park facilities to meet demand for recreational opportunities in the State; levels of operational funding and staff for existing State parks, as well as the need for capital funding to provide a high-quality experience to park visitors; the need for new State park offerings and identification of any recreational deserts across Maryland; and the extent to which State parks and associated recreational opportunities are adequately accessible to all populations of Marylanders, including low-income Marylanders, those who lack access to a car, and Marylanders with disabilities.

The Commission reviewed the work of prior State park advisory groups as well as reports requested from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) concerning the Maryland Park Service and the Critical Maintenance Program. Over the course of the Commission's six meetings, it heard presentations from a number of stakeholders, including the following: DNR, local and federal government representatives, equity

stakeholders, environment and allied stakeholders, national experts, and the Baltimore City Recreation and Parks Department.

The Commission makes the following recommendations (grouped into the six categories of capacity, maintenance, staffing, funding, equity, and climate change) with the acknowledgment that these recommendations are one step in the process of positioning the Maryland State park system as not only a national leader but also as a model for connecting park considerations with climate change, equity, and human health.

Capacity

Recommendation 1: DNR should investigate the possibility of establishing new State parks or developing new amenities in current State parks, including increasing the capacity to offer water-based recreational opportunities. The proposal for new or expanded State parks with associated amenities should be coordinated with the creation of a Maryland Park Service (MPS) comprehensive long range strategic plan reflecting major goals and progress towards meeting those goals. Decisions regarding the establishment of new State parks or amenities should target areas identified by the park equity tool as in need of recreational opportunities and/or locations that would relieve overcrowding in existing State parks that have consistently had to be closed to the public due to capacity restrictions. To preserve the quality of the visitor experience and protect natural resources and park facilities, DNR should consider the cultural and ecological carrying capacities of State park areas when investigating the development of new amenities in existing State parks.

Recommendation 2: DNR should establish new State historical parks or other units that preserve and interpret the story of Black Marylanders and other underrepresented communities.

Recommendation 3: DNR should establish, publish, and provide opportunities for public input on a 5-year facilities master plan for the State park system, and provide the General Assembly's relevant committees with annual updates on the implementation of the 5-year facilities master plan.

Recommendation 4: DNR should work on increasing the availability of recreational opportunities in other State-owned areas such as wildlife management areas and State forest lands. In doing so, DNR should consider the cultural and ecological carrying capacities of State-owned areas to preserve the quality of the visitor experience and protect natural resources and park facilities.

Recommendation 5: DNR should (1) investigate the possibility of redesignating State park system areas, such as natural resources management areas and natural environment areas, and other State-owned areas, such as wildlife management areas and State forest lands, as State parks and (2) include its findings in the 5-year facilities master plan.

Recommendation 6: DNR and the City of Baltimore should collaborate on improvements to Gwynns Falls/Leakin Park.

Recommendation 7: DNR should (1) investigate the possibility of providing improved public access to privately-owned land on a voluntary consent basis; (2) recommend to the General Assembly any changes needed to the State's recreational use statute; and (3) include its findings in the 5-year facilities master plan.

Recommendation 8: DNR should (1) coordinate with county, municipal, and federal park systems to increase trail connectivity between park systems and (2) include a report of coordinating efforts in the 5-year facilities master plan.

Recommendation 9: DNR should coordinate a whole systems approach to park and recreation planning, including coordination with local, municipal, county, and federal park systems. One avenue to explore is the Maryland Recreation and Parks Association planned meeting in late January 2022. Another avenue is the proposed Chesapeake National Recreation Area.

Recommendation 10: DNR should consider integrating infrastructure messaging with the National Park Service and local governments, including a one-stop shopping website and app that provides information on where parks and open spaces are located, the amenities available, and real-time information about park status (e.g., open, closed, etc.). A component of this integration should be the investigation of the expansion of the day-use reservation system beyond the Falling Branch area of Rocks State Park to all parks experiencing capacity shutdowns. The investigation should consider how the expansion of the day-use reservation system may impact State park visitors in terms of equity and access.

Recommendation 11: DNR should connect the Office of Outdoor Recreation with MPS's business manager, county tourism, and economic development offices, the Maryland Municipal League, the Maryland Association of Counties, and the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable. In addition, the Office of Outdoor Recreation should explore expanding opportunities for concessionaires.

Maintenance

Recommendation 12: The Maryland General Assembly and appropriate executive agencies should collaborate to utilize current and anticipated federal funding and current State budget surpluses to make an immediate investment in critical maintenance to eliminate the existing critical maintenance backlog over the next three years, and to develop a formula for ongoing maintenance funding to prevent another backlog from occurring.

Recommendation 13: DNR should prioritize increasing staffing in its engineering and construction unit to allow DNR to better oversee and implement projects, including resolution of the critical maintenance backlog.

Recommendation 14: DNR should modify the Critical Maintenance Program to include a robust funding allocation dedicated to the preservation and restoration of historical/cultural resources maintained by DNR. As a first step in this process, DNR should undertake a system-wide survey of historical and cultural resources, including estimates of costs to restore and maintain those resources, with the understanding that the preservation and restoration of historical/cultural resources will not be delayed while the statewide survey is being conducted.

Recommendation 15: DNR should establish and publish on its website a list of maintenance projects in every unit of the State park system that are expected to cost more than \$25,000, prioritize these projects using a system of objective criteria, and publish information regarding the scores individual projects receive in the prioritization system.

Recommendation 16: DNR should coordinate with the Department of General Services (DGS) on the development of an asset management system for its infrastructure. The asset management system should be based on a facility condition index that is updated for MPS's infrastructure on a continuous basis by a dedicated asset evaluation team and should include an inflation index adjustment.

Recommendation 17: A significant one-time investment should be made in pay-as-you-go capital capacity projects that will reduce the park capacity closures the system has been experiencing. These projects should focus on forms of recreation that are most driving demand, including trails, water-based recreation and picnicking, and parking facilities that support both.

Recommendation 18: DNR should work with DGS to increase the size of projects that can be handled in-house by DNR from \$50,000 to \$100,000. DNR should also consider tying the increase in the size of projects to the building and construction cost indexes to account for inflation.

Recommendation 19: DNR should consider the need to out-source capital development projects, particularly new infrastructure funded by the Natural Resources Development Fund, to the Maryland Stadium Authority to the degree that additional positions are provided for this purpose.

Staffing

Recommendation 20: DNR should increase the number of full-time employees in MPS by 100 permanent, classified positions over the next two fiscal years to better meet the needs of the park-going public. Further,

every additional staff position should be accompanied by a supplemental budget allocation that will adequately support the work of that specific employee (vehicles, equipment, offices, shops, and other necessary supports). DNR should double the size of the MPS workforce in the next 5 years, set a long-term goal of one authorized position for every 30,000 park visitors, and maintain staffing levels that will preserve the desired 1:30,000 employee-to-visitor ratio. In addition, DNR should conduct a staffing adequacy review every 5 years to determine if there is adequate staffing in the parks.

Recommendation 21: DNR should implement a volunteer management program modeled on the National Park Service's Volunteers-In-Parks program in order to strategically manage volunteer service provided by individuals and State parks friends groups. The program should be managed by a full-time dedicated paid volunteer program manager who conducts annual training for staff and volunteers; develops and promotes volunteer opportunities; performs program audit, monitoring, and evaluation functions to determine volunteer management program efficacy; and reports on annual volunteer impacts and statistics. Consideration should be given to adding supporting authority to the State code modeled after the Volunteers in the Parks Act of 1969. In addition, DNR should expand its work with the Friends of Maryland State Parks and other similar organizations, modeled on the National Park Service's relationship with the National Park Foundation and the National Park Service policy on donations and philanthropic partnerships, in order to leverage additional private charitable funding for park enhancements.

