ASSEMBLY, No. 5497

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

222nd LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED SEPTEMBER 14, 2026

Sponsored by:
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District 7 (Burlington)
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SYNOPSIS

Requires forest stewardship plan for certain lands acquired for recreation and conservation purposes.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.

AN ACT concerning forest stewardship plans for certain lands acquired for recreation and conservation purposes, and supplementing P.L.2016, c.12 (C.13:8C-43 et seq.).

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

1. a. Whenever the department acquires lands for recreation and conservation purposes for each acquisition that contains 25 acres or more of forested area using, in whole or in part, constitutionally dedicated CBT moneys, constitutionally dedicated moneys pursuant to P.L.1999, c.152 (C.13:8C-1 et seq.), or Green Acres bond act moneys, the department shall prepare and implement a forest stewardship plan for those lands within two years after the date of acquisition.

b. A forest stewardship plan prepared and implemented pursuant to subsection a. of this section shall conform with the rules and regulations adopted by the department pursuant to section 8 of P.L.2009, c.256 (C.13:1L-36) designed to ensure the sustainability of forest lands.

2. a. Within five years after the date of enactment of this act, the department shall prepare and implement a forest stewardship plan for all lands owned in fee simple by the State for recreation and conservation purposes that contain 25 acres or more of forested area on the date of enactment of this act.

b. A forest stewardship plan prepared and implemented pursuant to subsection a. of this section shall, at a minimum, conform with the rules and regulations adopted by the department pursuant to section 8 of P.L.2009, c.256 (C.13:1L-36) designed to ensure the sustainability of forest lands.

3. a. Whenever a local government unit or a qualifying tax exempt nonprofit organization acquires lands for recreation and conservation purposes for each acquisition that contains 25 acres or more of forested area using, in whole or in part, constitutionally dedicated CBT moneys, constitutionally dedicated moneys pursuant to P.L.1999, c.152 (C.13:8C-1 et seq.), or Green Acres bond act moneys, the local government unit or qualifying tax exempt nonprofit organization, as applicable, shall prepare and implement a forest stewardship plan for those lands within two years after the date of acquisition.

b. (1) The forest stewardship plan shall be submitted to the department for review and approval, and the department shall approve, approve with changes, or disapprove the plan within 30 days after receipt thereof. If the department disapproves a plan, the local government unit or qualifying tax exempt nonprofit

organization, as applicable, shall work with the department to develop a mutually acceptable plan.

(2) Upon request of the local government unit or qualifying tax exempt nonprofit organization, the department shall provide technical assistance in the preparation of the forest stewardship plan.

c. A forest stewardship plan prepared and implemented pursuant to subsection a. of this section shall, at a minimum, conform with the rules and regulations adopted by the department pursuant to section 8 of P.L.2009, c.256 (C.13:1L-36) designed to ensure the sustainability of forest lands.

4. In prioritizing applications submitted by local government units or qualifying tax exempt nonprofit organizations for funding for the acquisition or development of lands for recreation and conservation purposes, the department shall accord a higher weight to any application submitted by a local government unit or qualifying tax exempt nonprofit organization, as applicable, that implements a forest stewardship plan on lands owned for recreation and conservation purposes by that local government unit or qualifying tax exempt nonprofit organization, as applicable, for which a forest stewardship plan is not required pursuant to section 3 of this act. This additional weight shall be in addition to any other criteria and ranking procedures established by the department pursuant to P.L.1999, c.152 (C.13:8C-1 et seq.) and P.L.2016, c.12 (C.13:8C-43 et seq.).

5. This act shall take effect immediately.

STATEMENT

This bill would require the preparation and implementation of a forest stewardship plan for certain lands acquired for recreation and conservation purposes by the State, local government units, or qualifying tax exempt nonprofit organizations with funding provided through the State's open space preservation program, commonly referred to as the "Green Acres Program."

The bill would require the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to prepare and implement a forest stewardship plan when it acquires lands for recreation and conservation purposes that contain 25 acres or more of forested area. This plan would be required within two years after the date the DEP acquires the property.

In addition, the bill would require the DEP, within five years after the date the bill is enacted into law, to prepare and implement a forest stewardship plan for all lands that contain 25 acres or more

of forested area owned in fee simple by the State for recreation and conservation purposes on the date the bill is enacted into law.

The bill would also require local government units and qualifying tax exempt nonprofit organizations to prepare and implement forest stewardship plans when they acquire lands for recreation and conservation purposes that contain 25 acres or more of forested area. Local government units and qualifying tax exempt nonprofit organizations would be required to submit their plans to the DEP for review and approval. The DEP would be required to approve, approve with changes, or disapprove the plan within 30 days after receipt. If the DEP disapproves a plan, the local government unit or qualifying tax exempt nonprofit organization would be required to work with the DEP to develop a mutually acceptable plan.

A forest stewardship plan prepared and implemented pursuant to the bill would be required to conform with the DEP's rules and regulations adopted pursuant to section 8 of P.L.2009, c.256 (C.13:1L-36) designed to ensure the sustainability of forest lands.

Lastly, the bill directs the DEP, when prioritizing applications submitted by local government units or qualifying tax exempt nonprofit organizations for funding for the acquisition or development of lands for recreation and conservation purposes, to give a higher weight to any application submitted by a local government unit or qualifying tax exempt nonprofit organization, as applicable, that implements a forest stewardship plan on lands owned for recreation and conservation purposes by that entity for which a forest stewardship plan is not required pursuant to the bill. This additional weight would be in addition to any other criteria and ranking procedures established by the DEP pursuant to law.