



Larry Hogan, Governor
Boyd Rutherford, Lt. Governor
Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio, Secretary

January 28, 2021

The Honorable Shane Pendergrass
Chair, Health Government and Operations Committee
Room 241, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Letter of Information – House Bill 92 – Procurement – Invasive and Nonnative Plant Species – Prohibition on Use of State Funds

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources provides the following information on House Bill 92. This bill prohibits the use of State funds to purchase or plant invasive or nonnative plant species, authorizes the Board of Public Works to grant waivers under certain circumstances, and requires a list of native plant species to be made available.

Invasive and nonnative plants are having a significant detrimental impact on natural habitats and native species throughout the world. In the U.S., approximately 45 percent of rare, threatened or endangered species are at risk due to invasive species. Human health and economies are also at risk from invasive species. The impacts of nonnative and invasive species on our natural ecosystems and economy cost billions of dollars each year. Many of our commercial, agricultural, and recreational activities depend on healthy ecosystems supported by native plants and animals.

Native plants are those that occur naturally in a region in which they evolved. They are the ecological basis upon which life depends, capturing carbon, enriching the soil, filtering and managing water resources and supporting wildlife. Without native plants and the insects that co-evolved with them, native bird populations cannot survive. The World Conservation Union estimates that 12 percent of all bird species are threatened with extinction due to habitat loss and invasive species. Neotropical bird species, such as wrens, hawks and warblers, have declined nearly 50 percent since 1966. Native plants are essential to supporting populations of insects that are needed for the survival of bird nestlings. Research has shown, for example, that native oak trees support over 500 species of caterpillars whereas nonnative ginkgo trees, a commonly planted landscape tree from Asia, host only 5 species of caterpillars. When it takes over 6,000 caterpillars to raise one brood of chickadees, the loss of native plants results in a significant decline in chickadee populations.

DNR has prioritized the enhancement and restoration of native habitats on public lands by planting hundreds of acres of pollinator meadows, reducing lawns in park areas, planting tens of thousands of native trees and bushes, and removing invasive plant and animal species. The department is also educating visitors about the importance of incorporating native plants in their gardens and reducing their lawn areas to eliminate the need to use pesticides and to contribute to supporting Maryland's diverse natural plant and animal species.

The department would like to work with the sponsor of the legislation to strengthen the bill's implementation provisions and to work out the lack of clarity on how this procurement ban is intended to work.

Thank you again for allowing the department to provide the above information on HB 92 for the committee's careful consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

James W. McKitrick
Director, Legislative and Constituent Services