Recommendation 22: DNR should work with the Department of Budget and

Management (DBM) to make improvements to the hiring process by requiring DNR to seek to streamline human resources processes to ensure faster hiring for all positions within MPS, especially seasonal positions; providing MPS with an administrative waiver to the Maryland State Online Employment Center hiring process that is used to hire temporary employees; and eliminating the MPS requirement to request hiring freeze exemptions for all critical operations positions.

Recommendation 23: MPS should increase efforts to recruit and retain bilingual rangers and park staff and increase funding for the Es Mi Parque Program.

Recommendation 24: MPS should increase efforts to diversify its workforce through strong, targeted efforts to recruit people of color into positions within MPS.

Recommendation 25: MPS should develop programs focused on creating a pipeline of new rangers and other full-time staff from among volunteers, the State's foster youth system, and the State's historically underserved communities, including a State parks historic trades corps. These programs should be modeled on the cadet programs implemented by the National Park Service and should include collaboration with the State's Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Supporting authority should be added to State law modeled after the federal Land Management Workforce Flexibility Act, which allows qualified individuals serving under time-limited appointments in a land management agency to apply for permanent positions that are not available to the general public.

Recommendation 26: DBM should resolve the employee classification issues that have resulted in differential pay levels

between some employees and their direct supervisors.

Recommendation 27: DNR and DBM should conduct a salary review, including the consideration of maintaining a salary level sufficient to ensure diversity, in 2022 and every three years thereafter to (1) improve hiring by compensating MPS employees at a level commensurate with employees of local park systems, the National Park Service, and, for MPS maintenance personnel who perform skilled and licensed trade functions, the private-sector and (2) improve retention by promoting upward mobility within a job series.

Recommendation 28: DNR should report on the adequacy of Natural Resources Police coverage for State parks across the State, including staffing levels of Natural Resources Police officers within State park units, particularly during the peak season.

Recommendation 29: Legislation should be adopted to provide statutory recognition of the status of Maryland rangers as first responders and existing statutes should be amended to codify the inclusion of Maryland rangers and park services associates in the unique benefits afforded to all other first responders, including emergency response pay, preferential income tax deductions, and legal presumptions for occupational diseases.

Funding

Recommendation 30: The repayment plan for the Program Open Space (POS) funds diverted but not yet repaid from fiscal 2006 and between fiscal 2016 and 2018 should be modified in order to advance the repayment and allocate a greater portion of the funding to the Critical Maintenance Program, acquisitions of new State parks, and

the creation of amenities in existing State parks.

Recommendation 31: A permanent, sustainable, dedicated funding source should be identified that can adequately fund the additional resources identified and recommended by the Commission. This funding source should not redirect/reallocate existing funding sources. To the degree there is coordination between the State and local governments about overall park needs in the State, additional funding could be allocated to support local park needs.

Recommendation 32: Action should be taken to create targeted funding sources for cultural resource areas, including archeological sites, historic sites, and battlefields. Funds could be used for inventory, designation, and enhancing visitor interpretation.

Recommendation 33: A statutory funding goal for the State park system should be set with the intent of supporting Maryland as a National Park System model and to ensure that even with increasing visitation levels there are fewer State park capacity closures, there is improved equity of access, and there is green infrastructure in place to mitigate climate change.

Equity

Recommendation 34: The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) should conduct a pilot program extending existing Maryland Transit Administration bus routes in the Baltimore metro area (one of the most densely populated areas of the State) during the summer, thereby providing transit access to State parks in the region. Pilot routes could be advertised to park users, and MDOT could report back to the General

Assembly on the usage of these extended routes.

Recommendation 35: DNR should partner with MDOT on a pilot program for weekend shuttle service to State parks. The decentralized program could be based in existing park and ride facilities, parks with lower visitation, or other large parking areas as negotiated with public or private entities. In addition, the program could partner with existing shuttle, bus, or other mass transit carriers or pursue an electric automated shuttle.

Recommendation 36: DNR should collaborate with MDOT and local transportation agencies to improve bicycle, sidewalk, and trail access to State parks.

Recommendation 37: MPS should adopt universal design principles in its programming and amenities to ensure maximum access by all people, including people with disabilities and seniors. In addition, the MPS website and all other digital outreach should adhere to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 and Section 508 of the Americans with Disabilities Act in order to ensure accessibility for individuals who are deaf, blind, or both.

Climate Change

Recommendation 38: The State should consider committing to a 30x30 goal to conserve at least 30% of Maryland's land and waters by 2030 in line with the same federal goal proposed by the Joseph R. Biden, Jr. Administration.

Recommendation 39: Action should be taken to ensure that the Natural Resources Development Fund and Critical Maintenance Program include funding sufficient to allow

DNR to modernize and integrate green technology and sustainable practices into all State park facilities, whether through rehabilitation or replacement. DNR should recognize as a formal policy that Maryland's forests, trees, and wetlands are a major tool to battle climate change, both in terms of mitigation and adaptation/resiliency, and require that projects contribute to the extent possible to the improvement of local water quality.

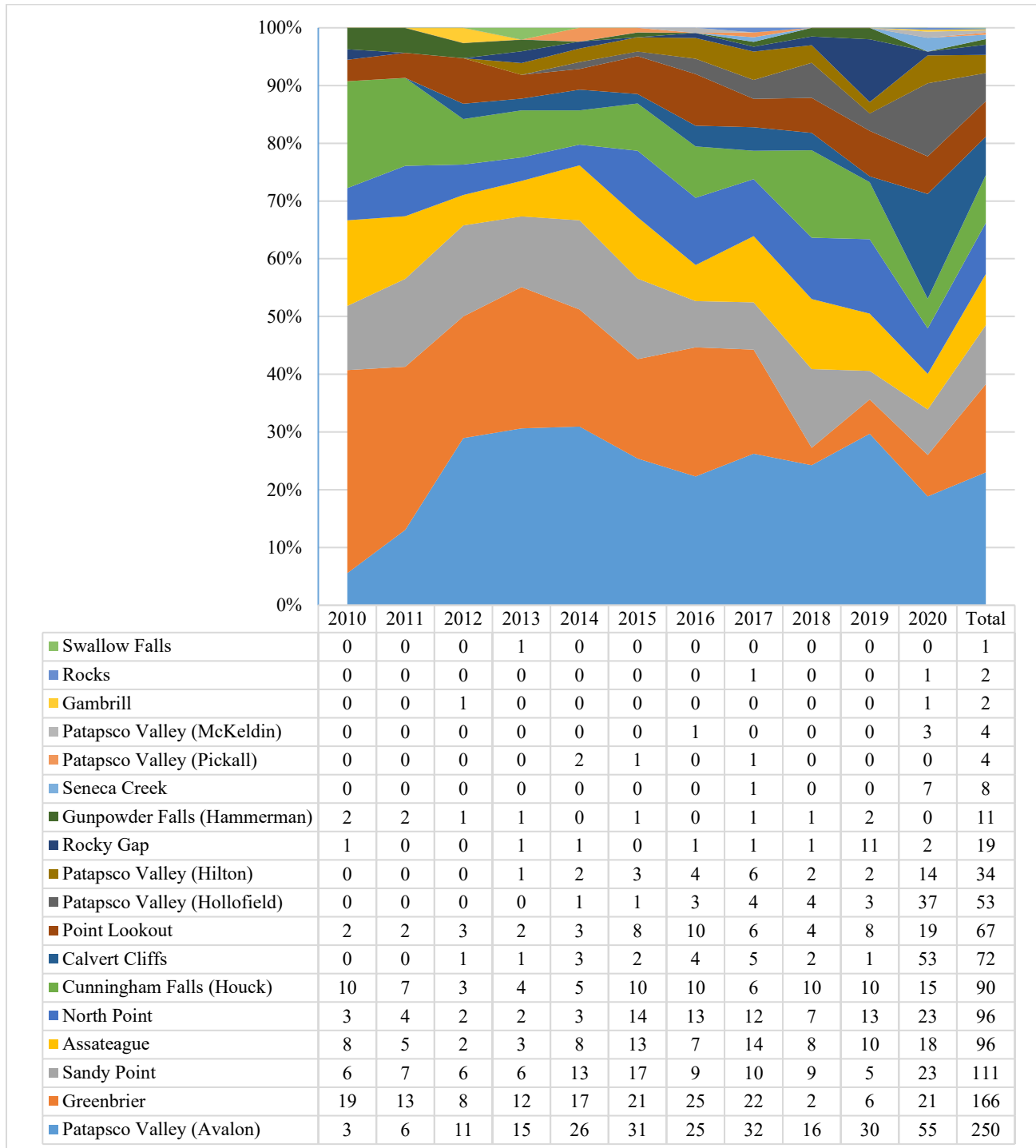
Recommendation 40: A new equity reforestation program should be created to proactively reforest historically underserved areas in partnership with local governments, communities, and individual homeowners. The program could be funded by a dedicated revenue source and would promote human health and mitigate climate change in collaboration with the efforts supported by the Tree Solutions Now Act of 2021 and any other tree planting programs in the State. This program could support reforestation on the following properties: (1) local and State parks; (2) other existing local government land; and (3) land purchased for this purpose and then either maintained by the State or turned over to local governments for passive recreation purposes as a natural landscape.

