

Testimony in support of SB 837

Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
Written Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 384
Deep Creek Lake - Lower Lake Levels - Requirement and Impact Study
Mr. Paul C. Edwards, Chair
Board of County Commissioners for Garrett County
February 20, 2024

Senator Feldman and members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee:

Deep Creek Lake and the surrounding area is often called the economic engine of Garrett County, and in many respects it is. The Lake is important to the County and the Board of Commissioners would not recommend any action that would jeopardize lake activities or the many downstream benefits, including white water rafting.

The Board of County Commissioners submitted the requested legislation during a Public Meeting with the Delegation on November 21, 2023. And shared draft copies with Maryland Department of Environment and Department of Natural Resources.

The Garrett County Commissioners support SB 837 as it will provide valuable scientific information on potential management tools for controlling nuisance submerged aquatic vegetation and excess sedimentation in shallow water coves and habitats. Managing both nuisance and invasive aquatic vegetation and controlling sediment inputs to Deep Creek Lake are key goals in the 2016 Deep Creek Watershed Management Plan, approved and signed by the Garrett County Commissioners.

SB 837 requires that the water level of Deep Creek Lake be lowered for a period of four weeks between November 30th and February 28th to enable Maryland Department of Natural Resources, or their contractors, to conduct studies to determine the impacts of the lower lake levels on the spread and growth of aquatic invasive plant species as well as sediment deposits in the lake.

Nothing in the proposed legislation is outside of the current permit requirements for the operation of the dam and generation of power. In fact, the current permit allows for emergency drawn downs of water without any penalties.

Multiple literature studies suggest that exposing aquatic species to cold winter temperatures during a lake drawdown will inhibit the spread of the vegetation. The studies proposed by SB 837 will help confirm if this is the case in Deep Creek Lake. The lake water levels will be lowered within the rules of the Water Appropriations and Use permit issued to Brookfield Power by Maryland Department of the Environment and will not be lower than the established "lower rule band" of 2455 feet for the winter months.

Historically, Deep Creek Lake has recharged in the spring, in ample time for whitewater releases. The Board of Commissioners have supported, and continue to support the whitewater releases for the rafting enthusiasts.

The ongoing Deep Creek Lake Arrowhead Cove dredging project involved the removal of accumulated sediment as well as both native and potentially nuisance aquatic species to help restore and maintain the lake as a healthy ecosystem and enhance the enjoyment of recreational users. The dredging project will address the pros and cons of dredging as a viable management tool for mitigation of accumulated sediment and will establish a baseline on the impact of the project on both native and invasive aquatic vegetation.

We recognize the need for the dam operators to maintain sufficient water levels to meet their contract requirements but there is also a requirement that the State of Maryland, as owners and stewards of the Lake research and evaluate best practices to control invasive aquatic species as well as to mitigate sediment. The information obtained from this proposed four-year study will be extremely important in the next permitting cycle.

We urge you to pass SB837 and would be open to discussing enhancements to address any concerns, especially for the whitewater stakeholders. We appreciate your consideration and support.

On behalf of the
Board of County Commissioners



Paul C. Edwards, Chair