

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

LS 6685
BILL NUMBER: SB 224

NOTE PREPARED: Feb 23, 2026
BILL AMENDED: Feb 23, 2026

SUBJECT: Department of Natural Resources.

FIRST AUTHOR: Sen. Glick
FIRST SPONSOR: Rep. Lindauer

BILL STATUS: 2nd Reading - 2nd House

FUNDS AFFECTED: X GENERAL
 X DEDICATED
 FEDERAL

IMPACT: State & Local

Summary of Legislation: *Various Provisions:* The bill defines various terms. It amends and removes various definitions. It makes various changes to Natural Resources Commission (NRC) procedures. It makes various changes to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) powers and duties. It 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. 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.

Landowner Liability for Recreational Use: The bill establishes various restrictions on landowner liability to recreational users. It provides that various restrictions on landowner liability do not apply to a parcel of land assessed as residential land.

Fish and Wildlife: The bill removes the penalty for a person who acts as a hunting guide without a guide license.

River Basin Commission Administration: The bill establishes a consolidated chapter for river basin commission (RBC) administration. It repeals existing, separate chapters for the Maumee RBC, the St. Joseph RBC, and the Upper Wabash RBC. It creates a new chapter for a RBC's conversion into a watershed development commission. It makes technical and conforming changes.

Effective Date: July 1, 2026.

Explanation of State Expenditures: *Summary:* The bill makes various changes that could impact expenditures or workload indeterminately. The changes should be able to be accomplished using existing staff and resources.

Additional Information:

Provisions Potentially Increasing Expenditures or Workload:

(Revised) Various Provisions: The bill requires the Division of Water, on behalf of the NRC, to hold the public hearing required for a proposed watershed development commission or conservancy district. 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 permanent structures along Lake Michigan. These procedures include requirement about public hearings and notices to owners of real property that is adjacent to the affected real property.

RBC Administration: If the Maumee RBC or the Upper Wabash RBC chooses to appoint a representative of the DNR to serve on their commissions, DNR workload could increase. (See *Explanation of Local Expenditures*.) The bill provides that a transformation from an RBC to a watershed development commission require approval from the DNR (rather than the NRC). Any workload increases will depend on local decisions.

Provisions Potentially Decreasing Expenditures or Workload:

Limits on Liability for Recreational Use: The bill reduces the state's liability when a person, or their property, is injured on state-owned land, which could decrease potential future expenditures.

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.

Potentially No Impact:

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

Explanation of State Revenues: *Court Fee Revenue:* The bill could impact the number of civil cases that are filed indeterminately. It removes the limits to liability for *residential* landowners when a person is injured on their property, which could increase civil cases. However, it expands limits to liability for other landowners when a person is injured on their property, providing that the landowner does not assume responsibility or incur liability for the condition of the land and adding the purposes of exercising and cycling to the list of recreational activities for which a person would be on the land.

The bill also repeals the Class B infraction for operating as a hunting guide without a hunting guide license. This violation would now be Class C infractions or Class C misdemeanors (knowing or intentional violations) under general fish and wildlife violation statutes. Any impact from this change should be minimal.

Court fee revenue per case ranges from \$85.50 to \$138, depending on whether the offense is an infraction, a misdemeanor/felony, or the case is a civil and depends on whether the case is filed in a court of record or a municipal court. The following linked documents describe the fees and revenue distribution for -

Infractions and criminal cases: [Court fees imposed in criminal, juvenile, and civil violation cases.](#)
Civil cases: [Court fees imposed in civil, probate, and small claims cases.](#)

Explanation of Local Expenditures: *Court Caseloads:* The bill could impact court caseload indeterminately by removing limits to liability for *residential* landowners and expanding limits to liability for other landowners.

Limits on Liability for Recreational Use: The bill reduces a local unit's liability when a person, or their property, is injured on their land, which could decrease potential future expenditures.

Penalty Provisions: A Class C misdemeanor is punishable by up to 60 days in jail.

RBC Administration: By consolidating the statutes for the three existing RBCs and making them uniform, the bill could impact local expenditures and workload. Any increases might be minimal, and will depend on local decisions.

