



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education

House Bill 784

Department of Natural Resources - Irreplaceable Natural Areas Program – Establishment

Date: February 23, 2022

To: Environment & Transportation Committee

Position: Support

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MD Land Use Planner

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** HB 784, which locates areas of high biodiversity and unique natural communities on state-owned lands, and identifies management strategies that support them. This bill integrates existing environmental data and programs to ensure proactive, sustainable management of truly irreplaceable natural areas.

State-owned lands serve as reservoirs of biological diversity and quality that keep Maryland's environment healthy and resilient. Positioned between southern and northern climates, and stretching from the mountains to the coast, Maryland is home to a disproportionately high variety of plant and animal species. This ecological diversity provides us with a strong and resilient natural environment. A greater variety of plant and animal species can more precisely regulate environmental conditions, preserving the health of land and water. While challenged by pressures like climate change and sea level rise, biodiversity also provides a foundation for our environment to adapt and withstand their impacts.

HB 784 integrates existing environmental data and planning to proactively protect these resources.

The state maintains a wealth of environmental information to draw upon when locating irreplaceable natural areas. In addition to Maryland's comprehensive catalog of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data, many of the lands subject to HB 784 were surveyed and inventoried for the scoring systems that guide the state's land acquisition and easement purchase decisions. Similarly, the state has invested in plans such as Greenprint and Targeted Ecological Areas that delineate and characterize green infrastructure, forests, stream buffers and other habitat. The information and recommendations in these plans can inform the development of management strategies specific to the needs of each natural area.

Protecting and promoting biodiversity requires an integrated management approach. Most of Maryland's existing environmental statutes manage a specific type of environmental feature, be they forests, wetlands, streams, floodplains, endangered species, or shorelines. HB 784 proactively brings data, rules and practices together to set clear, science-based expectations for the activities that are compatible with these precious natural spaces.

CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on HB 784. For more information, please contact Robin Jessica Clark, Maryland Staff Attorney at rclark@cbf.org and 443.995.8753.

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