Chapter 1. Capacity: Increasing Recreational Opportunities

The Maryland Park Service (MPS) of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is responsible for and maintains the State park system, which, as of 2020, covers approximately 141,180 acres. In addition to 53 general State parks, the system includes 25 natural resources management areas, seven natural environment areas, three rail trails, and two State battlefields.

The number of visitors to State parks has doubled since 2013. In 2020, a record-setting 21.5 million people visited State parks, a 45.0% increase from the 14.9 million in 2019. Also in 2020, there were 292 closures due to capacity limits in 12 parks across the State as shown in **Exhibit 1** (the Patapsco Valley State Park is only considered once despite multiple areas within the park being reflected in the exhibit below). According to DNR's 2016 Strategic Park Investment Plan, the single most important common denominator forcing park closures is the public demand for picnic facilities associated with access to water for swimming and wading.

Exhibit 1 Maryland State Park Capacity Closures Calendar 2010-2020



Source: Department of Natural Resources

The Commission heard testimony on the topic of park carrying capacity – defined here as the amount and type of recreation use that is compatible with the management prescription for an area – but was unable to address it fully in the context of park capacity shutdowns. Simply put, carrying capacity is a balance between protection and visitation. The carrying capacity issue is at the heart of the capacity shutdowns issue, as well as equity issues, as it addresses both the demand side of the equation (whether demand for parks is causing over-visitation concerns and degradation of natural resources) and the supply side (whether there is sufficient supply of recreation resources) and will be an ongoing concern for the management of the Maryland park system.

DNR notes that the number of parking spaces is directly tied to the capacity of a park to serve a particular visitor population size. However, the carrying capacity is governed by all types of infrastructure, including not only parking lots, but also bathrooms, campsites, cabins, water/wastewater capacity, and visitor center size. In addition, carrying capacity is also influenced by management decisions, which can be broken down into direct management, such as reservation and length of stay requirements, and indirect management practices, such as improved access roads and trails. *The Commission acknowledges the possibility in the future of considering a carrying capacity metric and carrying capacity requirement along the lines of the National Park Service's Visitor Use Management Framework to address the recreational needs of Marylanders at both the individual park and whole Maryland State park system levels.*

Park Expansion

As noted above, water-based recreational opportunities are in high demand. DNR's 2016 Strategic Park Investment Plan recognized the importance of this type of recreation in its list of requested master plan projects, which included a list of new or improved waterfront beaches. Other categories of projects in the 2016 report include: new picnic areas and facilities; new playgrounds; new boat access; expanded trail systems; new campgrounds and related facilities; renovated and new cabins; new nature lodges; other park lodging; historic site restoration projects; and possible new State parks in the future. The 2021 Capital Improvement Program reflects funding for routine development projects between fiscal 2022 and fiscal 2026, but to date an updated capital master plan for future projects has not been published. In addition, an MPS comprehensive long range strategic plan – proposed to be developed from individual park strategic management plans and reflecting major goals and progress towards meeting those goals – has yet to be published. Therefore, MPS would benefit from the development of a comprehensive long range strategic plan (a vision document), reflecting its major goals and progress toward those goals, and a 5-year facilities master plan (a capital development document), with annual updates to the General Assembly on the plan's implementation.

Expanding the availability of parks and recreational opportunities requires a focused evaluation of current assets and deficiencies. DNR, in collaboration with the University of Maryland School of Public Health, developed the Maryland Park Equity Mapper tool to assist with determining where new park space is needed, and which communities may be currently underserved or underutilized by existing park space. Components of the tool include the following: population density, concentration of low-income households, concentration of children under the age of 17, concentration of adults over the age of 65, concentration of non-white population,

distance to public park space, distance to public transportation, and walkability.

Recommendation 1: DNR should investigate the possibility of establishing new State parks or developing new amenities in current State parks, including increasing the capacity to offer water-based recreational opportunities. The proposal for new or expanded State parks with associated amenities should be coordinated with the creation of a MPS comprehensive long range strategic plan reflecting major goals and progress towards meeting those goals. Decisions regarding the establishment of new State parks or amenities should target areas identified by the park equity tool as in need of recreational opportunities and/or locations that would relieve overcrowding in existing State parks that have consistently had to be closed to the public due to capacity restrictions. To preserve the quality of the visitor experience and protect natural resources and park facilities, DNR should consider the cultural and ecological carrying capacities of State park areas when investigating the development of new amenities in existing State parks.

Recommendation 2: DNR should establish new State historical parks or other units that preserve and interpret the story of Black Marylanders and other underrepresented communities.

Recommendation 3: DNR should establish, publish, and provide opportunities for public input on a 5-year facilities master plan for the State park system, and provide the General Assembly's relevant committees with annual updates on the implementation of the 5-year facilities master plan.

Increasing Recreation on Other Park System Land

In addition to State parks, Maryland owns and DNR manages several other categories of land that can be used for recreational purposes, including natural resources management areas and natural environment areas. Natural resources management areas, comprising 27,617 acres, are managed for the primary benefit of wildlife habitat, sustainable farming, and passive, nature-based recreation such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, and boat access. These areas can also provide non-motorized trail use, including hiking, equestrian uses, and mountain biking. Natural environment areas, comprising 12,701 acres, allow for recreation development that is secondary to preservation objectives, with a primary focus on interpretation and environmental education. Of note, the Commission considered the restrictions on the use of wildlife management areas acquired and managed using federal Pittman-Robertson Act funding and encourages DNR to consider those restrictions when evaluating wildlife management areas for increased recreation.

Recommendation 4: DNR should work on increasing the availability of recreational opportunities in other State-owned areas such as wildlife management areas and State forest lands. In doing so, DNR should consider the cultural and ecological carrying capacities of State-owned areas to preserve the quality of the visitor experience and protect natural resources and park facilities.

