



# CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Environmental Protection and Restoration  
Environmental Education

## House Bill 884

State Conservation Land - Old-Growth Forests - Protection

Date: March 30, 2022

Position: **Support**

To: Education, Health, & Environmental Affairs

From: Erik Fisher, AICP, MD Land Use Planner

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** HB 884, which provides important protections for old-growth forests on state-owned lands. Old-growth forests provide unique and powerful environmental and social benefits, protecting biodiversity, fighting climate change, improving water quality, and promoting human health.

**Old-growth forests are unique ecosystems that keep Marylanders healthy and play a vital role in our region's environment.** While nearly all forested areas improve environmental conditions, the returns are often the greatest in old-growth forests – and some benefits can only be realized in these special areas. Old-growth forests sequester carbon at very high rates, create topsoil, provide microhabitats for fungi and fauna in accumulated dead wood, and provide a reservoir of diverse tree and understory species that can seed other areas. The mature trees and soil structure in old-growth forests also act as the Bay's best natural filter for polluted runoff, capturing nutrients and sediment that would otherwise foul nearby waterways.

**Old-growth forests are rare and at risk of elimination without focused management.**

The term “forest” is used to describe a continuum of wooded lands, from emergent natural regeneration of saplings to young pine stands, patches of maturing mixed hardwoods, and fully developed, multi-layered forest ecosystems. Existing state laws generally do not distinguish between these various types of forest. As a result, old-growth forests are usually managed as part of a much larger class of wooded lands governed by rules that allow for significant impact and loss. But according to the Old Growth Forest Network, less than 1% of our region's remaining forest land is old-growth. As these areas are undefined and largely unprotected in statute, Maryland could silently and unwittingly lose its remaining old-growth forests.

**The protection afforded by HB 884 ensures a future for Maryland's old-growth forests on public land.**

HB 884 adopts a definition of old-growth forests that is firmly rooted in science and practice, and extends protection from logging to forests meeting those criteria in state parks and wildlife management areas (WMAs). This procedure will help state land managers steer logging to more suitable areas and safeguard the limited remaining public old-growth forests in Maryland. Extending this protection to old-growth forests in state Natural Resource Management Areas (NRMAs) would also be appropriate, as these lands are managed in like manner to state parks and WMAs.

**CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on HB 884.** For more information, please contact Robin Jessica Clark, Maryland Staff Attorney at [rclark@cbf.org](mailto:rclark@cbf.org) and 443.995.8753.

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The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) is a non-profit environmental education and advocacy organization dedicated to the restoration and protection of the Chesapeake Bay. With over 300,000 members and e-subscribers, including over 109,000 in Maryland alone, CBF works to educate the public and to protect the interest of the Chesapeake and its resources.