

LEGISLATIVE SERVICES AGENCY
OFFICE OF FISCAL AND MANAGEMENT ANALYSIS
FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

LS 6685

BILL NUMBER: SB 224

NOTE PREPARED: Dec 31, 2025

BILL AMENDED:

SUBJECT: Department of Natural Resources.

FIRST AUTHOR: Sen. Glick

BILL STATUS: As Introduced

FIRST SPONSOR:

FUNDS AFFECTED: **GENERAL**
 DEDICATED
 FEDERAL

IMPACT: State & Local

Summary of Legislation: *Definitions:* The bill defines various terms. It amends the following definitions: (1) Fund. (2) Wildlife. It removes the following definitions: (1) Harvest season. (2) License. (3) Selling season.

Commission Procedures and Department Powers and Duties: The bill makes various changes to Natural Resources Commission (NRC) procedures. It makes various changes to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) powers and duties.

Various Provisions: The bill removes coordination between the Indiana Natural Resources Foundation and the President Benjamin Harrison Conservation Trust Program. It reduces the Benjamin Harrison Conservation Trust Project Commission from 20 members to 17 members and amends who is appointed to the commission. It removes the Hometown Indiana Grant Program.

Boating and Off-Road: The bill amends various boating and wakeboard regulations. It raises the financial threshold for certain actions in a boating accident from \$750 to \$2,000. It raises the financial threshold for certain actions in an off-road vehicle accident from \$750 to \$2,500.

Utility Easements: The bill requires the State Land Office to approve the legal description of a utility easement. It requires a person to file a utility easement with the State Land Office after the easement is recorded in the county. It provides that the DNR shall charge a fee for a utility easement and put fees in the President Benjamin Harrison Conservation Trust Fund. It creates an exception for a fee for a utility easement.

Archeology: The bill provides expiration terms for an archeology plan or development plan authorized by the Division of Historic Preservation and Archeology. It creates additional requirements for development plans.

Fish and Wildlife: The bill repeals the program that helps landowners with problems created by localized deer populations. It repeals the Game Bird Habitat Restoration Fund. It removes the DNR's ability to adopt rules to establish and operate a lottery system to allow an individual to purchase a license to take more than

one antlered deer within a one year period. It repeals the requirement that the DNR deposit \$20 dollars from the cost of every nonresident license to hunt deer into the Fish and Wildlife Fund. It removes the penalty for a person who acts as a hunting guide without a guide license. It amends the permit to possess live minnows and live crayfish. It removes fee scheme used to increase upland game bird population and removes game bird and exotic mammal regulations.

It replaces "wildlife" with "wild animal" throughout IC 14-22-34. It provides that the Director may do the following: (1) Seize and confiscate the wild animal in the name of the state of Indiana. (2) Sell or dispose of the wild animal. (3) Deposit proceeds, if any, into the Fish and Wildlife Fund.

It establishes that a person may not chemically, mechanically, physically, or biologically control aquatic vegetation in the public: (1) waters containing state owned fish; (2) waters of the state; or (3) boundary water of the state.

Forestry: The bill establishes the Forestry Equipment and Maintenance Fund.

Low Head Dams: The bill permits the DNR to immediately remove certain low head dams to provide emergency protection to life or property.

Ginseng: The bill makes various changes to ginseng licensing provisions.

Conservancy Districts: The bill adds improving water quality to the list of purposes for which a conservancy district may be established.

Watershed Development Commissions: The bill allows the Division of Water to perform certain functions on behalf of the NRC. It requires the NRC to coordinate with the DNR for purposes of a reporting requirement regarding conservancy districts.

Oil Royalties from Beneath the Wabash River: The bill requires the proceeds from royalties or other compensation paid for minerals taken from beneath the navigable waters of the Wabash River to be deposited into the Wabash River Heritage Corridor Fund and the Oil and Gas Fund in certain amounts.

Timber Licenses: The bill allows the DNR to use a timber licensee's bond to recover the costs of damage associated with the issued license or ensure performance of the contract. It requires a person who violates the timber sales provisions to repay the cost of damages not covered by the bond paid by the person, and prohibits a person who does not repay the cost of damages in full from purchasing timber from the DNR for at least one year.

Water Well Drillers License: The bill allows an applicant for a water well drillers license to request informal review by the DNR for the applicant's failed exam. It provides that, before a continuing education program is presented, either a sponsor of a continuing education program or a licensee who plans to attend a continuing education program may request informal review of a decision regarding water well drilling contractors that was made by the DNR.

It makes conforming changes.

Effective Date: July 1, 2026.

Explanation of State Expenditures: *Summary:* The bill makes various changes that could increase expenditures or workload and others that could decrease expenditures or workload. The net impact is indeterminate, but the changes are likely able to be accomplished using existing staff and resources.

