



JAN H. GARDNER
Frederick County
Executive

HB 960

**Natural Resources – Forest
Mitigation Banks and the
Forest Conservation Fund -
Alterations**

County Position: SUPPORT

Date: March 2, 2022

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Frederick County Executive Jan Gardner urges **SUPPORT** for House Bill 960 – Natural Resources – Forest Mitigation Banks and the Forest Conservation Fund – Alterations.

Local governments work diligently to balance growth and economic activities with the commitment to protect natural resources and the environment and to address climate change issues. Over the past two decades, local jurisdictions have protected existing forests and valuable forest ecosystems through the State's forest banking program.

County Executive Gardner supports the provisions in the proposed legislation that:

- Restores the ability for local jurisdictions to continue to save existing forests and preserve existing forest ecosystems through the banking program by removing the approval deadline of December 31, 2020 for a forest conservation plan;
- Ensures the ability of local jurisdictions to include existing forest in the banking program in order to protect sensitive areas, including stream buffers, forested floodplain, wetlands, and habitats for rare, threatened or endangered species;
- Preserves the practice of forest banking until the Harry R. Hughes Center on Agro-Ecology completes a study to evaluate forest and tree cover in Maryland, and submits its findings to the General Assembly by December 1, 2023;
- Extends the timeframe that local jurisdictions have to use forest conservation funds for reforestation or afforestation from two years (or three growing periods) to five years (or six growing periods) to provide sufficient time to effectively use these funds for planting projects; and
- Ensures adequate time so support local jurisdictions planting efforts, which include the identification of suitable planting sites, negotiation with property owners, development and execution of legal agreements, creation of reforestation plans, and acquisition of surveying or planting services through the required procurement processes.

Frederick County Executive Gardner urges **SUPPORT** for House Bill 960.