

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2026 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

Senate Bill 722

By Senators Hart and Chapman

[Introduced February 3, 2026; referred

to the Committee on Natural Resources; and then to

the Committee on the Judiciary]

1 A BILL to amend and reenact §20-7-4 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating to
2 powers and duties of Natural Resources police officers; requiring Natural Resources
3 officers to obtain consent of landowner or warrant prior to entering private property; and
4 providing exceptions.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 7. LAW ENFORCEMENT, MOTORBOATING, LITTER.

§20-7-4. Powers and duties of natural resources police officers.

1 (a) Natural resources police officers and other persons authorized to enforce the
2 provisions of this chapter are under the supervision and direction of the director in the performance
3 of their duties.

4 (b) Natural resources police officers have statewide jurisdiction and have authority to:

5 (1) Arrest on sight, without warrant or other court process, any person or persons
6 committing a criminal offense in violation of the laws of this state, in the presence of the officer, but
7 no arrest may be made where any form of administrative procedure is prescribed by this chapter
8 for the enforcement of the provisions of this chapter;

9 (2) Carry arms and weapons as may be prescribed by the director in the course and
10 performance of their duties, but no license or other authorization is required for this privilege;

11 (3) Search and examine, in the manner provided by law, any boat, vehicle, automobile,
12 conveyance, express or railroad car, fish box, fish bucket or creel, game bag or game coat or other
13 place in which hunting and fishing paraphernalia, wild animals, wild birds, fish, amphibians or other
14 forms of aquatic life could be concealed, packed or conveyed whenever they have reason to
15 believe that they would thereby secure or discover evidence of the violation of the provisions of
16 this chapter;

17 (4) Execute and serve a search warrant, notice or other process of law issued under the
18 authority of this chapter or other law relating to wildlife, forests, and all other natural resources, by
19 a magistrate or court having jurisdiction in the same manner, with the same authority and with the

20 same legal effect as a sheriff;

21 (5) Require the operator of any motor vehicle or other conveyance on or about the public
22 highways or roadways, or in or near the fields and streams of this state, to stop for the purpose of
23 allowing the natural resources police officers to conduct game-kill surveys;

24 (6) Summon aid in making arrests or seizures or in executing warrants, notices or
25 processes, in the same manner as sheriffs;

26 (7) Enter private lands or waters within the state while engaged in the performance of their
27 official duties if he or she has a warrant or has the explicit or implied permission of the landowner
28 or lessee: Provided, That a natural resource police officer may enter any private land without
29 permission if probable cause exists that there is a legitimate need to respond to emergency
30 situations, accidents, or other imminent threats to public safety occurring on the private land that
31 require immediate intervention.

32 (8) Arrest on sight, without warrant or other court process, subject to the limitations set
33 forth in subdivision (1) of this section, any person or persons committing a criminal offense in
34 violation of any law of this state in the presence of the officer on any state-owned lands and waters
35 and lands and waters under lease by the Division of Natural Resources and all national forest
36 lands, waters and parks and U.S. Corps of Army Engineers' properties within the boundaries of the
37 State of West Virginia and, in addition to the authority conferred in other subdivisions of this
38 section, execute all arrest warrants on these state and national lands, waters and parks and U.S.
39 Corps of Army Engineers' properties, consistent with the provisions of article one, chapter sixty-
40 two §62-1-1 et seq. of this code;

41 (9) Arrest any person who enters upon the land or premises of another without written
42 permission from the owner of the land or premises in order to cut, damage or carry away, or cause
43 to be cut, damaged or carried away, any timber, trees, logs, posts, fruit, nuts, growing plants or
44 products of any growing plant. Any person convicted of cutting, damaging or carrying away or
45 causing to be cut, damaged or carried away any timber, trees, logs, posts, fruits, nuts, growing

46 plants or products of growing plants is liable to the owner in the amount of three times the value of
47 the timber, trees, logs, posts, fruit, nuts, growing plants or products of any growing plant, in
48 addition to and notwithstanding any other penalties by law provided by ~~section thirteen, article~~
49 ~~three, chapter sixty-one~~ §61-3-13 of this code;

50 (10) Make a complaint in writing before any court or officer having jurisdiction, and procure
51 and execute the warrant, when the officer knows or has reason to believe that a person has
52 violated a law of this state. The actions of the natural resources police officer have the same force
53 and effect as if made by a sheriff;

54 (11) Serve and execute warrants for the arrest of any person and warrants for the search of
55 any premises, buildings, properties or conveyances issued by a properly constituted authority in
56 the same manner, with the same authority, and with the same legal effect, as a sheriff; and

57 (12) Do all things necessary to carry into effect the provisions of this chapter.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to require that a natural resources officer possess landowner consent or a warrant prior to entering private property and providing exceptions.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.