Additional Information -

Provisions Potentially Increasing Expenditures or Workload:

Low Head Dams: Expenditures could increase for the DNR, as the bill permits their immediate removal of certain low head dams for emergency protection to life or property; however, to the extent that this provision prevents damages, potential expenditures could be avoided. Additionally, the bill provides that the DNR may recover the cost of the emergency measures taken.

Utility Easements: The State Land Office, a division of the DNR, would be required to approve the legal description of a utility easement and accept utility easements for filing from a person after they have recorded it in the county. Easements must be submitted to and approved by the Governor, Attorney General, and the Indiana Department of Administration.

Conservancy Districts: The bill adds improving water quality to the list of purposes for which a conservancy district may be established, which could influence the creation of conservancy districts, and the workload of the NRC and the Division of Water.

Watershed Development Commissions: The bill requires the Division of Water, on behalf of the NRC, to hold the public hearing required for a proposed watershed development commission.

Commission Procedures and Department Powers and Duties: The bill specifies a NRC meeting or public hearing is subject to the Open Door Law (IC 5-14-1.5). The bill requires the DNR Director to adopt provisional rules, interim rules, and approve for preliminary adoption regular administrative rules for readoption that do not contain changes. The bill expands IC 14-11-4 (procedures governing certain licenses) to apply to the article regulating levees, dams, and drainage and to apply to the chapter regulating navigable waterways. These procedures include requirement about public hearings and notices to owners of real property that is adjacent to the affected real property.

Provisions Potentially Decreasing Expenditures or Workload:

Timber Licenses: The bill could reduce expenditures for the DNR as it allows the DNR to use a timber licensee's bond to recover the costs of damage associated with the issued license or ensure performance of the contract, and it requires a person who violates the timber sales provisions to repay the cost of damages not covered by the bond.

Boating and Off-Road Accidents: The bill could minimally reduce workload for the Law Enforcement Division of the DNR, and the Indiana State Police, as it raises the financial threshold for property damages in a boating accident (increased from \$750 to \$2,000) and an off-road vehicle accident (increased from \$750 to \$2,500), which determine when an accident needs to be reported to law enforcement.

Various Provisions: The bill removes the requirement that Indiana Natural Resources Foundation and the President Benjamin Harrison Conservation Trust Project Commission coordinate expenditures from their respective funds with one another. The bill also reduces the President Benjamin Harrison Conservation Trust

Project Commission from 20 members to 17 members, which could reduce travel expenses.

The bill removes certain requirements regarding the discovery of a Native American Indian burial ground. It allows (rather than requires) the NRC to adopt rules regarding human remains, maintaining the list of items that the NRC may (rather than shall) consider when adopting these rules.

The bill prohibits a person from building a structure within 100 feet from DNR-owned or -managed property and requires the person to indemnify and hold harmless the DNR if any structure that close is damaged.

The bill repeals requirements for staff to transfer certain revenue between funds.

The bill removes the requirement that the DNR Director or designee (must be a full-time employee) issue all licenses, permits, certifications, registrations, approvals, etc.

Provisions With Potentially No Impact:

Water Well Drillers License: The bill allows requests for informal reviews regarding failed exams for water well drillers licenses and the issuance of continuing education credits. This should not impact workload, as the Indiana Administrative Code (312 IAC 2-5) allows the request for informal review for any division of the DNR.

Various Provisions: The bill repeals the Hometown Indiana Grant Program. This program is not currently funded.

The bill repeals the program that provides for the Division of Fish and Wildlife and the Division of Soil Conservation, within the Indiana State Department of Agriculture, to assist landowners with problems caused by localized deer populations.

Explanation of State Revenues: Summary: The majority of changes in the bill should not impact *net* revenue to the DNR, but will change the fund(s) in which revenue is to be deposited. Revenue to the Fish and Wildlife Fund, the new nonreverting Forestry Equipment and Maintenance Fund, and the Oil and Gas Fund should increase from revenue diverted from other funds.

The bill will increase revenue for the President Benjamin Harrison Conservation Trust Fund by providing a fee structure for utility easements, which are to be deposited into the fund. Revenue could increase from provisions allowing the DNR to recover certain costs. There could be a minimal increase in revenue from ginseng dealer's licenses (rate increase) and decrease in revenue from bait dealer's licenses (if fewer are bought).

The bill also makes various changes to penalties for DNR violations, which could impact both the state General Fund (from court fees and infraction judgments) and the Common School Fund (from fines) indeterminately.

Additional Information -

Utility Easements: The bill will increase revenue for the President Benjamin Harrison Conservation Trust Fund by providing a fee structure for utility easements, which are to be deposited into the fund. Fees are based on the maximum width of the easement and a rate per linear foot, with a minimum of \$1,000. The fees

are to be deposited into the division's account, within the fund.

