

FISCAL NOTE TO
[First Reprint]
ASSEMBLY, No. 2132

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: DECEMBER 27, 1996

Assembly Bill No. 2132 (1R) of 1996 creates the Ecotourism Development and Strategic Planning Task Force in the Department of Environmental Protection for the purpose of 1) identifying existing and potential natural, historic and cultural resources that could be promoted as ecotourism destinations; 2) evaluating the measures necessary to ensure that the promotion of a targeted resource results in the preservation and increased protection of the resource; 3) evaluating the capacity of the targeted resource to accommodate tourism-related development and activities; 4) investigating methods for funding the costs of ecotourism promotion and development as well as resource preservation; and 5) holding public hearings deemed necessary to solicit public input on these issues.

The bill directs the task force to be composed of three employees each from the Departments of Environmental Protection (DEP), Commerce and Economic Development (DCED), Transportation (DOT) and Agriculture (DOA) who have expertise in parks management, natural resource protection, forestry, wildlife conservation, economic development, small business attraction and retention, marketing, tourism, agri-business, and road and trail building. The bill requires the task force to report its findings, conclusions and any recommendations for legislative or administrative action to the Governor, the Legislature, the participating State departments, and the public within one year of the effective date of this act, after which the task force would be dissolved. An appropriation of \$25,000 is included to meet the administrative costs of the task force in carrying out its duties pursuant to this act.

The DOA estimates it would incur costs of \$157,000 in carrying out its responsibilities under the bill. All but \$3,000 of this amount reflects the full-year salary costs of three employees, one being the Bureau Chief of Market Development and Promotion. The DCED estimates costs of \$27,000 to carry out its responsibilities under the bill. Of this amount, \$17,000 represents the partial salary costs of three employees (two being the Director and Deputy Director of the Division of Travel and Tourism), while the remaining \$10,000 reflects data processing and other non-salary expenditures. The DEP and the DOT did not submit fiscal note worksheets for this bill.

The Office of Legislative Services does not concur with the estimates submitted by the DOA and the DCED because the functions

assigned to these employees in connection with the task force should be considered a part of their regular duties and therefore fall within the scope of their regular workload. In addition, the designation of high-ranking personnel such as bureau chiefs and division directors is not a requirement of the bill and would seem unnecessary given the availability of skilled, lower-ranking staff. This is especially true in light of the fact that the bill encourages the task force to utilize other departmental staff and resources to carry out its objectives. Last, the DOA's estimate erroneously assumes that the three designated employees would be working full-time on this assignment. The bill does not imply that such a time commitment would be necessary.

The Office of Legislative Services estimates that the appropriation contained in the bill should be sufficient to cover all the non-salary administrative costs of the task force. In the event that reimbursement of salary costs for task force members becomes necessary (presuming that this assignment actually prevents these employees from performing all of their regular duties, thereby resulting in additional costs to the departments), the appropriated amount may not be sufficient. The level of such costs will ultimately depend on the scope of the work and the participation level of the affected State agencies.

In general, the degree to which the task force carries out its responsibilities under the bill may depend in large part on the availability of its State employees and resources. This availability, in turn, will be primarily dependent on, and limited by, the task force's ability to provide such services in the face of decreasing staff and funding levels caused by recent and future budgetary constraints.

This fiscal note has been prepared pursuant to P.L.1980, c.67.