Redesignation

A 2018 study by Headwaters Economics found that eight national monuments that had been redesignated as national parks saw their attendance increase by an average of 21% within five years. Recent federal legislation includes redesignating Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore (IN) to Indiana Dunes National Park (61st national park), White Sands National Monument (NM) to White Sands National Park (62nd), and New River Gorge National River (WV) to New River Gorge National Park and Preserve (63rd). As noted above, the Commission considered the restrictions on the use of wildlife management areas acquired and managed using federal Pittman-Robertson Act funding and encourages DNR to consider those restrictions when evaluating wildlife management areas for redesignation.

Recommendation 5: DNR should (1) investigate the possibility of redesignating State park system areas, such as natural resources management areas and natural environment areas, and other State-owned areas, such as wildlife management areas and State forest lands, as State parks and (2) include its findings in the 5-year facilities master plan.

Baltimore City

Baltimore City is one of three Maryland jurisdictions without a State park (the other jurisdictions are Kent County and Wicomico County, although Kent County has the Sassafras Natural Resources Management Area). In addition to Baltimore City's Program Open Space (POS) local allocation, the City also receives \$6 million per year from the State's share of POS funds for projects that meet park purposes. This funding is known as the Baltimore City direct grant. Projects funded through the Baltimore City direct grant are determined by the City or specific budget language, do not require matching funds, and can be used for operations, acquisition, or park development. The Commission's deliberations, including a presentation by the Baltimore City Department of Recreation and Parks and subsequent feedback from the Baltimore City administration, informs the Commission's recommendation for greater collaboration between DNR and the City of Baltimore on expanding recreational opportunities and access in existing parks as opposed to creating a new State park.

Recommendation 6: DNR and the City of Baltimore should collaborate on improvements to Gwynns Falls/Leakin Park.

Private Land

In Maryland, privately-owned conserved land represents the biggest share of acres of protected lands. Comparatively, the vast majority of protected lands in Pennsylvania are state-owned. According to the Maryland Protected Lands Dashboard, as of November 9, 2021, Maryland's total preserved acres equaled 1,806,837 acres, of which 1,006,697 acres (55.7%) were under easement, and thus privately-owned, and 800,141 acres (44.3%) were publicly owned. There are properties in Maryland that are already required to be open to the public due to the use of State or federal funds in the property purchase. For instance, the Beverly Triton Nature Park in Anne Arundel County was purchased with POS funds, but a portion of it was leased to a

community association for a number of years. The County allowed the lease to expire at the end of calendar 2019 in order to comply with DNR's public access requirements. The Holly Beach Farm property, which is managed by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and is located near Sandy Point State Park, is a possible future effort for public access given that it was purchased with both POS funding and federal Land and Water Conservation Fund funding.

In addition, there is a need to consider greater access to privately-owned lands through greater use of the provisions in Title 5, Subtitle 11 (Public Recreation on Private Land and Land Owned by Local Governments) of the Natural Resources Article. Under Subtitle 11, an owner of land who invites or allows without charge persons to use the property for any recreational or educational purpose does not assume responsibility for or incur liability as a result of any injury. However, the law does not limit the liability of an owner who willfully or maliciously fails to guard or warn against a dangerous condition, use, structure, or activity, or for injury suffered where the owner of the land charges the person who goes on the land for recreational or educational use. The protection from liability extends to an owner of land leased to the State or any of its political subdivisions for any recreational or educational purpose. DNR has the authority to explore a middle ground between full access to private lands and no access at all by leasing private lands to increase connectivity between parks and other recreational spaces open to the public. The Commission considered the concerns about liability and seeks feedback from DNR concerning the State's recreational use statute, including any statutory changes that would further encourage private landowners to allow the public to access private land for recreational and educational purposes.

The City of Annapolis is exploring an incentive-based approach to increasing public water access. In 1987, the City of Annapolis created four maritime zoning districts in order to preserve the city's working waterfront and maritime industry. Land use within the maritime zoning districts may include working boatyards, on-land boat storage, seafood processing, and boat/sailing clubs. As a result, the maritime zoning has prevented hotel and large-scale residential development on the waterfront and maintained the possibility for public water access. To incentivize public water access, the City of Annapolis is discussing the possibility of allowing landowners in the maritime zoning districts who agree to provide public water access to increase their non-maritime use by 5%. This would incentivize public water access improvements by property owners. In addition, the City of Annapolis, in collaboration with the National Park Service, is exploring a citywide public water access study. This type of study could be expanded statewide.

Recommendation 7: DNR should (1) investigate the possibility of providing improved public access to privately-owned land on a voluntary consent basis; (2) recommend to the General Assembly any changes needed to the State's recreational use statute; and (3) include its findings in the 5-year facilities master plan.

Intergovernmental Relations

There are two main local recreation and parks funding programs. The local component of POS, established in 1969, provides financial and technical assistance to counties and municipalities for the planning, acquisition, and/or development of recreation land or open space areas. The Community Parks and Playgrounds program, first funded in fiscal 2002, provides flexible

grants to municipal governments to respond to the unmet need for assistance to rehabilitate, expand, or improve existing parks, create new parks, or purchase and install playground equipment. Funding for the Community Parks and Playgrounds program comes from general obligation bonds included in the capital budget.

In addition, the fiscal 2022 capital budget included \$85 million in general obligation bonds for the Local Parks and Playgrounds Infrastructure Program, which funded shovel-ready projects in all 24 jurisdictions.

The Commission considered private contracting and concessions as part of its deliberations. The topic held considerable interest for members and was discussed in the context of the range of contracting possibilities from food, beverage, and recreation concessions all the way to full privatization of State assets. The Commission settled on private contracting and concessions without either long-term leasing or full privatization, although the debate over the proper level of involvement of private interests in public recreation is likely to continue.

Recommendation 8: DNR should (1) coordinate with county, municipal, and federal park systems to increase trail connectivity between park systems and (2) include a report of coordinating efforts in the 5- year facilities master plan.

Recommendation 9: DNR should coordinate a whole systems approach to park and recreation planning, including coordination with local, municipal, county, and federal park systems. One avenue to explore is the Maryland Recreation and Parks Association planned meeting in late January 2022. Another avenue is the proposed Chesapeake National Recreation Area.

Recommendation 10: DNR should consider integrating infrastructure messaging with the National Park Service and local governments, including a one-stop shopping website and app that provides information on where parks and open spaces are located, the amenities available, and real-time information about park status (e.g., open, closed, etc.). A component of this integration should be the investigation of the expansion of the day-use reservation system beyond the Falling Branch area of Rocks State Park to all parks experiencing capacity shutdowns. The investigation should consider how the expansion of the day-use reservation system may impact State park visitors in terms of equity and access.

Recommendation 11: DNR should connect the Office of Outdoor Recreation with MPS's business manager, county tourism, and economic development offices, the Maryland Municipal League, the Maryland Association of Counties, and the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable. In addition, the Office of Outdoor Recreation should explore expanding opportunities for concessionaires.

Chapter 2. Maintenance

Maryland's State park system was largely developed by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the 1930s and 1940s and during the post-war period of the 1950s and 1960s. As a result, much of the park system infrastructure is over 40 years old and in dire need of ongoing reinvestment.

DNR owns and manages over 120 facilities across the State. It has approximately 2,000 buildings, 700 miles of roads, 29 dams, numerous bridges, and various other structures. The Critical Maintenance Program backlog is currently estimated at \$63.0 million and is made up of 551 projects.

DNR's Engineer and Construction unit is not fully staffed and is hampered by the lack of an asset management system, which has contributed to the current Critical Maintenance Program backlog. *The Commission acknowledges the possibility in the future of establishing an engineering and construction unit within MPS.*

General Maintenance

Recommendation 12: The Maryland General Assembly and appropriate executive agencies should collaborate to utilize current and anticipated federal funding and current State budget surpluses to make an immediate investment in critical maintenance to eliminate the existing critical maintenance backlog over the next three years, and to develop a formula for ongoing maintenance funding to prevent another backlog from occurring.

