

**Committee:** House Environment and Transportation

**Testimony on:** HB 1284 Wetlands and Waterways Program – Stream Restoration Projects

**Position:** Support

**Hearing Date:** March 6, 2024

I am testifying for Friends of the Earth, in support of HB 1284, which makes badly needed reforms to Maryland stormwater policies.

Stream restorations as they are done now destroy the natural ecosystems in stream valleys. Thousands of trees are taken out to make room for heavy machinery used to dig up and reshape stream beds and banks, killing native vegetation and micro-organisms in the soil. The stream is left to bake in the sun without the shade needed for aquatic life. What rushes in to fill the void are invasive species which do not support native insects, birds or animals. Their populations are crashing, due largely to habitat loss.

In our cities and suburbs, nearly all our remaining nature is in the stream valleys. We need these riparian forests to cool our cities, sequester carbon, bring children closer to nature, mitigate stormwater and support wildlife.

This bill requires contractors seeking to do stream restoration projects to submit tree maps and detailed plans to minimize tree loss. MDE is required to modify its protocol for awarding pollution reduction credits to reflect the damage done by tree loss. If contractors fail to conserve trees as promised, they lose MS4 credits.

This is a welcome first step in what needs to be a major change in how we create incentives, to give greater priority to prevention – to bioretentions and green infrastructure to manage stormwater before it reaches streams. According to MDE's own 2022 Assurance Plan, there are many upland controls which are more cost-effective. Stream restorations often must be done over and over, because they treat only the symptoms, not the cause.

Rather than assuming they are beneficial, this bill creates a more objective process for evaluating stream restorations, including pre and post-project monitoring of biological and water quality impacts, and measurable and quantifiable standards for determining success.

Finally, the bill improves the process for community notification and engagement. Too often, citizens wake up one day to find their neighborhood stream being bulldozed, when it is far too late for them to have any voice in this decision.

For all these reasons, we strongly support HB 1284. Thank you.