



Assateague Coastal Trust - PO Box 731, Berlin, MD 21811 - 410-629-1538

HB0209 – Plastics and Packaging Reduction Act – Environment and Transportation
February 11, 2020
Position: Favorable

Assateague Coastal Trust (ACT) is an environmental advocacy organization on the Eastern Shore of Maryland with over 2000 members. Since 1970, ACT has been the voice for Delmarva's waterways and continues to defend the coastal watershed and surrounding region through community outreach, monitoring pollution, and advocating for protective environmental laws and policy.

The Assateague Coastal Trust's mission is to promote and encourage the protection of the health, productivity, and sustainability of the coastal bays watershed of Delmarva through advocacy, education and conservation.

In February, 2018, ACT initiated the Trash Free Assateague (TFA) program as a means to address the single use plastic issues that have become a global scale concern. The extreme northern reaches of Assateague Island National Seashore have resided as an area of primary concern and focus of the TFA program. We commonly reference the area as the *North Point* of Assateague Island. It is located several hundred yards south of Ocean City, Maryland, separated by an inlet and the Sinepuxent Bay. Despite its relatively isolated location, the *North Point* is **routinely inundated with plastic trash that is arriving by way of tide, swell, and wind, as well as an increase in visitors to this part of the National Seashore in recent years.**

TFA held the first public beach cleanup on the *North Point* in April 2018. With 12 volunteers and assistance from the National Park Service, 200 pounds of trash, the majority of which consisted of lightweight single use plastics, was removed from this relatively small area of the National Seashore. During a later TFA program at the *North Point*, **we discovered an area along the shoreline at the hightide zone where, specifically, single use plastic carry out bags had accumulated.**

We have attached to this testimony a series of photographs and text that explain the area being described in this testimony.

Initially believed to be a conglomeration of decomposing marine vegetation, **the area proved to be a mat of plastic grocery bags that had collected over time, being transported by the tide and deposited in an area along the northern side of the island** where it accumulated at a cut in the shoreline. Though we were unable to remove all of the bags due to the deposition of sand over much of the area, **approximately 60 pounds of the mat of plastic was removed.**

This specific area of conglomerated plastic bags still remains on the *North Point*, as it is continually fed a stream of trash, plastic debris, and single use carry out bags with each turn of the tides. **It is known that as these bags and other plastics remain in the free environment, they will begin breaking down into micro plastics and the chemical constituents which eventually manifest into surrounding soils, the hydrologic cycle, and the food chain**, a situation which promises adverse health implications for people, and the rest of the biological community.

The *North Point* of Assateague is a primary example of what has been termed an environmental externality. As the single use plastic habits continue to characterize our modern day society, the adverse effects which that habit inflicts on our environment are not always along the roadway we travel each day or in the parking lot we frequent each week. Often, evidence of this unsustainable habit plague the coasts, waterways, and lands that we don't see on a daily basis. Many of the areas bearing the burden of plastics are environments which have long remained natural havens on the Delmarva Peninsula. These areas are natural resources. They are absolutely essential to the quality of the economy and have long been symbolic of the eastern shore. They are areas worth protecting.

Since its inception in 2018, the TFA program has held numerous outreach events and beach cleanup programs, primarily of which have concentrated efforts on addressing the single use plastic issues facing Assateague Island National Seashore and Worcester County's watershed. **To date, over 1,000 pounds of trash and plastic have been removed by TFA** from areas throughout Worcester County, the majority of which has been removed from the shores of Assateague Island. Along with balloons, Styrofoam, and single use items like beverage bottles and straws, **single use carry out plastic bags have constituted a significant portion of material identified on area beaches and waterways.**

Aside of the known threat to marine life and other wildlife, and the adverse health implications which plastics in the free environment pose, TFA believes that what is on our land and in our waters is representative of the level of respect that we have for our environment, our community, and ourselves. Further, by taking the steps necessary to abate our society's single use plastic problem, Maryland would demonstrate that we also have the environmental ethic, will, and ability to work toward addressing climate change.

Our TFA program utilizes a unique approach in addressing the detriment to which plastics have on coastal environments. It is a philosophical approach that uses the lens of science and a call to action to instill a sense of stewardship. To care about the environment, we must first immerse ourselves in that environment to understand it on a personal and emotional level.

For these reasons, Assateague Coastal Trust supports HB0209 and we ask this Committee to give a FAVORABLE vote on this bill and move it to the House Floor. Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony in support of HB0209.

Sincerely,



Kathy Phillips, Executive Director/Assateague COASTKEEPER
Assateague Coastal Trust

The five photographs (A, B, C, D, and E) included were taken February 9, 2020 on the *North Point* of Assateague Island National Seashore. The photographs capture the area on the *North Point* where plastic single use carry-out bags have collected along the high tide zone that exists within one of the beach cuts on the north facing side of the *North Point*. This is the area where a “mat of plastic bags” exists, as discussed in our written testimony.

Photograph *E* depicts two plastics bags recently deposited overtop the mat of plastic. Presumably, tidal currents from the inlet, prevailing wind direction, and swell characteristics are acting to concentrate the single use carry out bags on this particular part of the beach. During specific weather events, sand may be deposited over the mat of plastic bags, or sand may be eroded out of the beach cut so as to reveal the mat of plastic.

On this particular day, the mat of plastic is covered with sand, deposited from increased wind and wave activity several days prior to our visit on February 9th. The plastic bags visible in photograph *E* demonstrate that this area located behind a rock sill is particularly susceptible to single use plastic carry-out bag inundation.





B







For Reference – just south of the Ocean City Inlet is the North Point of Assateague Island. It is part of the Assateague Island National Seashore, a national park that is treasured by millions.

