



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education*

House Bill 1146

Forest Conservation - Mel Noland Woodland Incentives Fund -
Distribution of Agricultural Land Transfer Tax Revenue

DATE: FEBRUARY 27, 2020

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation SUPPORTS House Bill 1146. HB 1146 would strengthen the technical assistance available to landowners interested in developing stewardship plans for forests on private property. As most forested land in Maryland is privately owned, this assistance is critical to maintaining healthy forests and meeting clean water goals.

76% of forests in Maryland are privately owned.¹ These woodlands are spread across lands controlled by more than 156,000 different families, corporations, and non-governmental organizations.² The benefits provided by forests are extensive: they supply oxygen, purify air and water, reduce flooding, recharge groundwater, cool the air, provide recreation, and increase property values. Forests are a critical tool in the Chesapeake Bay's recovery.

Forests are constantly under threat by development, conversion, invasive species, and other forces. These threats can be magnified where forest stands and ownership are fragmented. In Maryland, the average size of a forested parcel is only 17 acres, with over 132,000 landowners controlling less than 10 acres each.³

The health and benefits of Maryland's forests depend largely on stewardship by private landowners, most of whom may possess an interest – but not the expertise – to manage their woodlands effectively. Well-resourced technical assistance is critical to help landowners maintain and even improve the condition of Maryland's forests.

HB 1146 provides this assistance by directing up to \$300,000 of agricultural land transfer tax revenue to an existing forest stewardship program within the Department of Natural Resources. From this fund, the State can provide professional expertise to landowners for developing stewardship plans and actions that sustain their forests. Due to the current funding formula for this program, revenues are extremely unpredictable. This bill will ensure that existing transfer taxes that apply to wooded lands are available to sustain woodlands and forests now and into the future.

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation recommends a FAVORABLE report on HB 1146 from the Ways and Means Committee. For more information, please contact Erik Fisher, Maryland Assistant Director and Land Use Planner at 443.482.2096 or efisher@cbf.org.

¹ [Report on Policies to Achieve No Net Loss of Forests in Maryland](https://dnr.maryland.gov/forests/Documents/nonetlossfinalreport.pdf), Maryland Department of Natural Resources (December 2011), available at <https://dnr.maryland.gov/forests/Documents/nonetlossfinalreport.pdf>.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

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