



Assateague Coastal Trust - PO Box 731, Berlin, MD 21811 - 410-629-1538

HB314 – Plastic Bag Reduction Act – Environment and Transportation
January 28, 2021
Position: Favorable

Assateague Coastal Trust (ACT) is an environmental advocacy organization on the Eastern Shore of Maryland with over 2000 members. Since 1970, ACT has been the voice for Delmarva's waterways and continues to defend the coastal watershed and surrounding region through community outreach, monitoring pollution, and advocating for protective environmental laws and policy.

The Assateague Coastal Trust's mission is to promote and encourage the protection of the health, productivity, and sustainability of the coastal bays watershed of Delmarva through advocacy, education and conservation.

In February, 2018, ACT initiated the Trash Free Assateague (TFA) program as a means to address the single use plastic issues that have become a global scale concern. The extreme northern reaches of Assateague Island National Seashore have resided as an area of primary concern and focus of the TFA program. We commonly reference the area as the *North Point* of Assateague Island. It is located several hundred yards south of Ocean City, Maryland, separated by an inlet and the Sinepuxent Bay. Despite its relatively isolated location, the *North Point* is **routinely inundated with plastic trash that is arriving by way of tide, swell, and wind, as well as an increase in visitors to this part of the National Seashore in recent years.**

TFA held the first public beach cleanup on the *North Point* in April 2018. With 12 volunteers and assistance from the National Park Service, 200 pounds of trash, the majority of which consisted of lightweight single use plastics, was removed from this relatively small area of the National Seashore. During a later TFA program at the *North Point*, **we discovered an area along the shoreline at the hightide zone where, specifically, single use plastic bags had accumulated.**

Initially believed to be an area of decomposing marine vegetation, **the area proved to be a mat of plastic grocery bags that had collected over time, being transported by the tide and deposited in an area along the northern side of the island** where it accumulated at a cut in the shoreline. Though we were unable to remove all of the bags due to the deposition of sand over much of the area, **approximately 60 pounds of the mat of plastic was removed.**

The area of accumulated plastic bags still remains on the *North Point*, as it is continually fed a stream of trash, plastic debris, and plastic bags with each turn of the tide. **It is known that as these bags and other plastics remain in the free environment, they will begin breaking down into micro plastics and the chemical constituents which**

eventually manifest into surrounding soils, the hydrologic cycle, and the food chain, a situation which poses a threat to the human population and the rest of the biological community. The North Point of Assateague Island National Seashore is an environmental externality.

The adverse effects which society's convenience oriented lifestyle inflicts on our environment have a very broad reach. The excessive production of, and consequential dependence on single use plastics, including plastic bags, plague the health of our water, land, and the entire biologic community. Many of the areas bearing the burden of plastics are environments which have long remained natural havens on the Delmarva Peninsula in Maryland. These areas are natural resources. They are absolutely essential to the quality of the economy and have long been symbolic of the eastern shore. They are areas worth protecting.

Aside of the known threat to marine life and other wildlife, and the adverse health implications which plastics in the free environment pose, ACT's TFA program is founded on the philosophy that what is on our land and in our waters is representative of the level of respect that we have for our environment, our community, and ourselves.

For these reasons, Assateague Coastal Trust supports HB314 and we ask this Committee to give a FAVORABLE vote on this bill and move it to the House Floor. Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony in support of HB314.

Sincerely,



W.R. Weiland, Watershed Specialist
Assateague Coastal Trust