

January 30, 2023

Written testimony for SB62- Land Use - Public Service Companies - Pollinator-Friendly Vegetation Management¹

Position: Favorable

Submitted by: Denisse Guitarra, MD Conservation Advocate, Nature Forward



Dear Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

Nature Forward (formerly Audubon Naturalist Society) is the oldest independent environmental organization protecting nature in the DC metro region. Our mission is to inspire residents of the greater Washington, DC, region to appreciate, understand, and protect their natural environment through outdoor experiences, education, and advocacy. We thank the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB62- Land Use - Public Service Companies - Pollinator-Friendly Vegetation Management to permit pollinator-friendly management by public utilities.

In particular we are in support of SB62 as it focuses on creating pollinator friendly habitat while balancing the need for right-of-way mowing by public utilities. By implementing integrated pollinator friendly vegetation management of mowing no more than every 2 years and limiting to the time window between November 1st through March 31st, we can protect the critical species of monarch butterflies² and early nesting birds.³

The State of Maryland can and should play a leadership role in creating laws that protect and expand our region's precious and declining meadow habitats. Meadows create natural infrastructure with multiple ecological benefits, including supporting the health of pollinators and creating habitat for small mammals, birds, insects, and amphibians. Allowing meadows to grow along rights-of-way not only benefits wildlife, but also fights climate change. Meadows serve as carbon sinks that reduce greenhouse gasses from being released into the atmosphere, and also improve water quality by filtering pollutants from stormwater. Allowing

¹ SB62- Land Use - Public Service Companies - Pollinator-Friendly Vegetation Management. Available at: <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Legislation/Details/sb0062>

² Monarch Butterfly life cycle. Available at: <https://monarchjointventure.org/monarch-biology/life-cycle>

³ Maryland DC breeding bird atlas 3. Breeding Timeline and safe dates. Available at: <https://ebird.org/atlasmdcc/about/safe-dates>



for more meadow habitat in Maryland through this bill can help the State achieve the important goals of our 2016 Pollinator Protection Act.

Meadow habitats are particularly essential for the health and well-being of birds and pollinators. Grassland bird species, which rely on meadows as habitat, have exhibited a 53% decline in the past fifty years.⁴ At the same time, the decline in insect populations, many of which rely on meadow and grassland ecosystems to thrive, negatively impact agricultural production, and destabilize local and global ecosystems.⁵ Habitat loss is a major driver of both of these crises, and Maryland is no exception. Meadow habitats are in sharp decline across the state.

There is enormous opportunity to create meadow habitat on land owned by Maryland's electric utilities, which are among the largest private landowners in the State. By exempting these public companies from municipal and county ordinances on "weed" height, Maryland can achieve tremendous positive environmental impacts. Through the simple act of reducing mowing, meadows can thrive under power line rights-of-way owned by utilities on public land. When rights-of-way return to meadow habitat, thousands of acres of Maryland open space will provide rich, biodiverse corridors. If the state adopts this legislation, Maryland will become a regional exemplar, demonstrating best practices for providing intact, invaluable wildlife corridors.

Thank you for leading the effort to pass SB62 and allow utilities to create more meadow habitat along powerline rights-of-way. All of us at Nature Forward appreciate your leadership in addressing the biodiversity crisis, the challenge of climate change, and the rights of all our communities to have access to ecologically healthy natural areas. On behalf of the 28,000 people, we serve each year, Nature Forward supports your bill SB62- Land Use - Public Service Companies - Pollinator-Friendly Vegetation Management to permit pollinator-friendly management by public utilities.

Sincerely,

Denisse Guitarra, Nature Forward Maryland Conservation Advocate

Brönte Nevins, Nature Forward Conservation Volunteer

Alice Sturm, PLA, Nature Forward Garden Manager and Author, *Xerces Society Guide to Mid-Atlantic Native Meadows* (2020)

⁴ Rosenberg, Kenneth V., Dokter, Adriaan M., Blancher, Peter J., Sauer, John R., Smith, Adam C., Smith, Paul A., Stanton, Jessica C., Panjabi, Arvind, Helft, Laura, Parr, Michael, and Marra, Peter P. *Decline of the North American avifauna*. Retrieved from <https://par.nsf.gov/biblio/10133018>. *Science* 366.6461 Web. doi:10.1126/science.aaw1313.

⁵ Forister, ML, Pelton, EM, Black, SH. Declines in insect abundance and diversity: We know enough to act now. *Conservation Science and Practice*. 2019; 1:e80. <https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.80>