

Wednesday February 24, 2021

TO: Kumar Barve, Chair of House Environment & Transportation Committee; and Committee Members

FROM: Caitlin Kerr, The Nature Conservancy, Conservation & Climate Policy Analyst

POSITION: Support HB 1133 Tree Planting – Urban Trees Program and Commission for the Innovation and Advancement of Carbon Markets and Sustainable Tree Plantings

The Nature Conservancy (the Conservancy) supports HB 1133 offered by Delegate Bridges. HB 1133 seeks to further Maryland's progress on reversing inequities in urban tree cover throughout the state. It also advances the Maryland-based carbon offset market's establishment in order to support more tree plantings. Urban trees provide cost-effective, economically valuable co-benefits including ecosystem services like carbon dioxide sequestration, water filtration, flood mitigation, heat reduction, air quality improvement, and native trees provide critical wildlife habitat. These impacts can improve both mental and physical health. Furthermore, a carbon offset market could draw on private investment to support additional tree plantings. The Conservancy has significant experience here in Maryland and around the world working with private finance to implement conservation projects. This bill creates an opportunity to engage with and enhance the participation of private finance to both accelerate tree planting and reduce the costs of plantings, while also gaining the most significant and cost-effective co-benefits.

Nature is the climate solution hiding in plain sight. Natural climate solutions (NCS) protect biodiversity, restore watersheds, and improve human health. The Conservancy led the foundational science on NCS¹ and we know that intense collaboration between frontline communities, governments, large and small non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private financing is essential to achieve the transformational change that is necessary to combat climate change.

Urban trees provide critical public health benefits. In Baltimore City, temperatures reach up to 21°F hotter than in surrounding rural areas. By 2050, the city is estimated to experience five times as many dangerous heat days with a heat index over 105°F as we did at the start of the century. These impacts are not limited to cities; across Maryland, we average ten days a year when heat exceeds dangerous levels. This number is predicted to rise to forty days annually by 2050. Extreme heat can worsen existing illnesses, posing severe threats to vulnerable individuals. It can also cause mental and physical stress, heat-related illnesses, and sometimes deaths. Shaded surfaces can be up to 20-45°F cooler than peak temperatures of unshaded surfaces. Evaporation and transpiration processes in plants can reduce peak temperatures in the area by 2-9°F.

The Conservancy commends Delegate Bridges for working to reverse existing inequities in tree cover and also advancing natural climate solutions that can provide valuable environmental, economic, and public health co-benefits for years to come.

Therefore, we urge a favorable report on HB 1133.

¹ <https://www.pnas.org/content/114/44/11645>