

My name is Marney Bruce and I am a past president of the Maryland Native Plant Society and current co-president of Chesapeake Wild Ones Natural Landscaping.

Bill number HB 279 addresses low-impact landscaping which includes rain gardens and other features that use natural principles to capture and return rainwater to the soil, recharging the water table. These features also filter rainwater of excess nutrients that can pollute our streams and ultimately reach the Chesapeake Bay.

Stormwater management is an important part of Maryland's environmental concerns. With our changing weather patterns, homeowners have a large role to play in preventing stormwater from accelerating stream channel erosion and alleviating local flooding. When thousands of gardeners in HOAs all over Maryland are encouraged to replace turf grass with conservation or low-impact landscaping, urban runoff will lessen.

But presently, many HOAs make it difficult for homeowners to have anything other than lawns. Turf grass is the number-one irrigated crop in Maryland, where 1.3 million acres are devoted to it. This law is needed to help change the way residents see natural landscaping.

Low-impact gardening can also include landscaping that reduces the need for supplemental treated water from our aquifers, reservoirs, creeks and rivers. In times of drought, our rivers and our local streams are stressed already, so reducing the amount of irrigation needed, as well as recharging the groundwater, makes sense.

The State of Maryland is spending an immense amount of money implementing stormwater best management practices, repairing streams and trying to reverse the damage already done to the Chesapeake Bay. This bill is a good start at finding low-cost ways to heal our local environment and protect communities from the vagaries of weather.