Additional Information: The bill's provisions may allow the RBCs to continue to operate as they currently do, but also provide for expansion or reduction of representation on the commissions and make changes to RBC purposes. The bill maintains statutory *requirements* only if they are consistent in all three RBC statutes. It changes any *requirements* that are not consistent or not present in all three RBC statutes to "may" provisions. It changes the *authorities and purposes* so that they all match. The following are a few examples of those changes.

Travel and Per Diem: The statutes for all three RBCs provide that members of a commission are entitled to reimbursement of travel expenses. However, only two of the RBC statutes (for the Maumee RBC and the Upper Wabash RBC) permit a per diem. The bill maintains the travel reimbursement *requirement* and expands the per diem *option* in the new RBC statute, which would provide that option for the St. Joseph RBC, as well. Expenditures could increase if this option is used.

RBC Purposes: The bill makes various changes to the powers, authorities, and purposes allowed for RBCs. Expenditures could increase if an RBC expands its work.

Members Serving on RBCs: The bill maintains commission representation for RBCs if the representation is required in all three current RBC statutes, and allows an RBC to appoint the other representatives.

As shown in the table, all three current RBC statutes require representation from the county executives and county surveyors of each participating county and from each soil and water conservation district that includes territory in any of those counties. However, only two of the RBCs require all three county commissioners. Therefore, the bill maintains the requirement for one county commissioner for each participating county, and allows RBCs to appoint the other county commissioners, as well as additional members currently only required in the St. Joseph RBC statutes (from certain municipalities, county health officers, and the DNR).

A Comparison of the Representatives of Current River Basin Commissions and the Structure in the Bill

Official(s)	Currently Required to Serve on an RBC			Required to Serve [Optional Appointment]
	Maumee	St. Joseph	Upper Wabash	
County executive	<u>All</u> from each member county	1 from each member county	<u>All</u> from each member county	1 from each member county; [may appoint all county executives]
County surveyor	1 from each member county	1 from each member county	1 from each member county	1 from each member county
Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD)	1 from each included SWCD	1 from each included SWCD	1 from each included SWCD	1 from each included SWCD
Executive of each second class city or largest municipality		1 from each member county*		[may appoint 1 from each member county]
County health officer		1 from each member county		[may appoint 1 from each member county]
DNR representative		1		[may appoint 1]

The majority of these members are statutorily allowed to designate another individual to serve.

**Could be more than one from any county having more than one second class city.*

RBCs could choose to reduce the number of members that serve on the commission or add optional members. These changes may potentially not affect workload or expenditures, if some members do not currently attend meetings (if a county executive typically only sends one county commissioner as their representative).

[The changes made to the statutes that allow an RBC to transform into a watershed development commission, were to specify the counties that are included in the Maumee River Basin, and were technical and conforming changes, such as changes to cross-references.]

Explanation of Local Revenues: *Court Fee Revenue:* The bill could impact the number of civil cases that are filed indeterminately by removing limits to liability for *residential* landowners and expanding limits to liability for other landowners. The bill also increases the offense of operating without a hunting guide license from a Class B infraction to a Class C infraction or Class C misdemeanor. (See also *Explanation of State Revenue*).

The amounts of court fee revenue per case depends on whether the offense is an infraction or a misdemeanor/felony, or the case is a civil and depends on whether the case is filed in a court of record or a municipal court. The following linked documents describe the fees and revenue distribution for -
 Infractions and criminal cases: [Court fees imposed in criminal, juvenile, and civil violation cases.](#)
 Civil cases: [Court fees imposed in civil, probate, and small claims cases.](#)

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

Local Agencies Affected: Trial courts, city and town courts, local law enforcement agencies; participating counties for the Maumee RBC, St. Joseph RBC, and Upper Wabash RBC.

Information Sources: <https://www.mrbc.org/content/about-maumee-river-basin-commission>;

https://www.sjrbc.com/docs/meetings/2025/SJRBC_Members.pdf;
<https://uwrbc.org/who-we-are>; <https://uwrbc.org/funding>.
<https://www.railstotrails.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Legal-Research-Digest-Liability-Aspects-of-Bikeways.pdf>.

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