Recommendation 13: DNR should prioritize increasing staffing in its engineering and construction unit to allow DNR to better oversee and implement projects, including resolution of the critical maintenance backlog.

Recommendation 14: DNR should modify the Critical Maintenance Program to include a robust funding allocation dedicated to the preservation and restoration of historical/cultural resources maintained by DNR. As a first step in this process, DNR should undertake a system-wide survey of historical and cultural resources, including estimates of costs to restore and maintain those resources, with the understanding that the preservation and restoration of historical/cultural resources will not be delayed while the statewide survey is being conducted.

Recommendation 15: DNR should establish and publish on its website a list of maintenance projects in every unit of the State park system that are expected to cost more than \$25,000, prioritize these projects using a system of objective criteria, and publish information regarding the scores individual projects receive in the prioritization system.

Recommendation 16: DNR should coordinate with the Department of General Services (DGS) on the development of an asset management system for its infrastructure. The asset management system should be based on a facility condition index that is updated for MPS's infrastructure on a continuous basis by a dedicated asset evaluation team and should include an inflation index adjustment.

Specific Capital Projects

Recommendation 17: A significant one-time investment should be made in pay-as-you-go capital capacity projects that will reduce the park capacity closures the system has been experiencing. These projects should focus on forms of recreation that are most driving demand, including trails, water-based recreation and picnicking, and parking facilities that support both.

Procurement

DNR has procurement authority for projects estimated up to \$50,000 and awards approximately 75 to 100 contracts annually. DGS administers and awards contracts over \$50,000. *The Commission acknowledges the possibility in the future of establishing a State park revenue authority to handle capital projects in general and the backlog of critical maintenance projects in particular.*

Recommendation 18: DNR should work with DGS to increase the size of projects that can be handled in-house by DNR from \$50,000 to \$100,000. DNR should also consider tying the increase in the size of projects to the building and construction cost indexes to account for inflation.

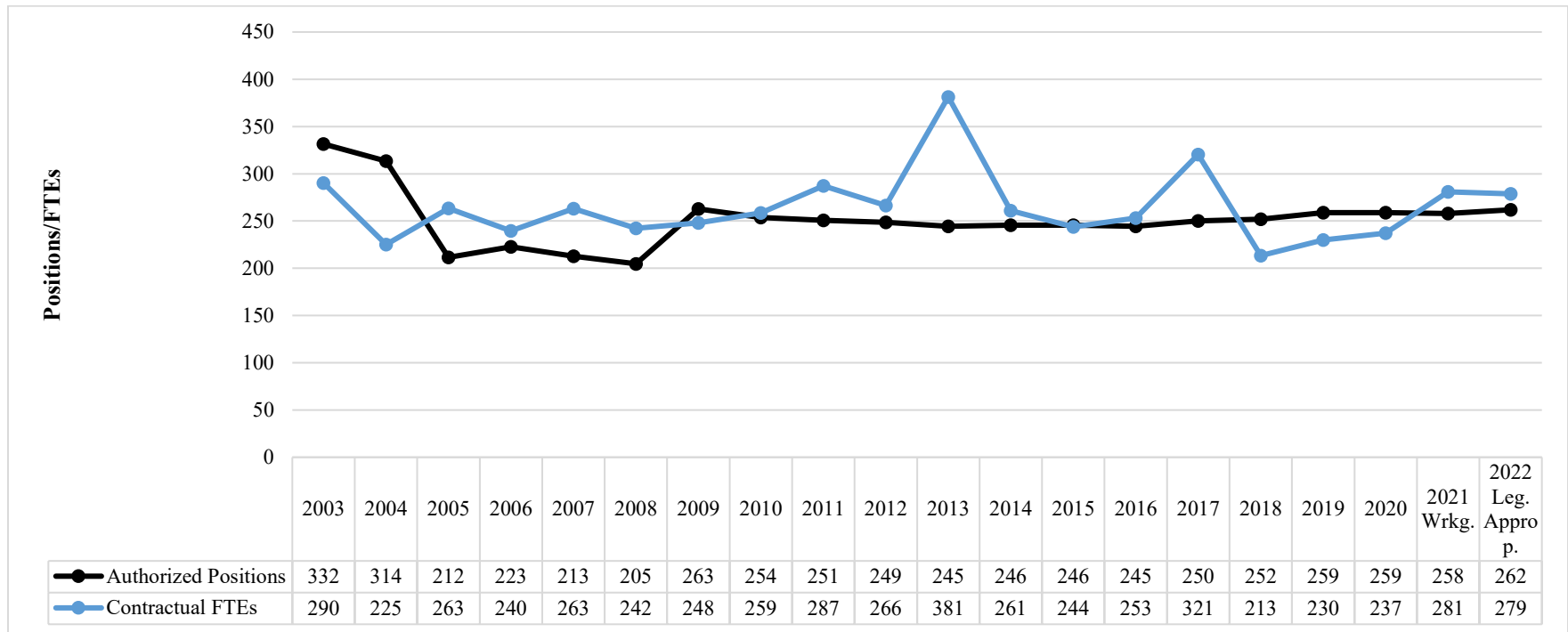
Recommendation 19: DNR should consider the need to out-source capital development projects, particularly new infrastructure funded by the Natural Resources Development Fund, to the Maryland Stadium Authority to the degree that additional positions are provided for this purpose.

Chapter 3. Staffing

Number of MPS Staff

Visitation to State parks has doubled since DNR and the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) collaborated on a 5-year strategic plan, which was submitted to the General Assembly in 2013. The strategic plan identified an additional 70 positions needed for the operation and management of the then 66 State parks. In the 9 years since the strategic plan was submitted, 25 new State parks and areas have been acquired or opened, yet only 18 permanent positions have been added, as shown in **Exhibit 2**. In addition, MPS would benefit from the development of a volunteer management program modeled on the National Park Service's Volunteers-In-Parks in order to leverage volunteer support.

**Exhibit 2
Maryland Park Service Personnel
Calendar 2003-2022 Legislative Appropriation**



FTE: full-time equivalent

Note: The contractual full-time equivalents number for fiscal 2022 reflects the fiscal 2022 allowance.

Source: Governor's Budget Books, Fiscal 2005-2022; Fiscal Digest for Fiscal Year 2022

Recommendation 20: DNR should increase the number of full-time employees in MPS by 100 permanent, classified positions over the next two fiscal years to better meet the needs of the park-going public. Further, every additional staff position should be accompanied by a supplemental budget allocation that will adequately support the work of that specific employee (vehicles, equipment, offices, shops, and other necessary supports). DNR should double the size of the MPS workforce in the next 5 years, set a long-term goal of one authorized position for every 30,000 park visitors, and maintain staffing levels that will preserve the desired 1:30,000 employee-to-visitor ratio. In addition, DNR should conduct a staffing adequacy review every 5 years to determine if there is adequate staffing in the parks.

Recommendation 21: DNR should implement a volunteer management program modeled on the National Park Service's Volunteers-In-Parks program in order to strategically manage volunteer service provided by individuals and State parks friends groups. The program should be managed by a full-time dedicated paid volunteer program manager who conducts annual training for staff and volunteers; develops and promotes volunteer opportunities; performs program audit, monitoring, and evaluation functions to determine volunteer management program efficacy; and reports on annual volunteer impacts and statistics. Consideration should be given to adding supporting authority to the State code modeled after the Volunteers in the Parks Act of 1969. In addition, DNR should expand its work with the Friends of Maryland State Parks and other similar organizations, modeled on the National Park Service's relationship with the National Park Foundation and the National Park Service policy on donations and philanthropic partnerships, in order to leverage additional private charitable funding for park enhancements.

