

Fiscal impact reports (FIRs) are prepared by the Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) for standing finance committees of the NM Legislature. The LFC does not assume responsibility for the accuracy of these reports if they are used for other purposes.

Current FIRs (in HTML & Adobe PDF formats) are available on the NM Legislative Website (legis.state.nm.us). Adobe PDF versions include all attachments, whereas HTML versions may not. Previously issued FIRs and attachments may be obtained from the LFC in Suite 101 of the State Capitol Building North.

FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

ORIGINAL DATE 1-26-06

SPONSOR Hall **LAST UPDATED** _____ **HB** 161

SHORT TITLE Statewide Outdoor Classroom Program **SB** _____

ANALYST Woods

APPROPRIATION (dollars in thousands)

Appropriation		Recurring or Non-Rec	Fund Affected
FY06	FY07		
	\$250.0	Recurring	General Fund

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

Duplicates SB37

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

LFC Files

Responses Received From

Department of Finance and Administration (DFA) (SB37)

Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD) (SB37)

Public Education Department (PED) (SB37)

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

House Bill 161, which makes an appropriation to the State Parks Division of the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department, of \$250,000 from the general fund for expenditure in fiscal year 2007 to support a statewide outdoor classroom program. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of the fiscal year 2007 shall revert to the general fund.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

The Department of Finance and Administration (DFA) notes that this legislation will provide enhanced opportunities for New Mexican school children to visit and experience the facilities of the State Parks Division of the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department. Further that the program is the outgrowth of a report prepared by the State Parks Division, and the Public Education Department as required by Senate Joint Memorial 24, passed during the 2005 legislative session. DFA indicates that the \$250,000 required to support the program will be recurring

general fund monies.

The Public Education Department (PED) indicates that, while the appropriation is made to the State Parks Division of EMNRD, there will be also be costs incurred by (PED) while assisting EMNRD in the development of the teacher education training program, assisting in recruitment of teachers and evaluation of the project. PED estimates of the time required to support this legislation would be .20 Administrator A @ 25.495 per hour and benefits. The cost of time and benefits would be \$13,964. Monitoring the project would include travel @ .32 for 500 miles and per diem for two nights at \$85 for a total of \$ 330. The total cost of the time, benefits and travel to support this project will be \$14,294.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

As further background, EMNRD indicates that this legislation stems from a study prepared by the State Parks Division (SPD) and the Public Education Department required by SJM 24, which passed the Legislature in 2005. SJM 24 requested SPD and PED to evaluate opportunities for collaboration. This study, *Making New Mexico Schools Work Outdoors*, as required by SJM 24, was presented to the Legislative Education Study Committee in October 2005. Commenting on the study, EMNRD observes:

SPD and PED found enormous potential for partnerships that can improve the education of New Mexico's children, benefit state parks, and better serve the state in general. The joint study cites recent research indicating outdoor, interactive education can increase student test scores, reduce discipline problems, build citizenry skills and resource stewardship ethics, and increase teacher job satisfaction.

Each of the 34 state parks is potential outdoor classroom, encompassing a variety of natural and cultural resource themes, positioned for a hands-on, interdisciplinary approach. In 2005, however, only 5 percent of New Mexico's K-12 students visited state parks as part of their school program. This situation reflects great unrealized potential as 80 percent of schools are within 30 minutes of a state park.

The SJM 24 study recommended the establishment of the "New Mexico Outdoor Classroom" initiative, the mission of which is: "State Parks and PED will improve academic achievement and encourage resource stewardship by engaging New Mexico's children in heritage education." The study proposed non-recurring funding for a pilot project to launch and test the initiative. The pilot project would consist of:

- *Outdoor Education Institutes*: To provide short teacher training institutes, develop curriculum-based programming, and build partnerships between parks and teachers.
- *Teacher Resource Program*: To provide hands-on teaching materials for children, expand the State Parks Junior Ranger program, develop on-line educational programming, and augment staffing to deliver the programs.

- *Kids-to-Parks Grant Program:* To provide transportation funding for outdoor education initiatives.
- *Service Learning Program:* To provide funding for students to complete resource-related projects at state parks.

As coordinator of an outdoor classroom program, SPD would approach the program as a partnership with numerous entities, such as the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs, New Mexico State Land Office, the U.S. National Park Service, and non-governmental organizations.

In closing, EMNRD suggests that this legislation could help to close the achievement gap by pairing schools with state parks and connecting children with the outdoors and with their natural and cultural heritage. Further, that the legislation would make possible a significant increase in interdisciplinary, hands-on education, increasing student academic achievement and making schools work outdoors, while also helping to lay the foundation for a strong SPD/PED partnership.

PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS

The Public Education Department anticipates that the PED and State Parks Division partnership could impact the public school performance measures relating to the percent of stakeholders who rate their involvement with public schools as positive and the percent of 4th and 8th-grade students who achieve proficiency or above on the criterion-referenced assessments in reading and language arts, and could also assist students in meeting core performance measures. Further, the number of education programs and the percentage of park visitors participating in education programs are key performance measures for the State Parks Division. The program will assist the division in augmenting the performance of its outdoor education programs by creating closer ties to the statewide educational system and linking division programs and statewide educational curriculum standards and benchmarks.

EMNRD notes that the legislation would allow SPD to implement a statewide outdoor classroom program cooperatively with PED and other agencies and organizations, and would therefore enhance the performance of SPD in providing quality educational programming. The number of interpretive programs offered by SPD is a performance measure specified by the Legislature that has been in place for a number of years. This metric is also recommended as an FY07 performance measure and the outdoor classroom program would assist SPD in exceeding this performance measure.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

EMNRD advises that the State Parks Division has the staff, experience, and infrastructure to effectively administer the legislation, and to succeed with the project. Working in conjunction with PED, SPD management staff could undertake the programmatic implementation of the statewide Outdoor Classroom Program and State Park education field staff could provide the hands-on programming and school-to-park connection. The partnership with PED, through the Office of the Secretary and the PED's Rural Education Bureau, will provide State Parks with a unique, effective link to schools across the state, crucial to the success of this program.

WHAT WILL BE THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT ENACTING THIS BILL

EMNRD indicates that if the legislation is not enacted, SPD will not have sufficient funding to launch the statewide outdoor classroom program. SPD will continue its efforts to provide quality interpretation and education programming, but state parks and other locations would remain underutilized for outdoor education. SPD would not have the ability to capitalize on the full potential of the parks to enhance New Mexico educational systems and to meet existing demand for programs, student/teacher educational resources, and teacher training.

BW/mt