Maryland Native Plant Society

APPRECIATION CONSERVATION EDUCATION

Testimony: **HB0035, Local Government - Regulatory Powers - Regulation of Tree of Heaven**
Committee: **Environment and Transportation**
Hearing Date: **February 4, 2026**
Position: **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS**

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and honorable members of the Committee:

The Maryland Native Plant Society supports HB35 with the sponsor's amendments, which enables counties and municipalities to manage the spread and damaging impacts of invasive trees, including tree of heaven and any invasive tree regulated by the Maryland Department of Agriculture.

Maryland law defines an invasive plant as a species that did not evolve in our state and causes economic harm, ecological harm, environmental harm, or harm to human health. A nationwide study estimated that in 2000, the harm from invasive plants due to losses of ecosystem services and agricultural productivity cost Americans $34 billion annually (approximately $64 billion in 2026 dollars.)[1] By 2023, invasive plant costs globally had grown into the hundreds of billions of dollars each year.[2]

Our state is making good progress in addressing the harms caused by invasive plants by adding thirteen invasive species to the Maryland Prohibited Invasive Plant List in early 2026, including three invasive trees. While current state law prohibits the sale of any invasive plant on the Prohibited List (after a phase-out period), there is no law that addresses the management and control of these same invasives, which are currently in our environment. That is what this law enables counties and municipalities to do.

The Callery pear tree (including cultivar 'Bradford' pear), added to the Maryland Prohibited Invasive Plant List this January, was widely planted in residential neighborhoods and has now spread extensively to natural areas. Its early white spring blooms can be seen up and down Maryland's roads and highways. The tree spreads rapidly and aggressively, forming dense thickets, and its quick growth often leads to catastrophic breakage due to a weak branching structure.[3] Not infrequently, the branches fall on houses and cars, or even people.

Though these trees will be phased out of the nursery trade over the next two years, how do we deal with the trees in the landscape that will continue to multiply? One idea that has been successfully used in states across the country and is part of this bill is a bounty or native tree replacement program. States including Virginia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, Ohio and Missouri have used bounty programs to encourage property owners to remove this harmful and potentially dangerous tree from their landscapes. Most of the programs offer a native replacement tree in exchange for the invasive tree to provide many benefits for generations to come.

Tree of Heaven, found in all but one Maryland county, is a tough hardy tree that grows almost anywhere and tolerates a wide range of soils, light conditions and moisture, seemingly a perfect urban tree. This tree, however, is an exceedingly aggressive grower and can damage pavement, residential foundations

and underground utilities. The wood has little value, and the trees have a high fall rate, making them unsafe in developed landscapes. Tree of heaven forms dense thickets that provide minimal habitat for native wildlife, and it leaches chemicals into the soil that are toxic to neighboring plants. A single tree can produce over 300,000 seeds annually, which are dispersed by wind and water, and trees can send out underground stems up to 50 feet.[4] Finally, this tree is the preferred host of the spotted lantern fly, which causes damage and losses to agricultural crops like grapes, apples, peaches, and hops, as well as damage to native trees like red maples and black walnuts. Removing this tree from the landscape is a challenge and the public needs the best possible information on how to control this species.

As part of the sponsor amendments to this bill, the University of Maryland Extension is updating its online information for these invasive species to help the public accurately identify the species and learn about the best management methods. The proper identification and removal of tree of heaven, Callery pear, and other invasive trees, as well as replacement with native trees, will provide our ecosystems the help so desperately needed to survive and thrive in a changing climate.

The Maryland Native Plant Society respectfully requests a favorable with amendment report on HB35.

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Citations

[1] Pimentel, D., L. Lach, R. Zuniga, D. Morrison. Environmental and Economic Costs of Nonindigenous Species in the United States, BioScience, Volume 50, Issue 1, January 2000, 53– 65.
https://entnemdept.ufl.edu/Hodges/als4161/Secure/PDF%20Files/Articles/Environmental_and_Economic.pdf
[2] Roy, H., A. Pauchard, P. Stoett, T. Renard Truong, S. Backer, et.al. 2023. IPBES Invasive Alien Species Assessment: Summary for Policymakers. Zenodo.
[3] University of Maryland Extension. Accessed 2/1/26. Callery (Bradford) Pear.
https://extension.umd.edu/resource/callery-bradford-pear/
[4] University of Maryland Extension. Accessed 2/1/26. Invasives in Your Woodland: Tree-of-Heaven (Ailanthus) (Updated 2025).
https://extension.umd.edu/resource/invasives-your-woodland-tree-heaven-ailanthus-updated-2025/

Bounty and Native Tree Replacement Programs Programs

Virginia:
https://dof.virginia.gov/forest-management-health/forest-health/financial-assistance-program/callery-pear-exchange-program/
South Carolina: https://www.clemson.edu/extension/bradford-pear/
North Carolina: https://www.treebountync.com/
Indiana: https://www.in.gov/nirpc/environment/communitree/invasive-species-replacement-program/
Illinois: https://www.illinoisplants.org/callery-pear/?doing_wp_cron=1769103306.3896489143371582031250
Kentucky: https://news.mgcafe.uky.edu/article/bradford-pear-bounty-program-combats-invasive-kentucky-trees
Ohio: https://www.lickingpollinatorpathway.org/bounty
Missouri: https://moinvasives.org/2025/01/31/2025-callery-pear-buyback/