



P.O. Box 278
Riverdale, MD 20738

Committee: Education, Health and Environmental Affairs

Testimony on: SB 7 “Invasive and Native Plants – Classification, Listing, Use, and Sales and Use Tax”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: January 25, 2022

The Maryland Sierra Club submits this testimony in strong support of SB 7. This bill would require that any plants identified in the *Plant Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas* report be assigned by the Department of Agriculture (DOA) to the regulations on invasive plants. DOA would be able to add additional plants to the Tier 1 (causing severe harm), or Tier 2 (likely to result in substantial impact) categories. SB 7 would also require the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to publish a list of plants native to Maryland that would provide information on suitable alternatives to invasive plants. In addition, the bill would require that state agencies prioritize the use of native plants whenever possible and require DNR to inform nurseries and landscapers of the provisions of this bill. It would also eliminate the sales tax on native plants.

This bill will significantly benefit the agricultural, economic, and environmental health of Maryland. In Maryland invasive plants cause millions of dollars in economic and environmental damage to trees, crops, and wildlife, and impede recreation activities in Maryland.

Fast growing invasive plants deprive native plants of soil, water, nutrients, space, and light. Invasive plants have an unfair competitive advantage because they have no natural checks on their growth, such as pests or diseases, and may be unpalatable, so they can grow faster, crowd out or prevent the emergence of native plants, and become predominant, endangering necessary biodiversity.

Adaptation of ecosystems is an extremely slow process. Because they did not evolve here, invasive plants introduced hundreds of years ago by colonists have become naturalized in our region but often do not provide nutrients to Maryland wildlife. As with more recently introduced nonnative invasive plants, this threatens the dwindling populations of insects, small mammals, and birds in Maryland.

Furthermore, invasive plants can reduce crop yields, and many are unpalatable or toxic to livestock. They threaten ecosystem integrity, degrade cultural resources, and potentially interfere with visitor experiences in parks. They are also endangering our forests, since invasives such as English Ivy kill trees faster than forest stewards can manage them.

Benefits of stopping further introduction of invasive plants include:

- Preserved forest canopy which mitigates temperature extremes, e.g., hotspots

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.

- Increased carbon sequestration
- Decreased stormwater problems, as a diversity of native plants with different root depths allows the ground to hold more water
- Increased biodiversity, with more wildflowers such as spring beauty, native shrubs such as blackberry, and trees such as pawpaw in the Maryland landscape.

Finally, invasive plant species can impact several ecosystem properties, such as soil cover, nutrient cycling, wildfire resilience, and hydrology. Therefore, controlling invasive plants is a necessary step towards the restoration of an ecosystem.¹

The Maryland Sierra Club strongly supports this bill because we need accessible and up-to-date lists of both invasive plants and their native alternatives to better inform and guide stakeholders. To help ensure healthier ecosystems and a strong Maryland economy, the Maryland Sierra Club urges a favorable report on SB 7.

Lily Fountain
Chair, Natural Places Committee
lily.fountain@mdsierra.org

Josh Tulkin
Chapter Director
Josh.Tulkin@MDSierra.org

¹ Weidlich, E.W.A., Florido, F. G., Sorrini, T. B. & Brancalion, P. H. S. (2020). Controlling invasive plant species in ecological restoration: A global review; *Journal of Global Ecology*, 08 May.