



Maryland Forests Association, Inc.

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Maryland's voice for forest, wildlife, and natural resource management

March 21, 2022

The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky, Chair
The Honorable Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice Chair
Maryland Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 West Wing 11 Bladen St.
Annapolis, Maryland 21401 – 1991

Re: HB784- Department of Natural Resources- Irreplaceable Areas Program- Establishment

Dear Chairman Pinsky, Vice Chairwoman Kagan, and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Forests Association (MFA) opposes the passage of HB784

Maryland Forests Association, Inc. (MFA) is Maryland's voice for forest, wildlife, and natural resource management. As a non-profit 501 c(3) membership-driven organization established in 1976, we represent the entire forest community statewide. Our membership includes private landowners, foresters, recreational groups, and industry stakeholders. We are a conservation-minded group that wants to see forests remain forests. We believe that if passed, HB784 would add an unnecessary, redundant level of planning and open the door to controversy over state land management., interfering with our vision which states: "The Maryland Forests Association envisions a future in which vibrant forests are maintained throughout the State, providing diverse economic and environmental benefits to all."

HB784 would require the DNR to develop regulations that identify, describe, and create a management prescription for areas that are home to species designated as rare, threatened, or endangered. DNR has already mapped these areas, and every inch of state-owned land has a designation based on its resources. This bill is ill-advised and should not be passed for these reasons:

First, it is redundant. Each state forest is managed according to a comprehensive plan, a crucial part of which is to identify ecologically significant areas, including areas critical for the habitat of individual wildlife areas. For example, the plan for the Eastern regional forests shows there are seven separate zones, each to be treated differently to preserve their ecological values. Then, each year, DNR drafts a work plan with specific projects designed to help achieve the longer-term goals outlined in the overall management plan. Finally, public review and comment are actively sought for each level of planning. This process results in 72,000 of the 217,000 acres of state forests are not available for timber harvests. According to DNR's recent "Forest Action Plan," if state lands managed as parks or wildlife management areas are included, the percent of lands where logging is prohibited jumps to 41%, according to DNR's recent "Forest Action Plan."

Second, the bill is based upon subjective terms. "Biodiversity," "irreplaceable natural area," "unique natural community," or "pristine example of a native ecosystem type" represent open invitations for disagreement among the scientific and legal community. Such terms are a staple of continued controversy over public land management across the country. Imposing this requirement on DNR and basing them on subjective terms will do nothing more than overturn the established planning and management process for state-owned lands.

I spent much of my career in Idaho, representing the large timber industry there. We were heavily dependent on timber from the national forests, the majority landowner in the state. It was a constant battle between the industry and those who opposed logging on public lands. Much of that fight centered around the interpretation of various subjective terms similar to those in HB784, and much of it devolved into complex legal battles. Only the lawyers did well in the process.

Finally, for those who might not trust the state's planning process or question its validity, it is essential to note that two third-party organizations, the "Sustainable Forests Initiative" and the "Forest Stewardship Council," both require identification and protection of important ecological areas. On a regular basis, teams of scientists and natural resource professionals visit each state forest for intensive field audits of their operations to ensure these organizations' objectives are being met. As a result, they issue a certification to the DNR that management of the state forests meets environmental values.

Bear in mind that state-managed timber lands make up fully one-third of all the parcels of forests over 10 acres on the lower Eastern Shore, so we take the management of state forests very seriously. Can what we witnessed on public lands out west happen here? We can only point to The Old Growth Forest Action Network's comments on last year's annual work plan for these lands, "In light of the scientific advances since the State forest lands were acquired, forest harvesting should be halted, or sharply curtailed on State forests." The provisions of this bill will provide the tools for those who clearly oppose active forest management, including logging, to achieve their goals.

We believe that state-owned land is already adequately protected and respectfully request an UNFAVORABLE report on HB784. We ask that the committee takes the time to learn more about sustainable forestry and the other laws and regulations that are already in place. The Maryland Forests Association would be more than happy to arrange a field tour.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joseph Hinson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "H".

Joseph Hinson
President
Maryland Forests Association