Fish and Wildlife Fund: Current law requires that certain dollar amounts from the sale of each nonresident hunting license and nonresident deer license are to be transferred from the Fish and Wildlife Fund to other funds. The bill repeals these provisions and funds. The balance in the Deer Research and Management Fund of about \$2.16 M (as of June 30, 2025) will be transferred to the Fish and Wildlife Fund. The balance in the Game Bird Habitat Restoration Fund of about \$6.1 M (as of June 30, 2025) will be transferred to the Fish and Wildlife Fund. This fund also currently receives revenue from the sale of stamps.

The bill repeals the provision in statute that requires, if the NRC ever establishes entrance fees for fish and wildlife areas, that the fees are to be deposited into the Nongame Fund. These fees, if established, would go into the Fish and Wildlife Fund. It also removes the provision that prohibits charging the entry fee to a person who holds a hunting or fishing license.

Forestry: The bill establishes the new nonreverting Forestry Equipment and Maintenance Fund and requires 50% of timber harvest proceeds to be deposited into the fund. Based on annual revenue from FY 2021 to FY 2025, an estimated \$550,000 to \$1.1 M will be diverted into the new fund each year.

Oil Royalties from Beneath the Wabash River: Currently, all oil royalties from oil taken from under the Wabash River go into the Wabash River Heritage Corridor Fund. The bill reduces this amount to 20%, with the remaining 80% to be deposited into the Oil and Gas Fund. Based on annual revenue from FY 2021 to FY 2025, an estimated \$92,000 to \$192,000 will be diverted each year.

Low Head Dams: The bill provides that the DNR may recover the cost of the emergency measures taken in the removal of a low head dam for emergency protection to life or property.

Ginseng Dealer Licenses: The bill would minimally increase revenue from ginseng dealer licenses by increasing the fee from \$100 to \$200. There are less than 20 licenses purchased each year.

Minnows and Crayfish: The bill increases the number of minnows and crayfish that a person can possess from 500 to 5,000. This could reduce the number of bait dealer's licenses sold, if some individual purchase bait dealer's licenses in order to have more than 500 in their possession, but without the intention of selling the bait. Bait dealer's licenses are \$20.

Penalty Provisions: The bill makes the following changes to penalties related to natural resource violations:

- Operating without a hunting guide license - repeals the Class B infraction. These violations would now be Class C infractions or Class C misdemeanors (knowing or intentional violations) under general fish and wildlife violation statutes.
- Ginseng - repeals various Class B infractions, Class B misdemeanors, and Class A misdemeanors, making all violations Class C misdemeanors (first offense), Class B misdemeanors (second offense), and Class A misdemeanors (third and subsequent offenses).
- Game bird or exotic mammal - repeals the Class A misdemeanor for hunting, trapping, or chasing a game bird or exotic mammal on a shooting preserve if not with specified weapons or devices.

These changes to penalties could impact both the state General Fund (from court fees and infraction

judgments) and the Common School Fund (from criminal fines) indeterminately. The total fee revenue per case ranges between \$113 and \$138.

The maximum judgment for a Class C infraction is \$500 and for a Class B infraction is \$1,000 (state General Fund). The maximum fine for a Class C misdemeanor is \$500, for a Class B misdemeanor is \$1,000, and for Class A misdemeanor is \$5,000 (Common School Fund). The following linked document describes the fees and distribution of the revenue: [Court fees imposed in criminal, juvenile, and civil violation cases](#).

Explanation of Local Expenditures: *Conservancy Districts:* Expenditures could increase for conservancy districts that choose to implement water quality purposes.

Penalty Provisions: The bill makes various changes to penalties for DNR violations. The impact is indeterminate, but likely small. A Class C misdemeanor is punishable by up to 60 days in jail, a Class B misdemeanor by up to 180 days, and a Class A misdemeanor by up to one year.

Explanation of Local Revenues: *Penalty Provisions:* The bill makes various changes to penalties for DNR violations. The impact on revenue to local units is indeterminate, but likely small. The following linked document describes the fees and distribution of the revenue: [Court fees imposed in criminal, juvenile, and civil violation cases](#).

State Agencies Affected: Attorney General, Department of Natural Resources, Governor, Indiana Department of Administration, Indiana State Police, Natural Resources Commission.

Local Agencies Affected: Conservancy districts, trial courts, local law enforcement agencies.

Information Sources: State Peoplesoft Financial Data;
https://iga.in.gov/pdf-documents/124/2025/universal/committees/interim/government-reform-task-force/d6faa969-70f9-4c70-91a0-5d76bd588693/exhibits/attachment_6217.pdf

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