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HB0807 – Natural Resources – Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Surveys

Feb 14, 2024

Position: Favorable

I am writing to express my **SUPPORT** for **HB0807**, which pertains to the surveying of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) in Maryland waters. This bill proposes essential alterations to the definition of "aerial survey" and requires the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to report on alternative methods for delineating and adjusting SAV protection zones.

Submerged aquatic vegetation plays a crucial role in maintaining the health and balance of aquatic ecosystems. **These underwater plants provide habitat for aquatic species, improve water quality by absorbing excess nutrients, sequester carbon, and stabilize shorelines.** It is of great importance that we take proactive measures to protect and restore SAV beds in Maryland's waters.

HB0807 pursues alteration to the definition of "aerial survey". **This alteration would allow for an expansion of data utilization beyond the current aerial surveys conducted by the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS).** By expanding the definition of "SAV survey" to include other approved surveys that utilize relevant data, the bill promotes flexibility in surveying methods, which can lead to more comprehensive and accurate assessments of SAV populations in years where aerial surveys are interrupted by weather events. Along Maryland's Coastal Bays, surveying conducted by aerial flyover was interrupted in three of five years between 2016 and 2020, highlighting a pressing need for adjustments to the surveying methodology.

Additionally, the bill mandates a report be created by the Maryland DNR to assess the implications and feasibility of alternative methods for delineating SAV protection zones. This study will provide valuable insights into potential advancements in surveying technologies and methodologies, as well as the possibility of increasing the frequency of delineation updates beyond the current three-year interval. Such initiatives demonstrate a proactive approach to conservation and management of SAV resources in Maryland.



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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The Assateague Coastal Trust urges the SUPPORT for HB0807 and consideration for the pressing need for continued research into new methodologies for Sea Grass surveys and related data collection. As a concerned advocate for the environmental integrity of Maryland's Coastal Bays, I believe that HB0807 represents a significant step forward in the protection of submerged aquatic vegetation in Maryland waters. I urge you to support this bill and advocate for its passage. By doing so, we can contribute to the preservation of our state's aquatic ecosystems and resources for current and future generations.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I trust that you will give favorable consideration to HB0807.

Taylor Swanson,
Assateague Coastkeeper, on behalf of Assateague Coastal Trust.

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