



Assateague Coastal Trust, Inc.

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HB0729 – Department of the Environment – Nontidal Wetlands – Protection of Vernal Pools (Vernal Pool Wetlands Protection Act of 2024)

Feb 19, 2024

Position: Favorable

I am writing to express my strong **SUPPORT** for the **HB0729** Vernal Pool Wetlands Protection Act of 2024. This bill aims to safeguard vernal pool ecosystems and represents a vital step towards preserving Maryland's biodiversity and ensuring the long-term health of our natural environment.

Vernal pools are seasonal wetlands which play a critical role in supporting a wide array of species, including the wood frog, mole salamanders, and fairy shrimp, many of which rely exclusively on vernal pools for their reproduction and survival. By providing essential habitat for these unique species, vernal pools contribute significantly to the rich biodiversity of Maryland.

Additionally, vernal pools offer invaluable ecosystem services that benefit both wildlife and humans alike. **These pools act as natural filters for stormwater flows, helping to improve water quality, playing a crucial role in replenishing groundwater, which is essential for maintaining healthy ecosystems and supporting human communities.**

Despite their ecological importance, vernal pools face numerous threats, including habitat destruction and the lack of regulatory protection. The Vernal Pool Wetlands Protection Act of 2024 addresses these challenges by requiring the Department of the Environment to adopt regulations aimed at protecting and preserving vernal pools in our state. These regulations will establish much-needed protections for vernal pools, including 100-foot buffers around these ecosystems to safeguard their integrity and prevent encroachment.

This legislation mandates the development of a comprehensive plan for identifying vernal pools throughout Maryland. By gaining a better understanding of the number and locations of these critical habitats, we can take targeted conservation actions to ensure their long-term viability. This is of great importance to the southern region of Delmarva where vernal pool ecosystems have been devastated by agricultural and developmental sprawl. This legislation will help offer critical protections to those remaining vernal pool ecosystems.



MISSION: Working with diverse community partners, we protect and defend the health of Delmarva's waters through advocacy, education, science, and the enforcement of clean water laws.

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In conclusion, I urge your **SUPPORT** for **HB0729** Vernal Pool Wetlands Protection Act of 2024. By enacting this legislation, we can take meaningful steps towards conserving Maryland's natural heritage, preserving essential ecosystems, and protecting the countless species that rely on vernal pools for their survival. Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Taylor Swanson,

Assateague Coastkeeper, on behalf of Assateague Coastal Trust.