

Department of Planning and Budget 2024 Session Fiscal Impact Statement

1. **Bill Number:** HB309

House of Origin Introduced Substitute Engrossed
 Second House In Committee Substitute Enrolled

2. **Patron:** Hope

3. **Committee:** Appropriations

4. **Title:** Department of Forestry; Forest Conservation Plan required.

5. **Summary:** Requires the Department of Forestry, in coordination with a stakeholder advisory group, to develop a Forestland and Urban Tree Canopy Conservation Plan no later than November 1, 2026, and update such plan every five years thereafter. The bill requires the Department to post and maintain on its website the most recent version of the Plan and submit the Plan to the Governor and Chairmen of the House Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources and the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources no later than November 30, 2026, and November 30 every five years thereafter.

6. **Budget Amendment Necessary:** Yes, item 96 of HB30/SB30 as introduced. See Item 8.

7. **Fiscal Impact Estimates:** Preliminary

7a. **Expenditure Impact:**

<i>Fiscal Year</i>	<i>Dollars</i>	<i>Positions</i>	<i>Fund</i>
2024	-	-	-
2025	-	-	-
2026	\$630,000	0	General
2027	\$530,000	0	General
2028	-	0	General
2029	-	0	General
2030	-	0	General

8. **Fiscal Implications:** The Department of Forestry does not currently have the capacity or expertise to develop a Plan as described in the bill. Based on previous experience and preliminary estimates, the Department estimates that \$500,000 in the first year and \$400,000 in the second year will be sufficient to contract with a qualified firm to perform the analysis, develop the Plan, and coordinate the stakeholder recommendation process. Additionally, the Department would need funding of \$130,000 in both years to bring on one full time staff member or contractor to coordinate and manage the plan.

The bill only directs the development of the Plan. If it is the intent of the General Assembly for the Department to implement the Plan, the Department would need to retain the one full time coordinator on an ongoing basis, at a continuing cost of \$130,000 annually and an increase of one FTE.

The bill would create a Technical Advisory Committee that would include representatives from the Department of Environmental Quality, Department of Wildlife Resources, Department of Conservation and Recreation, and the Virginia Cooperative Extension. It is anticipated that each of these agencies will be able to absorb any participation costs within existing resources.

9. Specific Agency or Political Subdivisions Affected: Department of Forestry, Department of Environmental Quality, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Department of Wildlife Resources, Department of Conservation and Recreation, localities.

10. Technical Amendment Necessary: No

11. Other Comments: SB461 would direct the Department of Forestry to develop a similar Forest Conservation Plan.