

Tuesday, March 25, 2025

TO: Brian Feldman, Chair of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee; and Committee Members

FROM: Michelle Dietz, The Nature Conservancy, Director of Government Relations; Cait Kerr, The Nature Conservancy, State Policy Manager

POSITION: Support HB 717 Natural Resources - Public Lands - Acquisition, Staffing, Operations, and Funding

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports HB 717 requested by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR). TNC is a global conservation organization working to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. In Maryland, our work focuses on delivering science-based, on-the-ground solutions that secure clean water and healthy living environments for our communities, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing resilience in the face of a changing climate. We are dedicated to a future where people and nature thrive together.

TNC is part of a global effort to preserve the world's remaining wild and near-natural habitats, with the goal of protecting 30 percent of the planet by 2030. We recognize that investing in land management is a key piece of realizing our desired impact from meeting that goal. Here in Maryland, the lands and waters that surround us are irreplaceable resources. They are an invaluable part of our heritage, our economy, and our identity. Economists have estimated that nature contributes trillions of dollars to the global economy each year, in the form of ecosystem services such as pollination and water filtration and storage. Maryland's outdoor recreation economy generates 109,000 direct jobs, \$14 billion in consumer spending, \$4.4 billion in wages and salaries, and \$951 million in state and local tax revenue. Investing in management staff and resources allows our state to optimize land use for the greatest environmental and economic benefits. Improving access to our state's lands brings Marylanders closer to our cultural heritage, fosters land stewardship, and offers health benefits from recreation. HB 717 aims to dedicate funding, staff, and resources to strengthen Maryland's investment in managing and maintaining our lands.

Maryland's protected lands are an heirloom that we all have the opportunity to experience and the responsibility to steward for future generations. Our intent in supporting HB 717 is to continue elevating collaborative approaches to meet our protected areas' needs. TNC appreciates DNR's work and responsiveness to our prior amendments on this bill and we value the agency's willingness to work with us through the administrative process to achieve this bill's intent. We look forward to working with the agency on implementing this legislation and the resulting programs in the near future.

Therefore, we urge a favorable report on HB 717.