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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 396

Offered January 10, 2007

Prefiled January 10, 2007

Requesting the Governor to establish a task force to work with the Department of Conservation and Recreation to study land preservation, water supply protection, and the availability of large parks to serve future generations in Northern Virginia. Report.

Patron—Ticer

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, the population of Northern Virginia, particularly in the Counties of Loudoun, Fairfax, and Prince William, has experienced growth rates as high as 48.8 percent during the past five years, and the population of the Counties of Loudoun, Fairfax, and Prince William is projected to grow, according to the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, an additional 30 percent by 2020; and

WHEREAS, while occupying three percent of the land area in the Commonwealth, the Counties of Loudoun, Fairfax, Arlington, and Prince William and the Cities of Alexandria, Falls Church, and Fairfax contain 27 percent of the population as determined by the most recent population estimates made by the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia; and

WHEREAS, residents of Northern Virginia must travel long distances to access the vast majority of Virginia State Parks; and

WHEREAS, the acreage of parkland in Northern Virginia has not grown commensurate with the population of Northern Virginia and, in comparison with other mid-Atlantic states, Northern Virginia is deficient in the availability of large public parks; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth has not provided funds to meet the parkland and outdoor recreational needs identified by the Virginia Outdoor Plan; and the \$119 million Virginia Parks and Natural Areas Bond Act of 2002 did not result in any parkland acquisition in Northern Virginia; and

WHEREAS, federal grants to the Commonwealth from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which have historically helped finance the purchase of many of the larger regional and county parks in Northern Virginia, have declined significantly; and

WHEREAS, the preponderance of funds derived from local bond issues for parks and recreation are most often allocated to park development as opposed to land acquisition; and

WHEREAS, the County of Arlington and the Cities of Alexandria, Falls Church, and Fairfax have virtually no remaining undeveloped land on which to locate additional large parks for passive recreation; and

WHEREAS, limited opportunities remain for setting aside land for larger parks and protecting sensitive environments in the Counties of Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William; and

WHEREAS, the cost and competition for land continues to escalate and is a deterrent to fee simple parkland acquisition; and

WHEREAS, public ownership of watershed lands as passive parkland or as protected private open space is a low-cost approach to assuring high-quality potable drinking water; and

WHEREAS, there is an urgent need for the Commonwealth to devise a creative means of financing the acquisition of public lands as parkland and to protect potable water resources in the rapidly developing areas of Northern Virginia; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Governor be requested to establish a task force to work with the Department of Conservation and Recreation to study land preservation, water supply protection, and the availability of large parks to serve future generations in Northern Virginia.

The task force shall include representation from local government, local or regional park agencies, local water authorities, the Northern Virginia Planning Commission, and the General Assembly. Representation from the General Assembly shall include two members of the House of Delegates, to be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Delegates in accordance with the principles of proportional representation contained in the Rules of the House of Delegates, and one member of the Senate, to be appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules. Legislative members of the task force shall receive such compensation as provided in § 30-19.12. The costs of the study shall be borne by the Office of the Governor.

In conducting their study, the Department and the task force shall identify the necessary actions to obtain and preserve undeveloped land in Northern Virginia for the protection of potable water resources and to provide park and recreational opportunities.

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59 The Governor's task force shall complete its meetings by November 30, 2007, and shall submit to the
60 Governor and the General Assembly an executive summary and a report of its findings and
61 recommendations for publication as a House or Senate document. The executive summary and report
62 shall be submitted as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for
63 the processing of legislative documents and reports no later than the first day of the 2008 Regular
64 Session of the General Assembly and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.