

24102046D

SENATE BILL NO. 455

Senate Amendments in [] - February 1, 2024

A BILL to amend the Code of Virginia by adding in Article 8 of Chapter 5 of Title 29.1 a section numbered 29.1-580, relating to Wildlife Corridor Grant Fund established; report.

Patron Prior to Engrossment—Senator Marsden

Referred to Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That the Code of Virginia is amended by adding in Article 8 of Chapter 5 of Title 29.1 a section numbered 29.1-580 as follows:

§ 29.1-580. Wildlife Corridor Grant Fund.

A. As used in this section,

"Departments" means the Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Department of Forestry, the Department of Transportation, and the Department of Wildlife Resources.

"Fund" means the Wildlife Corridor Grant Fund established in this section.

B. There is hereby created in the state treasury a special nonreverting fund to be known as the Wildlife Corridor Grant Fund. The Fund shall be established on the books of the Comptroller. All funds appropriated for such purpose and any gifts, donations, grants, bequests, and other funds received on its behalf shall be paid into the state treasury and credited to the Fund. Interest earned on moneys in the Fund shall remain in the Fund and be credited to it. Any moneys remaining in the Fund, including interest thereon, at the end of each fiscal year shall not revert to the general fund but shall remain in the Fund. Moneys in the Fund shall be used solely for the purposes of providing grants for projects that conserve or enhance wildlife corridors prioritized by the Plan and associated wildlife crossing infrastructure projects. Expenditures and disbursements from the Fund shall be made by the State Treasurer on warrants issued by the Comptroller upon written request signed by the Director of the Department of Wildlife Resources.

C. ~~[At least one representative from each of~~ The Director of Wildlife Resources shall administer the Fund, and in consultation with] the Departments shall ~~[collaborate to]~~ determine how to disburse grants from the Fund. Representatives of the Departments shall develop a timeline, scoring system, and criteria to disburse grants from the Fund in accordance with this section. Criteria shall include the extent to which a project will (i) further a priority identified in the Plan; (ii) reduce high-cost wildlife-vehicle collisions; (iii) extend the lifetime and reduce the maintenance costs of road-related infrastructure; (iv) connect certain types of protected areas, such as federal, state, or private lands with conservation easements; (v) benefit endangered or threatened species, species of greatest conservation need, or reintroduced wildlife populations; or (vi) leverage available federal grant funding.

D. In addition to projects that meet the criteria in subsection C, grants from the Fund may also be used for (i) nonconstruction projects that advance priorities in the Plan, such as data collection, feasibility studies, or the production of designs and plans; (ii) matching funds required to leverage federal grant funds for projects that would advance the Plan; (iii) exclusionary or funnel fencing to keep wildlife off of roads; (iv) maintenance costs associated with completed projects; and (v) administration and personnel expenses related to the purposes of the Fund pursuant to this section.

E. Applicants eligible to receive moneys from the Fund through any grant program created by the Departments shall include, at a minimum, representatives from (i) state agencies, (ii) metropolitan planning organizations, (iii) localities, (iv) regional transportation authorities, (v) Indian tribes, (vi) nonprofit entities and academic institutions, and (vii) a combination of any of the entities listed in clauses (i) through (vi).

F. The Director of the Department of Wildlife Resources, on behalf of the Departments, shall submit a biennial report to the General Assembly by November 1 of each odd-numbered year and such report shall be made available to the public. The report shall include the number and types of public and private funding opportunities sought for the Fund; the amount of public funding received by the Fund; the amount and number of awards from the Fund; and information regarding the progress of projects funded by the Fund, including data on the use of project infrastructure by wildlife.

ENGROSSED

SB455E