

Wednesday, February 23, 2022

TO: Kumar Barve, Chair of Environment and Transportation Committee and Committee Members
FROM: Michelle Dietz, The Nature Conservancy, Director of Government Relations; and Cait Kerr, The Nature Conservancy, Climate and Conservation Policy Analyst,
POSITION: Support HB 784 - Department of Natural Resources - Irreplaceable Natural Areas Program - Establishment

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports HB 784 offered by Delegate Stein. TNC is a global conservation organization working to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. In Maryland, our work focuses on delivering science-based, on-the-ground solutions that secure clean water and healthy living environments for our communities, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing resilience in the face of a changing climate. We are dedicated to a future where people and nature thrive together.

TNC is part of a global effort to preserve the world's remaining wild and near-natural habitats, with the goal of protecting 30 percent of the planet by 2030. HB 784 aims to promote state-owned and managed lands' capacity to preserve biodiversity through establishing the Irreplaceable Natural Areas Program. This program expands the Maryland Department of Natural Resources' ability to protect threatened and endangered species by preserving the vital habitats that support these species. Establishing this program will preserve our state's unique biodiversity for current and future generations.

Each year, the United States loses an area the size of Delaware to development and unsustainable use. This land and biodiversity loss can often be irreversible. Here in Maryland, the lands and waters that surround us are irreplaceable resources. They are an invaluable part of our heritage, our economy, and our identity. Climate change and a wide range of human activities are impacting habitats at an unprecedented and unsustainable rate. The precipitous decline in biodiversity—the complex and wondrous system of life that sustains us all—is one of our greatest challenges; it is jeopardizing food and water supplies and undermining global, social and economic stability. Economists have estimated that nature contributes trillions of dollars to the global economy each year, in the form of ecosystem services such as pollination and water filtration and storage. By establishing the Irreplaceable Natural Areas Program, Maryland can take marked steps to reverse biodiversity loss in our state and create a future where natural areas can support the most vulnerable species and can continue to provide valuable ecosystem services on which state residents depend.

TNC commends Delegate Stein for advancing legislation aimed at protecting habitats to maintain Maryland's biodiversity and preserving irreplaceable ecosystem services as well as nature's intrinsic cultural and physical values.

Therefore, we urge a favorable report on HB 784.