



Maryland Forests Association, Inc.

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Maryland's voice for forest, wildlife, and natural resource management

February 6, 2026

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman, Chair

The Honorable Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice-Chair

Maryland Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: SB257 Mel Noland Woodland Incentives and Fellowship Fund- Reporting

Dear Chairman Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the **Maryland Forests Association (MFA)** — representing Maryland's forest landowners, forest products businesses, and forestry professionals — we respectfully submit this testimony in **support of Senate Bill 257**.

SB 257 strengthens transparency and accountability by requiring the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to provide clearer reporting on revenues and expenditures associated with the **Mel Noland Woodland Incentives and Fellowship Fund**. This improved reporting will help policymakers and stakeholders better understand how funds are received, distributed, and used.

Why the Mel Noland Fund Matters

The Mel Noland Woodland Incentives and Fellowship Fund is essential to Maryland's efforts to support active and sustainable management of private woodlands. The Fund helps finance the **Woodland Incentive Program (WIP)**, a cost-share program administered by the Maryland Forest Service that enables private landowners to implement forest stewardship practices, including reforestation, timber stand improvement, and the development of Forest Stewardship Plans. By offsetting a significant portion of project costs, WIP makes responsible forest management financially feasible for landowners who might otherwise be unable to invest in long-term stewardship.

These investments generate measurable public benefits, including improved water quality in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, enhanced wildlife habitat, increased forest health and resilience, and sustained timber productivity. The Fund also supports the **Mel Noland Fellowship Program**, which helps train the next generation of forestry professionals and strengthens Maryland's natural resource workforce.

Importantly, the Mel Noland Fund is the only dedicated state funding source supporting **forest stewardship, marketing, and utilization activities in Maryland**. These functions are interconnected: healthy forests require active management, and active management depends on strong markets and infrastructure to utilize forest products. Without this funding, Maryland risks losing critical capacity to support landowners and sustain working forests.

Impact of the Fund in Practice

The Mel Noland Fund has supported a wide range of on-the-ground forestry projects that deliver environmental and economic benefits across the state, including these recent accomplishments:

- Promoting workforce development by providing financial assistance for numerous forestry programs such as the Natural Resource Career Camp, Urban Forestry Camp, Junior Achievement of the Eastern Shore, Evergreen Heritage Center, and St. Mary's Career and Technology Academy.
- Eradicating Spongy Moth on more than 37,000 acres of white oak forest.
- Leveraging funds for a wood energy engineering study at Frostburg State University, which would create jobs, keep money in the local economy by providing a much-needed market for low-value wood, and assist in meeting renewable energy goals.

At the same time, demand for assistance consistently exceeds available funding. As a result, important stewardship and utilization projects have been delayed or unable to proceed, including:

Examples of worthwhile projects not funded due to insufficient resources:

- A wood energy project slated for Garrett County failed to come to fruition due to a lack of funding available for the match required by a federal grant.
- DNR was unable to provide a match to the only capital grant program for the forestry sector, WIPIEI, administered by MARBIDCO.
- The creation of the Forest Markets Council, envisioned by the Forestry Economic Adjustment Strategy, has stalled due to a lack of funding and support staff.
- An effort to stand up a workforce training for Timber Stand Improvement crews geared towards veterans transitioning to civilian life has also been held up due to a lack of funding.

These unmet needs highlight the importance of clear reporting on Fund revenues and expenditures. Accurate, transparent information will help the General Assembly evaluate whether funding levels are sufficient to meet Maryland's forest stewardship goals. We believe Mel Noland has been historically underfunded. We ask that priority be given to keeping this crucial program properly funded.

Conclusion

Forests are our greatest renewable resource. The programs, practices, and projects supported by the Mel Noland Fund are essential to the forest supply chain. SB 257 is a practical and important step toward ensuring transparency in a program that plays a critical role in maintaining healthy forests and a strong forest economy. Clear reporting will support informed decision-making and reinforce confidence that funds are being transferred and used effectively to benefit Maryland's environment and rural communities.

For these reasons, the Maryland Forests Association respectfully urges a **favorable report on Senate Bill 257**.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



Elizabeth D. Hill
Executive Director
Maryland Forests Association