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SPEAKER PRO TEM  
—

Environment and Transportation  
Committee

*Subcommittees*

Chair, Environment

Natural Resources,  
Agriculture and Open Space



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*The Maryland House of Delegates*  
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**Delegate Dana Stein Testimony in Support of HB 807**  
**Natural Resources - Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Surveys**

Chairman Feldman, Vice Chairwoman Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) are grasses, algae, and other plants that are rooted and grow completely underwater. They provide many benefits to Bay ecosystems, particularly by providing habitat for crabs, fish, and other aquatic organisms. SAV also help prevent erosion, remove sediments, and absorb nutrients in the Bay.

The 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement set a goal of restoring 185,000 total acres of SAV Bay-wide, with 130,000 acres to be restored by 2025. We're only 60% of the way there. 76,462 acres have been restored to date, leaving the Bay 53,538 acres short of the 2025 goal.

This makes it important to protect existing SAV beds and their seed banks. Since 2001, DNR has mapped SAV Protection Zones in the Bay using the Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences (VIMS) annual aerial flyover survey to delineate the zones. However, the cost of these surveys is increasing, and results are dependent on weather and water clarity. It can also take up to a year for images to be processed and GIS maps produced.

This bill, with DNR's amendment, enables DNR to use any DNR-approved survey that meets certain criteria related to the survey's geographic scope and methodology, in addition to the VIMS surveys. These could include satellite or drone imagery and machine-learning-assisted processing.

Also, under the bill, DNR is to study and report on the implications and feasibility of using alternative methods other than an aerial survey to delineate SAV protection zones.