



Date: March 9, 2022

Bill: SB 791- Natural Resources - Land Conservation - Establishment of Goals and Programs (Maryland the Beautiful Act)

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Guzzone and Members of the Committee:

The National Aquarium respectfully requests a favorable report for **SB 791- Natural Resources - Land Conservation - Establishment of Goals and Programs (Maryland the Beautiful Act)**, which sets a land conservation goal for Maryland to conserve 30% of state lands by 2030 and 40% by 2040.

Nature is necessary for human existence, yet human activities are significantly harming our life support systems. Human activities are causing biodiversity – diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems – to decline at an unprecedented rate, with an estimated 1 million species facing extinction in the coming decades¹. In terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems, the primary driver is land-use change. The global trend holds across Maryland, home to diverse habitats for birds, plants and wildlife as well as people. Our state’s landscape has changed dramatically over the past century. Hundreds of thousands of acres of forestland serving as important habitat for wildlife have been developed. More than 500 species and subspecies of plants and animals are recognized in Maryland’s protected species regulations; the state’s current Wildlife Action Plan notes that many other species are declining and may soon warrant listing. Currently, 39 of these species are listed as threatened or endangered according to the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

In short, we must build on existing conservation and accelerate the pace, and as Maryland continues to grow, we must ensure that all Marylanders are able to enjoy and benefit from nature. The Maryland the Beautiful Act is a strong step forward towards ensuring that nature and people can thrive. This legislation will improve land conservation throughout the state, by setting achievable goals and establishing clear mechanisms for implementation, including increased incentives for conservation on private land and a ‘ Greenspace Equity Program ’ to support community-led projects. Building greenspace, stewardship of forests, and other land conservation activities benefit water quality as well as wetland and coastal ecosystems.

Looking ahead, the state should also outline similar goals for conservation of its waters, as recently recommended by the State Park Investment Commission and to be consistent with the country’s national conservation goal established in 2021², to conserve, connect and restore 30% of our lands and waters by 2030 for the sake of our economy, health and well-being.

We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 791.

Contact:

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¹ IPBES (2019): Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. E. S. Brondizio, J. Settele, S. Díaz, and H. T. Ngo (editors). IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany. 1148 pages. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3831673>

² Presidential Executive Order 14008, Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad/>