



National Headquarters

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**Testimony Concerning HB 1425 –
Climate Solutions Act of 2020 – Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Act
Submitted to the Environment and Transportation and Economic Matters Committees
March 4, 2020**

Position: Favorable With Amendments

Esteemed Chairs, Vice-Chairs, and Members of the Committees,

I work on climate issues for Defenders of Wildlife, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to the protection of native plants and animals in their natural communities. We represent almost two million members and supporters nationwide. I have over twenty years of experience conducting forest, wetland, and wildlife assessments in Maryland and elsewhere, and developed Maryland's Green Infrastructure Assessment while employed at the Department of Natural Resources.

Climate change is a global emergency. It's here, and it's happening now. We are already seeing unprecedented heat waves, fires, and storms. Without action, these will get exponentially worse. Of particular interest to Defenders supporters, there is overwhelming scientific consensus that the world faces a Sixth Mass Extinction and that climate change is a significant driver of this crisis. A U.N. report found that over one million species are at risk of extinction.¹ This concern is not limited to wildlife enthusiasts—polls show that the vast majority of Americans consider nature and conservation as essential to their quality of life.²

Facing a global emergency, we must act to reduce the impacts of climate change to the greatest extent possible. Defenders of Wildlife applauds the State of Maryland for its steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and supports the goals of House Bill 1425 to achieve net-zero statewide emissions by 2045. We especially applaud the inclusion of interim goals and specific recommendations, and the recognition that disadvantaged and vulnerable communities may be especially hard hit if no action is taken. And we applaud the provision to plant 1,000,000 trees over the previous year's baseline, as a measure to sequester carbon and provide other benefits to humans and wildlife.

Forests provide numerous benefits beyond carbon sequestration, including wildlife habitat, flood protection, aquifer recharge, cleaner water and air, recreation, aesthetics, and more. However, Natural Resources § 5-102(b) is almost solely focused on forests from the standpoint of the wood and pulp industries. While these industries are important, the retaining and expansion of natural forests is also important. Defenders therefore requests an addition, **Natural Resources § 5-102(b)(8)(iv)**, to read: **THE CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION OF NATURAL FORESTS TO PROVIDE WILDLIFE HABITAT AND OTHER ECOLOGICAL BENEFITS AS LISTED IN § 5-102(a)(1)-(7).**

The burning of trees for fuel is at best carbon-neutral (and may likely result in more CO₂ in the atmosphere)³, whereas their long-term retention, or sustainable use for timber products, is generally carbon-negative (less CO₂ in the atmosphere). Defenders urges **striking Natural Resources § 5-102(b)[(5)](6)**. The State should not encourage the cutting trees for fuel.

Finally, the planting of trees should be done strategically and mindful of ecological context, recognizing that land availability and mitigation requirements might not always make this possible. For example, restoration can be targeted to protect waterways, enhance forest-dependent wildlife habitat, and provide viable wildlife corridors. The details may be best handled by Department of Natural Resources staff, but potential bill language could **end with: § 5-102(b)(2) ... AND PLANTED STRATEGICALLY TO MAXIMIZE WATER QUALITY, WILDLIFE HABITAT, AND OTHER ECOLOGICAL BENEFITS.**

Respectfully submitted,

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¹ Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). 2019. IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.

² Poll conducted by Public Opinion Strategies and Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates, June 16-19, 2012, with registered voters nationally who were likely to cast ballots in the 2012 election.

³ Schlesinger, W. H. 2018. Are wood pellets a green fuel? *Science* Vol. 359, Issue 6382, pp. 1328-1329