



Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Josh Kurtz, Secretary
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

March 26, 2024

BILL NUMBER: House Bill 807 – Third Reader

SHORT TITLE: Natural Resources - Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Surveys

DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: SUPPORT

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION

The Department supports the intent of this bill, which suggests modifying the definition of “aerial survey” for surveying submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) for SAV protection zone delineation. The Department is open to considering alternative survey methods once they have been thoroughly vetted, approved, and made available for management use, given the rapid advancement in survey technologies.

We appreciate the sponsors’ inclusion of our amendments, which lessen the fiscal and operational impact on the Department. These amendments include clarifying the definition of “SAV survey” and ensuring that an SAV survey and updated delineation continue to be mapped and cannot be “observed”.

The Department also supports the study on the potential implications and feasibility of using alternative survey methods to delineate SAV protection zones. We appreciate the deadline extension for the SAV report from December 31, 2024 to December 1, 2025 through the House amendments.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Department has contracted the Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences (VIMS) to conduct annual surveys to determine the abundance and distribution of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) in Maryland waters of the Chesapeake Bay, its tidal tributaries, and the Atlantic Coastal Bays. Currently, VIMS uses both aerial and satellite imagery in its annual SAV survey. This survey is the oldest and most comprehensive SAV survey in the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays and is utilized by the State of Maryland, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and many federal agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency Chesapeake Bay Program. The survey is used to assess SAV and water clarity criteria assessments, track restoration goals, and assess impacts on SAV habitat. By contracting with VIMS, the Department ensures consistent standard operating procedures and guidelines for the acquisition of aerial and satellite imagery, photo interpretation, SAV bed delineation, bed density estimates, and quality assurance and quality control compliance.

BILL EXPLANATION

The proposed bill aims to modify the definition of "aerial survey" for the purpose of surveying submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) to include other forms of survey methodologies that encompass certain geographic areas. Additionally, the bill mandates the Department to conduct a study and submit a report on the feasibility and implications of using alternative methods, apart from aerial surveys, to delineate SAV protection zones on or before a certain date.

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