Hiring Practices

State parks rely on a surge of short-term seasonal employees to operate visitor centers, contact stations, beaches, and campgrounds, as well as to perform grounds maintenance and other mission-critical functions during the busiest times of the year. The inability to adequately staff any State park function compromises public safety, resource protection, and the visitor experience. The timeline to hire a seasonal employee is approximately two months, including, in many cases, rehires for vacancies occurring in the middle of the three-month summer season. Classified vacancies are sometimes carried for up to a year or more for critical operational functions at parks already deemed in need of additional staff. A part of the reason for delays in filling vacancies is due to the on-going hiring freeze for State employees in place since fiscal 2001.

MPS's workforce could benefit from increased diversity in terms of both technical skills and personal backgrounds. The National Park Service offers tools to address both of these considerations and offers a model for similar efforts within the State.

Recommendation 22: DNR should work with DBM to make improvements to the hiring process by requiring DNR to seek to streamline human resources processes to ensure faster hiring for all positions within MPS, especially seasonal positions; providing MPS with an administrative waiver to the Maryland State Online Employment Center hiring process that is used to hire temporary employees; and eliminating the MPS requirement to request hiring freeze exemptions for all critical operations positions.

Recommendation 23: MPS should increase efforts to recruit and retain bilingual rangers and park staff and increase funding for the Es Mi Parque Program.

Recommendation 24: MPS should increase efforts to diversify its workforce through strong, targeted efforts to recruit people of color into positions within MPS.

Recommendation 25: MPS should develop programs focused on creating a pipeline of new rangers and other full-time staff from among volunteers, the State's foster youth system, and the State's historically underserved communities, including a State parks historic trades corps. These programs should be modeled on the cadet programs implemented by the National Park Service and should include collaboration with the State's Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Supporting authority should be added to State law modeled after the federal Land Management Workforce Flexibility Act, which allows qualified individuals serving under time-limited appointments in a land management agency to apply for permanent positions that are not available to the general public.

Staff Compensation

In 2018, a salary equity adjustment, requested by MPS and approved by DBM, brought all rangers, both current and new hires, to a step three pay increment level without a commensurate increase to employees already at step three or higher, effectively resulting in the elimination of longevity pay for more senior employees.

In 2019, a DBM-approved and union-negotiated action resulted in all lead rangers (Park Services Associate Leads – Grade 15) being elevated to the same grade as their direct supervisors (Park Services Supervisors – Grade 16). DBM later created a second lead ranger classification at a lower pay grade (15), resulting in two different pay grades for the same position.

In 2021, the minimum wage for all State employees, including short-term seasonal employees, increased to \$15/hour, further compressing MPS's salary scale regarding long-term contractual and career classified employees.

The Commission heard testimony about MPS's non-competitive salaries as compared to local park systems and the National Park Service and the difficulty in retaining employees. In particular, the Commission heard that the skilled and licensed trade functions are not receiving compensation comparable to the private sector. A salary review conducted on a regular basis would help to ameliorate these concerns.

Recommendation 26: DBM should resolve the employee classification issues that have resulted in differential pay levels between some employees and their direct supervisors.

Recommendation 27: DNR and DBM should conduct a salary review, including the consideration of maintaining a salary level sufficient to ensure diversity, in 2022 and every

3 years thereafter to (1) improve hiring by compensating MPS employees at a level commensurate with employees of local park systems, the National Park Service, and, for MPS maintenance personnel who perform skilled and licensed trade functions, the private-sector and (2) improve retention by promoting upward mobility within a job series.

Public Safety and Law Enforcement

In 2005, Maryland park rangers with law enforcement powers were transferred to the Natural Resources Police (NRP). This transfer reduced the in-house law enforcement capacity of MPS. In addition, it increased the scope of duties for NRP, which already operates under a statewide law enforcement mandate.

Recommendation 28: DNR should report on the adequacy of Natural Resources Police coverage for State parks across the State, including staffing levels of Natural Resources Police officers within State park units, particularly during the peak season.

Rangers as First Responders

Rangers routinely respond to a variety of emergencies in State parks and other areas in coordination with police, fire, and emergency medical services (EMS) who regularly rely on rangers to provide first aid, search and rescue, and other public safety services in undeveloped and often remote settings. Rangers are often overlooked for various benefits afforded to more commonly recognized first responders like police, fire, and EMS. *The Commission acknowledges the possibility in the future of the establishment of a Maryland State park warden to issue warnings/citations for DNR State park rules and regulations.*

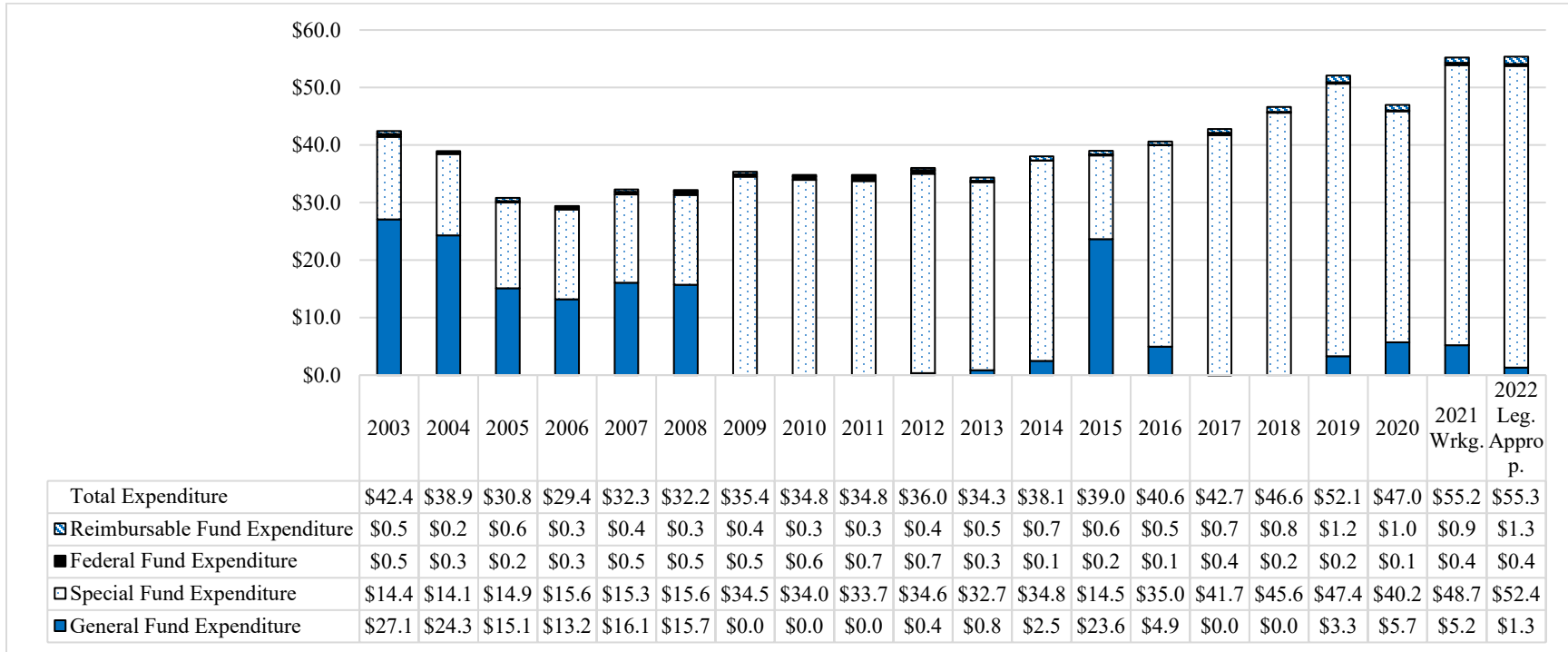
Recommendation 29: Legislation should be adopted to provide statutory recognition of the status of Maryland rangers as first responders and existing statutes should be amended to codify the inclusion of Maryland rangers and park services associates in the unique benefits afforded to all other first responders, including emergency response pay, preferential income tax deductions, and legal presumptions for occupational diseases.

