



Date: March 6, 2024

Bill: HB 1358 – Natural Resources – Establishment of Gwynns Falls State Park

Position: Support

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the Committee:

The National Aquarium respectfully requests a favorable report for **House Bill 1358 – Natural Resources – Establishment of Gwynns Falls State Park**, which will designate Gwynns Falls State Park as a partnership park between the Department of Natural Resources and Baltimore City to provide accessible outdoor, nature-based recreation and learning opportunities.

The National Aquarium connects people with nature to inspire compassion and care for our ocean planet. We help Baltimore City residents discover urban biodiversity through community science, a collaborative process that engages the public in scientific investigation. The National Aquarium encourages local students, residents, and visitors to “get nerdy with nature” in their neighborhoods and during the annual City Nature Challenge and other events. We are proud to have partnered with the Greater Baltimore Wilderness Coalition, the Carrie Murray Nature Center, and others to organize Leakin Park Bioblitz events, first held in 2018 that have since resulted in hundreds of observations of plant and animal species. Over the years we have also hosted trail hikes, contributed to restoration work in the park, and participated in Baltimore’s Urban Bird Treaty program activities.

Gwynns Falls Leakin Park consists of more than a thousand acres and is one of the largest urban wilderness areas in the region. The park is within walking distance of thousands of city residents; it is adjacent to Baltimore County and is nearby to Anne Arundel and Howard Counties. A new state-city partnership park would serve an area of at least a million people with better access to outdoor recreation while enhancing conservation of urban forest and other important habitats for many diverse species of wildlife. We applaud that the legislation establishes a stakeholder advisory committee and encourage consideration of how the scope and management of the new partnership park may align with the state’s Irreplaceable Natural Areas program to fill the gap of any city designation within that program.

Baltimore City is one of only two jurisdictions in Maryland that lacks a state park and the associated recreational, educational, economic, and cultural benefits which state parks offer. The creation of Gwynns Falls State Park would increase needed investment in Baltimore’s greenspaces and would allow all Marylanders better connections with the benefits of nature and urban wilderness.

We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 1358.

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