



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education*

House Bill 1306

Aquatic Habitat Protection Act

DATE: **MARCH 4, 2020**

POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation strongly supports the Aquatic Habitat Protection Act (HB 1306) as a means to safeguard one of the Bay's most important habitats, underwater seagrass beds. HB 1306 would ensure information on submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) beds is kept up to date and these important habitats are afforded the protections from damage.

SAV is a critically important habitat in Chesapeake Bay. Underwater grasses provide habitat and nursery areas to fish and blue crabs. SAV also serves as a food item for turtles and foraging waterfowl who use the Chesapeake Bay as a stopover on their migratory routes. The wave-dampening effect of SAV results in increased water clarity and reduced erosion of adjacent shorelines. Seagrasses, along with mangroves and marshes, are also considered "blue carbon" habitats, due to their ability to remove and sequester carbon from the atmosphere. One acre of seagrass can remove 1,230 pounds of carbon per acre per year.¹

The rebound of Chesapeake Bay seagrasses is the largest recorded in the world and has been directly linked to the reduction in nutrient inputs under the Chesapeake Bay Clean Water Blueprint or "pollution diet."² In 2018, SAV acreage exceeded 100,000 acres for the first time since 1979. Despite this significant achievement, there is much more work to do to achieve the goal of 185,000 acres of SAV established by the 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement.³

HB 1306 ensures that the progress made to date is not undermined by practices that would directly or indirectly harm SAV. HB 1306 requires the Department of Natural Resources to update the boundaries of SAV protection zones annually and provide maps of those areas online. It also establishes a 150 buffer around SAV to ensure that harvesting activities do not result in mechanical removal of SAV or disturbance of the seed bank, which can negatively impact seed germination.

For these reasons, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation recommends a favorable report on HB 1306 from the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee. Please contact Dr. Allison Colden at acolden@cbf.org or 443-482-2160 with any questions.

¹ Mcleod, E. *et al.* 2011. A blueprint for blue carbon: toward in improved understanding of the role of vegetated coastal habitats in sequestering CO₂. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*. 9 (10) 552-560. <https://doi.org/10.1890/110004>

² Lefcheck, J.S. *et al.* 2018. Long-term nutrient reductions lead to the unprecedented recovery of a temperate coastal region. *Proceedings of the National Academies of Sciences*. 115 (14) 3658-3662. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1715798115>

³ Chesapeake Progress. Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV). <https://www.chesapeakeprogress.com/abundant-life/sav>

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