Chapter 4. Funding

Funding Sources

The main funding sources for MPS are two special funds: the Forest or Park Reserve Fund and an allocation of funding from the State transfer tax through POS for operating and capital purposes (including the Critical Maintenance Program for repairs of existing infrastructure and the Natural Resources Development Fund for new infrastructure). The Forest or Park Reserve Fund supports payment in-lieu of taxes distributions to local jurisdictions in addition to park operations. **Exhibit 3** reflects MPS operating budget funding. The main change over the period shown has been the reduction of general funds, which were exchanged for State transfer tax special funds by Chapter 2 of the 2007 first special session.

**Exhibit 3
Maryland Park Service Funding
Fiscal 2003-2022 Legislative Appropriation
(\$ in Millions)**



Source: Governor's Budget Books, Fiscal 2005-2022; Fiscal Digest for Fiscal Year 2022

POS transfer tax diversions totaled approximately \$1.4 billion between fiscal 2002 and 2016, of which approximately \$0.7 billion has been replaced. Chapter 10 of 2016 established a plan for reimbursement of the \$90 million fiscal 2006 transfer, which means that \$0.6 billion of the fiscal 2002 through fiscal 2016 transfers are not currently planned to be replaced. In addition, Chapter 10 scheduled the full repayment of fiscal 2016-2018 transfers, \$152.2 million. Therefore, in total, Chapter 10 scheduled the repayment of \$242.2 million, although this plan has evolved since fiscal 2018 with modifications each year shifting repayment amount timing and allocation. Through fiscal 2022, \$68.1 million of the \$242.2 million has been repaid leaving the remaining \$174.1 million to be repaid by fiscal 2031. All told, \$0.6 billion of the transfer tax funding diverted to the General Fund is not scheduled to be repaid.

Recommendation 30: The repayment plan for POS funds diverted but not yet repaid from fiscal 2006 and between fiscal 2016 and 2018 should be modified in order to advance the repayment and allocate a greater portion of the funding to the Critical Maintenance Program, acquisitions of new State parks, and the creation of amenities in existing State parks.

Recommendation 31: A permanent, sustainable, dedicated funding source should be identified that can adequately fund the additional resources identified and recommended by the Commission. This funding source should not redirect/reallocate existing funding sources. To the degree there is coordination between the State and local governments about overall park needs in the State, additional funding could be allocated to support local park needs.

Recommendation 32: Action should be taken to create targeted funding sources for cultural resource areas, including archeological sites, historic sites, and battlefields. Funds could be used for inventory, designation, and enhancing visitor interpretation.

Operating Funding

From 2013 through 2020, Maryland ranked first in the highest median income in the United States. However, the park service operating budget as a percentage of the State budget was ranked thirty-seventh in 2013 and thirty-fourth in 2018.

Recommendation 33: A statutory funding goal for the State park system should be set with the intent of supporting Maryland as a National Park System model and to ensure that even with increasing visitation levels there are fewer State park capacity closures, there is improved equity of access, and there is green infrastructure in place to mitigate climate change.

Chapter 5. Equity: Barriers to Access

Equity in this report means creating equal access to opportunities in parks and other green spaces by meeting the needs of individuals. Equity may be considered as both the process of providing for individual needs in order to expand access to parks and other green spaces and the goal of achieving this access. As noted in the Commission's charge, equity includes but is not limited to improving access for low-income Marylanders, those who lack access to a car, and Marylanders with disabilities. For instance, seniors are a growing proportion of Maryland's population and are included in the Commission's considerations about access.

Transportation

Transportation poses a significant barrier to park access. Most residents use an automobile when accessing parks and facilities where they participate in outdoor recreation activities (93%, followed distantly by 10% traveling on foot, 5% traveling by bike, 2% by public transit, and 1% by other means). Access to the outdoors that is close-to-home is important as most people are not willing to drive more than an hour for outdoor space. Information provided by the Maryland Association of Counties shows a lack of public transit options. For instance, of the 65 State parks, natural resource management areas, and battlefields shown, 59 had no transit access and only 4 had full transit access (Bill Burton Fishing Pier State Park, North Point State Battlefield, Seneca Creek State Park, and Wye Oak State Park).

Recommendation 34: The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) should conduct a pilot program extending existing Maryland Transit Administration bus routes in the Baltimore metro area (one of the most densely populated areas of the State) during the summer, thereby providing transit access to State parks in the region. Pilot routes could be advertised to park users, and MDOT could report back to the General Assembly on the usage of these extended routes.

Recommendation 35: DNR should partner with MDOT on a pilot program for weekend shuttle service to State parks. The decentralized program could be based in existing park and ride facilities, parks with lower visitation, or other large parking areas as negotiated with public or private entities. In addition, the program could partner with existing shuttle, bus, or other mass transit carriers or pursue an electric automated shuttle.

Recommendation 36: DNR should collaborate with MDOT and local transportation agencies to improve bicycle, sidewalk, and trail access to State parks.

Accessibility

Overall, 10.7% of all Marylanders have a disability, according to the American Community Survey. Additionally, 22.44% of Marylanders 18 years old or older have a disability. Almost 100,000 Marylanders have developmental disabilities. Considerations for providing access for people with disabilities includes the availability of adequate restroom facilities, adaptive

recreation equipment, accessible playgrounds, and paved trails. Additional factors include getting to State parks, equitable access in State parks, and access to communications, including signage, websites, and the use of plain language.

By 2036, people over the age of 65 will outnumber children in the United States, a first in U.S. history. An aging resident base increases the need for accessible facilities or services. Of the Maryland households surveyed, 14% reported having a need for Americans with Disability Act (ADA) facilities or services for a household member, up slightly from 12% in 2013. Respondents aged 65 or older were more than twice as likely as other age cohorts to cite a lack of ADA-accessible features as a barrier.

When asked about the most important community features, 83% of adults say parks are extremely or very important. Pre-pandemic, while older adults represented more than 20% of the population, they made up only 4% of park users. Additionally, lack of parks and tree canopy can increase the local temperature and older adults represent a disproportionate share of heat-related deaths.

Older adults want park features and activities that (1) support passive and active recreation by older adults; (2) welcome grandparents raising grandchildren; (3) demonstrate universal design features; and (4) encourage intergenerational use.

Recommendation 37: MPS should adopt universal design principles in its programming and amenities to ensure maximum access by all people, including people with disabilities and seniors. In addition, the MPS website and all other digital outreach should adhere to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 and Section 508 of ADA in order to ensure accessibility for individuals who are deaf, blind, or both.

Chapter 6. Climate Change

The Chesapeake Bay restoration effort is an international model for estuary rehabilitation and is a complementary effort to the improvement of Maryland's park system. Both efforts are faced with climate change effects, and improvements made in either policy area will assist Maryland in meeting its larger climate change policy goals. Adaptive land management sea level rise models indicate that 68,700 acres of DNR managed lands are located under two feet of elevation and vulnerable to inundation by 2050, with an additional 16,300 acres vulnerable by 2100.

DNR plans to conduct a vulnerability assessment of State recreational lands that will utilize climate change-related GIS data, infrastructure data, and ecological data to identify and understand vulnerabilities and impacts, including long-term impacts to recreational use, water access, infrastructure, and ecosystem management.

