



Maryland Chapter

7338 Baltimore Avenue, Suite 102
College Park, MD 20740-3211

Committee: Education, Health and Environmental Affairs

Testimony on: SB597 – “Agriculture - Cost-Sharing Program - Fixed Natural Filter Practices”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 25, 2020

The Maryland Sierra Club urges a favorable report on this bill. The bill would amend the Maryland Agriculture Water Quality Cost-Share Program (MACS) to fund natural filter practices that have greater and more lasting benefits for protecting water quality, as well as for restoring healthy soils and increasing climate resilience.

Natural filter practices or “nature-based solutions” include riparian forest buffers, tree planting on agricultural lands, wetland restoration, and pasture management practices which have lasting value, not only for protecting water quality but also for climate mitigation and resilience. In addition to filtering water, they increase sequestration of carbon in soils, which increases soil fertility and productivity, thereby reducing the need for artificial fertilizers that are among the major sources of pollution in the Chesapeake Bay.

At present, the MACS program provides only one-time payments for these natural filter practices at a much lower rate than for annual planting of cover crops. It also pays a lower amount for planting a diverse mix of cover crops rather than a monoculture of rye. It also does not cover conversion of row crops to pasture and rotational grazing practices. In 2016 and 2017 this fund was depleted because much of the funding was used to cover management of waste from new and expanding Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), at a time when these operations should be reduced and more regulated.

SB597 would enable the MACS \$30 million annual budget to provide greater benefits needed to reach the goals of the Chesapeake Bay Agreement. Therefore, the Maryland Sierra Club urges a favorable report on this bill.

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