



SCENIC RIVERS LAND TRUST
PROTECTING ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY'S LAND AND WATER

February 26, 2024

The Honorable Marc Korman
Chair, Environment and Transportation
Maryland House of Delegates
251 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Regina T. Boyce
Vice Chair, Environment and Transportation
Maryland House of Delegates
251 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Regarding: HB 979 – Agriculture – Invasive Plant Species – Regulation (Biodiversity and Agriculture Protection Act)

Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

On behalf of Scenic Rivers Land Trust, I write to urge your support for the Biodiversity and Agriculture Protection Act (HB 979) which will improve the process to prohibit the propagation, purchase, and sale of invasive plants that are harming our state. While most non-native plant species sold in Maryland never become invasive, the few that do cause incredible damage to our ecosystems.

Scenic Rivers Land Trust strongly supports this bill as it is critical to addressing the growing invasive species problem within many natural habitats and farms in Maryland. Too many invasive plant species are still able to be sold in Maryland, damaging our precious forests, neighborhoods, waterways, and farms. Only six (2%) of the nearly 300 invasive plant species have been prohibited since Maryland first passed an invasive plant prohibition law in 2011.

Our mission is to conserve the natural and scenic areas within Anne Arundel County, and we have placed conservation easements on thousands of acres of forest land. While we have peace of mind that these special and biodiverse places are forever protected from overdevelopment, they are not safe from infestations of invasive species. More and more we are witnessing our conserved forests and wetlands face destruction from invasive plant species that are still allowed to be sold in Maryland. We are effectively “adding fuel to the fire” for these out-of-control plants.

To help our conserved forests, we have launched a Healthy Forests Program to engage volunteers and professional restoration companies to assist in removing invasive plant species from conserved forests. Most of this work occurs in Bacon Ridge Natural Area in Crownsville, MD. Oriental bittersweet and Japanese honeysuckle are killing the trees while autumn olive, multiflora rose, Japanese barberry, wavyleaf basket grass and Japanese stiltgrass carpet the forest floor so densely that the forest will not be able to regenerate on its own. This deadly and suffocating mix of invasives will eventually reduce this beautifully diverse forest with a multitude of plant and animal species (and home to miles of trails) to a dense thicket of just these few invasive species. Of the 630-acre Bacon Ridge Natural Area under easement, over 90 acres are already infested with the invasive species listed above.

Our Healthy Forests Program is honorable work, but it is not enough— we need these harmful terrestrial and aquatic invasive plants to be prohibited from being propagated, purchased, or sold in Maryland.

We believe this bill's proposed status assessment protocol that will more rapidly place invaders on the prohibited list is critical to this effort, as well as MDA and DNR staffing to assess invasive plant threats. Over \$150,000 has been spent at Bacon Ridge Natural Area to control invasives species. Maryland's DNR is estimated to have spent roughly \$1 million to manage hydrilla in Deep Creek Lake since 2014. Recognizing invaders more quickly and prohibiting their sale earlier follows the adage "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

Passing the Biodiversity & Agriculture Protection Act is crucial for the well-being of Maryland's forests, agriculture, and native plant species. I urge you to support this legislation and contribute to the ongoing efforts to combat the invasive plant problem in our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Sarah Knebel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the beginning.

Sarah Knebel
Executive Director
Scenic Rivers Land Trust