The University of Maryland School of Public Health, in collaboration with DNR, is developing a Climate and Health Equity Mapper. The mapper combines multiple public health factors (overall mortality; respiratory illness such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and COVID; diabetes; heat-related illness; heart disease; obesity; mental health; and medically underserved areas) and climate equity factors (greenhouse gas emissions; sea level rise; urban heat islands including canopy cover and connectivity; and flood risk including floodplain, housing, and stormwater infrastructure).

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. signed the Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad on January 27, 2021. The Executive Order includes a goal of conserving at least 30% of U.S. lands and waters by 2030, otherwise known as the "30x30" goal. Subsequently, the U.S. Department of the Interior released the report *Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful*, which lays out eight principles for a locally led effort to reach the goal. The National Park Service Chesapeake Office testified to the benefits of the 30x30 goal, including benefits to wildlife and habitat, equitable outdoor recreation, clean air and water quality/quantity, historic and cultural heritage, agriculture and working lands, scenic vistas and quality of life, climate resilience, and associated economic benefits.

According to the Maryland Department of Planning, Maryland's land area is 6,189,629 acres. Of this land area, the Maryland Protected Lands Dashboard indicates that there are 1,806,837 total preserved acres as of November 9, 2021. Therefore, Maryland has conserved approximately 29% of its land area, which is close to the 30% goal noted above in the 30x30 goal. The protected lands are reflected in **Exhibit 4**.

Exhibit 4
Protected Lands by Category
November 9, 2021

<u>Category</u>	<u>Acres</u>
Maryland Environmental Trust	138,789
Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation	340,253
Local purchase of development rights/transfer of development rights	230,564
Private conservation organizations	61,309
Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation	2,238
Rural Legacy Program	112,598
Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act/Forest Legacy/Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program/Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (formerly Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program)	30,445
Cluster subdivision remainder	43,054
POS Stateside conservation easement	47,453
County recreation and parks	200,372
DNR State land inventory	498,079
Federal Park and conservation	101,690
Total	1,806,844

Note: Numbers do not sum to 1,806,837 acres due to rounding.

Source: Maryland Department of Planning, Department of Natural Resources, and Maryland Department of Agriculture

Recommendation 38: The State should consider committing to a 30x30 goal to conserve at least 30% of Maryland's land and waters by 2030 in line with the same federal goal proposed by the Joseph R. Biden, Jr. Administration.

Recommendation 39: Action should be taken to ensure that the Natural Resources Development Fund and Critical Maintenance Program include funding sufficient to allow DNR to modernize and integrate green technology and sustainable practices into all State park facilities, whether through rehabilitation or replacement. DNR should recognize as a formal policy that Maryland's forests, trees, and wetlands are a major tool to battle climate change, both in terms of mitigation and adaptation/resiliency, and require that projects contribute to the extent possible to the improvement of local water quality.

Recommendation 40: A new equity reforestation program should be created to proactively reforest historically underserved areas in partnership with local governments, communities, and individual homeowners. The program could be funded by a dedicated revenue source and would promote human health and mitigate climate change in collaboration with the efforts supported by the Tree Solutions Now Act of 2021 and any other tree planting programs in the State. This program could support reforestation on the following properties: (1) local and State parks; (2) other existing local government land; and (3) land purchased for this purpose and then either maintained by the State or turned over to local governments for passive recreation purposes as a natural landscape.

Appendix 1

Additional Resources

Governor's Special Commission on Maryland State Parks. The [Governor's Special Commission on State Parks Report](#). (Fall 2000).

Maryland State Parks Funding Study Work Group. [Maryland State Parks Funding Study: A Plan to fully fund the operations of the Maryland Park Service](#). (September 12, 2007).

Department of Resources and Department of General Services. [Department of Natural Resources and Department of General Services One Year Capital Development Funding](#). (September 12, 2008).

Department of Natural Resources. Department of Natural Resources [Department of Natural Resources 5-Year Capital Development Project Plan](#). (June 30, 2009).

Department of Natural Resources. [Maryland Park Service Five-Year Strategic Plan](#). (January 2013).

Department of Natural Resources. [Maryland Park Service 2016 Strategic Park Investment Plan](#). (November 2016).

Department of Natural Resources. [Maryland Park Service State Park P3 Pilot Program Report](#). (November 13, 2018).

Department of Natural Resources. [Maryland Park Service Funding Report](#). (February 19, 2019).

Department of Natural Resources. [Critical Maintenance Program Report](#). (December 13, 2019).

Department of Natural Resources and Department of Commerce. [Maryland Outdoor Recreation Economic Commission Final Report](#). (December 2019).

Department of Natural Resources. [Maryland Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan. \(2019-2023\)](#).

Maryland Counties. [Maryland Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plans \(LPPRPs\). \(2017\)](#).

Appendix 2

Presenters

September 10, 2021 Meeting

Department of Legislative Services

- Jeremy D. Baker
- Andrew D. Gray

September 21, 2021 Meeting

State Agency Panel

- The Honorable Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio, Secretary, Department of Natural Resources
- Nita Settina, Superintendent, Maryland Park Service, Department of Natural Resources
- Sandi Olek, Policy Advisor on Smart Growth and Sustainable Communities, Chesapeake and Coastal Service, Department of Natural Resources
- Carrie Lhotsky, Program Open Space – Community and Local Grants, Land Acquisition and Planning, Department of Natural Resources
- Jason Dubow, Manager, Resource Conservation and Management, Maryland Department of Planning

Local and Federal Government Panel

- Scott A. Hancock, Executive Director, Maryland Municipal League
- Steven Miller, Affiliate President, Maryland Association of County Park and Recreation Administrators and Director, Wicomico County Recreation, Parks, and Tourism
- Michael Sanderson, Executive Director, Maryland Association of Counties
- Wendy O’Sullivan, Superintendent of the Chesapeake Bay Office, National Park Service

October 5, 2021 Meeting

Equity Stakeholders Panel

- Camille Burke, Chair, Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities
- Maite Arce, President and CEO, Hispanic Access Foundation
- Roslyn Johnson, Director, Baltimore County Department of Recreation and

Parks, Co-chair, Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Task Force, The American Academy of Park and Recreation Administrators

- Kori Jones, Equity Officer, Maryland Recreation and Parks Association, Howard County Recreation and Parks
- Jan-Michael Archer, Doctoral Student, University of Maryland School of Public Health
- Danielle Arigoni, Director of Livable Communities, AARP
- Rachel London, Executive Director, Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council
- Frank Lance, President and CEO, Parks and People Foundation
- Maurice Peret, Coordinator of Career Mentoring & Employment Programs, National Federation of the Blind

Environment and Allied Stakeholders Panel

- Joel Dunn, President and CEO, Chesapeake Conservancy
- Dean Hughes, President, Maryland Rangers Association
- Mel Poole, President, Friends of Maryland State Parks
- Nicholas A. Redding, President and CEO, Preservation Maryland

October 19, 2021 Meeting

National Experts Panel

- Lewis Ledford, Executive Director, National Association of State Park Directors
- Jessica (Wahl) Turner, Executive Director, Outdoor Recreation Roundtable
- Leon Younger, President, Pros Consulting
- Dr. Natalia Buta, Chair, Department of Kinesiology and Recreation, Frostburg State University
- Dr. Jordan Smith, Director, Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism, Utah State University
- Wendy O’Sullivan, Superintendent, National Park Service, Chesapeake Office
- Joel Dunn, President and CEO, Chesapeake Conservancy

November 9, 2021 Meeting

Baltimore City Recreation and Parks

- Reginald Moore, Director
- Adam Boarman, Chief of Capital Development, Capital Development and Planning