

LEGISLATIVE FISCAL ESTIMATE TO
ASSEMBLY, No. 2133

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: JANUARY 3, 1997

Assembly Bill No. 2133 of 1996 authorizes the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to utilize volunteers to: (1) assist State Park Rangers and other DEP personnel in staffing, operating, patrolling, and monitoring State parks and forests and associated structures and facilities; and (2) assist with maintenance and improvement activities and projects at State parks and forests. While the bill does not vest a park volunteer with law enforcement authority, it does authorize a volunteer to receive such training in public safety, resource protection, environmental education and interpretation, recreation supervision, and other subject matter areas pertinent to the volunteer's duties and responsibilities as may be deemed appropriate by the Commissioner of Environmental Protection. Under the bill, a park volunteer would be deemed to be a State employee for purposes of the "New Jersey Tort Claims Act," N.J.S.59:1-1 et seq.

The Office of Legislative Services estimates that the bill could have a positive, long-range fiscal impact on the DEP's operating budget if, once parks volunteers are properly trained, supervised, and gain experience, their continued presence mitigates or lessens the need to replace full-time or seasonal parks staff who leave State service due to attrition, layoff or retirement. In the interim, however, the DEP may incur some additional supervisory and training costs if it decides to implement and maintain this initiative. It should be remembered that since the bill authorizes, rather than requires, the DEP to utilize volunteers for the purposes specified, the ability of the department to cover such costs will be limited by the funding level of its annual operating budget unless other non-State funding sources can be found and utilized.

This legislative fiscal estimate has been produced by the Office of Legislative Services due to the failure of the Executive Branch to respond to our request for a fiscal note.

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