



Assateague Coastal Trust – PO Box 731, Berlin, MD 21811 – 410-629-1538

March 21st, 2022

The Honorable Senator Paul G. Pinsky, Chair
The Honorable Senator Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice-Chair
Senate Education, Health, and Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support for HB 882

Dear Honorable Chair Pinsky, Vice-Chair Kagan, and Senate Education, Health, and Environment Committee,

The Assateague Coastal Trust is in support of HB 882 and the proposal to expand the Pocomoke River Wildlands and adjust the Wildlands boundary to create a public access passageway in Worcester County.

Assateague Coastal Trust has been the leader for 50 years on the shore regarding discussions with town leaders, tourism partners, other NGOs, and community members to advance opportunities for economic development for the town of Snow Hill and neighboring areas. The proposal is consistent with the mission of Assateague Coastal Trust to increase the protection of important natural resources, enhance recreational opportunities, and support efforts to engage community members and visitors to the region in passive outdoor recreation.

Birdwatching, hiking, and biking rank high among interests for residents and for visitors to the area and expanding trail opportunities and connecting communities to trails and parks has never been more important. The pandemic has shown us that access to the outdoors and nature is critical to maintain both mental and physical health during these difficult times. Assateague State Park saw its biggest numbers ever in 2020- over 2.1 million visitors and 308,000 campers. With this area being a short drive from Assateague State Park, it can be expected that this will improve tourism and visitors for Pocomoke State Park. This project also provides an exciting opportunity for Snow Hill to provide residents with new recreational opportunities.

Protecting ecological areas along the Pocomoke River is critical for numerous bird species and a variety of mammals that make their home along the river's riparian areas. The proposed expansion will protect the large landscape areas along the Pocomoke River and provide new recreational opportunities for local communities and visitors to explore and to gain greater understanding of the benefits of land conservation.

With your support, we look forward to working with the Maryland Forest Service, Maryland Park Service, the Town of Snow Hill and other groups and individuals to plan a natural and cultural destination to benefit the region for years to come.

Thank you for your consideration, we urge a favorable report on HB882.

Gabrielle Ross, Assateague Coastkeeper
Assateague Coastal Trust