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Committee: Education, Health and Environmental Affairs

Testimony on: HB784 “Department of Natural Resources – Irreplaceable Natural Areas Program - Establishment”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: March 22, 2022

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports HB 784. The bill would establish an Irreplaceable Natural Areas Program in the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for the purpose of preserving Maryland’s native biodiversity on State-owned land managed by the DNR for current and future residents of the state.

Maryland's native ecosystems and plant and animal species are disappearing due to development, invasive species, climate change, and insufficient protection, management, and restoration. Over the years, these factors have contributed to changes in Maryland’s biodiversity. Over one third of Maryland native plant species are being tracked due to threats of their survival.¹ Over 300 species of Maryland’s wildlife species are classified as rare.²

Sierra Club members and supporters find value in ecosystems that support our native plants and animals. These highly functional ecosystems are critical not only to preserving biodiversity, but also to mediate effects of climate change, absorb storm water runoff, buffer temperature fluctuations, and provide carbon sinks. In addition to these environmental services, native plants provide food for essential pollinators.

The Irreplaceable Natural Areas Program will give DNR the directive to protect these exceptional natural places. While threats are increasing to native habitats and species, establishment of this program will require DNR to delineate these areas and develop compatible activities that ensure their long-term survival. We recommend a favorable report.

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¹ Knapp, Wesley; F. C. Naczi, Robert (2021): Vascular Plants of Maryland, USA: A Comprehensive Account of the State's Botanical Diversity. Smithsonian Contributions to Botany. Book. <https://doi.org/10.5479/si.14605674>

² DNR, Maryland’s Wildlife Species, https://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/Pages/plants_wildlife/mdwllists.aspx