



Bill: **HB 979** “Biodiversity and Agriculture Protection Act”
Committee: **Environment and Transportation**
Hearing Date: **February 28, 2024**
Position: **FAV**

I am writing this testimony as president of **Wild Ones Greater Baltimore**, and have been active in building awareness through education and community building through my associations with a number of environmental advocacy groups. Wild Ones is a national organization which promotes native landscapes through education, advocacy, and collaborative action.

HB 979, the **Biodiversity and Agriculture Protection Act**, is the result of careful consideration of the impact of decades of mostly unchecked spread of invasive plants, many of which have been brought into our ecosystems by collectors around the world. Selections of these plants end up propagated for mass sales in the nursery trade. Customers purchasing these plants do not realize the harm these plants do to our native plants and wildlife whose co-evolved relationships are essential factors in maintaining functional and sustainable ecosystems. These relationships are being broken by invasive plants, the worst of which should not be available for sale here in Maryland.

Local nurseries and garden centers often stock these plants because they “do so well” for customers, which often amounts to an unchecked spread beyond the backyard garden. They do so well, in fact, that you **cannot get rid of them, and certain invasive plants are so tenacious that specific timed treatments with herbicide over multiple years can be the only remedy**. The concurrent explosion of interest in native plants has created shortages in native plant supply that can be well met if nurseries realize the opportunity this creates and offer more native plants, rather than harmful invasive plants.

I recently was asked to speak at the Chesapeake Green Conference (2024) and my talk covered the potential PR crisis the nursery industry faces following damning results from a study¹ by the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, which **links sales of invasive plants**

¹University of Massachusetts Amherst,
<https://www.umass.edu/news/article/study-finds-plant-nurseries-are-exacerbating-climate-driven-spread-80-invasive-species>

directly to the spread of these plants into a 13-mile radius and beyond (the typical distance a homeowner drives to the nursery to buy plants).

HB 979 not only streamlines the process of evaluating which plants should be banned from commercial sale in Maryland (so that plants deemed to be emerging threats to our ecosystems can be dealt with more quickly), but will ensure plants that have languished in limbo on the Tier 2 list will finally be able to be deemed invasive and banned from being propagated or sold in Maryland nurseries.

I have spoken with countless nursery people and gardeners in my community and beyond, and the definitive increase in interest in native plants in the last five years shows that people are waking up to the critical importance of not just restoring degraded areas, but to preserve the remaining populations of un-invaded ecosystems that we have left.

Because of the number of people distressed by the amount of invasive plants they see taking over wild areas in Baltimore County, where I live, there is an exploratory group forming to assess the feasibility of emulating the Weed Warrior program in Baltimore City. I have had conversations with county representatives who indicated there was not enough staff or money in their budget to tackle the problem from their end.

People are becoming more aware that the **loss of biodiversity that occurs when invasive plants take over a natural area is almost incalculable—these losses lead to a cascade of severed relationships, oftentimes resulting in extinction** of species that are dependent upon one another for survival: flower to pollinator, pollinator to mammal, and mammal that seeds the next generation.

Throughout Maryland, invasive vines are engulfing trees, resulting in malformed branches, branch die off, and eventually the death of mature native trees, which are champions of providing essential resources to pollinators and needed cooling to surrounding areas. I do my best to free the trees on my property and my neighbor's acreage, but I keep seeing invasive trees, shrubs and flowering plants for sale at neighborhood nurseries and it breaks my heart.

Last summer I asked a neighbor if I could trim the seedheads from her invasive Chinese fountain grasses before the seeds were carried away by the wind. She agreed. Her husband became curious about my trimming, and asked why it was necessary. I mentioned that this plant was spreading aggressively on my property, popping up everywhere, and explained how invasive it was. As my words sank in, I saw expressions of shock, anger, and disillusionment flicker across his face. He asked, "If this plant is so harmful, why are the nurseries selling it?" I replied, "Yes, that is exactly the question."

If the invasive plants deemed to cause the most harm to our ecosystems could be restricted from commercial sale, our ecosystems might have a chance of recovery. There is much work to be done with regard to removal of these plants and restoring the native plants into their native ranges.

Wild Ones Greater Baltimore urges a **favorable report on HB 979** to prevent the spread of damaging invasive plants into our struggling ecosystems.

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