

Thursday, March 7, 2024

TO: Brian Feldman, Chair of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee; Guy Guzzone, Chair of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee; and Committee Members
FROM: Mariana Rosales, The Nature Conservancy, Director of Climate; Cait Kerr, The Nature Conservancy, State Policy Manager
POSITION: Support SB 1082 Solar Energy and Energy Storage - Development and State Procurement

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports SB 1082 offered by Senator Hester. SB 1082 establishes Utility-Scale Solar Design and Siting Commission, to provide recommendations related to solar energy development and land conservation and preservation. The bill also sets requirements for cover crop plantings and maintenance on land where ground-mounted solar energy stations larger than a set size are located, seeks to expand solar development, and establishes a conservation and restoration fund that solar developers will be required to pay into if their solar project is located on land zoned for agriculture or silviculture.

Maryland needs to accelerate our renewable energy rollout to meet our goals under the Renewable Portfolio Standard and the Climate Solutions Now Act. Simultaneously, it is important to preserve our forested and agricultural lands, which provide carbon sinks as well as adaptation and resilience benefits. Historically, solar development and land preservation have been conflicting objectives, but that paradigm is evolving. At TNC, we believe it is not only possible but also necessary to pursue both; however, in order to do so, we need integrative, creative approaches to pursue smart solar energy deployment.

Solar energy is one of the cleanest electricity sources available in our state, but its land usage can be intensive and there must be guidance to prevent negative impacts. SB 1082 takes this into consideration and includes some potential safeguards to minimize impacts on areas of conservation, restoration, agricultural, environmental, or historical importance.

TNC commends Senator Hester on introducing this bill, which seeks to expand solar energy deployment while also establishing safeguards to protect preserved lands.

Therefore, we urge a favorable report on SB 1082.