

SUPPORT HB463 & SB141

Topic: Boat ramps; removes authorization for Department of Wildlife Resources to charge a fee for use.

Bill Patron: Delegate Austin & Senator Edwards

Reasons to support HB463 & SB141

In 2020, the General Assembly authorized Virginia's Department of Wildlife Resources to adopt boat ramp access fees, but when the fees went into effect later that year, it quickly became clear that a one-size-fits-all approach could become a significant barrier for many river users.

In 2021, the General Assembly paused fee collection and directed DWR to convene a stakeholder group to discuss the costs and benefits of access fees and develop a set of recommendations. The work group engaged the expertise of the private and public sectors and included outdoor educators, commercial outfitters, river conservation advocates, municipal officials, and tourism representatives.

The stakeholders discussed the needs of the agency and the impacts on paddlers and outdoor outfitters, arriving at the following recommendations:

1. The General Assembly should remove language directing DWR to charge access fees for boat ramps; and
2. The General Assembly should revise language in the Budget Bill to ensure DWR receives the full authorized amount of revenue raised by sales and use taxes on wildlife-based recreation equipment and watercraft on an annual basis.

The proposed FY 2023-2024 Budget Bill includes language giving DWR the full funding it is authorized to receive from these dedicated revenue sources. We urge the General Assembly to retain this language and pass HB463 and SB141 -- fulfilling the recommendations of the stakeholder group, promoting recreation on our rivers, and ensuring that DWR has the resources it needs to deliver on its mission.

Overview:

HB463 and SB141 remove authorization for the Department of Wildlife Resources to charge a fee for the use of facilities that it manages but does not own and for the use of boat ramps that it owns or manages. This is the result of a stakeholder work group convened by the General Assembly through a 2021 budget amendment to discuss the costs and benefits of such fees and the impact on recreational users in Virginia.



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This position was taken by Virginia Conservation Network (VCN)'s Legislative Committee and Board of Directors and is supported by Virginia's conservation community. For a complete list of VCN positions, visit www.vcnva.org/bill-tracker. VCN is committed to building a powerful, diverse, and highly-coordinated conservation movement focused on protecting our Commonwealth's natural resources today and for tomorrow.