



Friends of Maryland State Parks Foundation

*is a statewide, independent, all-volunteer, citizen 501 (c) 3 organization.
We are dedicated to **preserve, protect, enhance, and advocate** for our state parks.*

Friends of Maryland State Parks Written Testimony Great Maryland Outdoors Act SB541 & HB727

Friends Vision for Maryland State Parks:

Since 1906 Maryland State Parks have enhanced quality of life ideals by promoting health, safety, education, environmental stewardship, physical fitness, family enjoyment, and the general welfare of the public. Our parks' natural and recreational resources and cultural heritage should be sustained now and for all succeeding generations. We believe our park system should be the best and aspire to be a "National Model"¹.

Great Maryland Outdoors Act:

The Friends fully and enthusiastically support this landmark, comprehensive, bi-partisan, cross-filed legislation. It is holistically and historically transformational for Maryland's State Parks System. The reasons the Friends strongly encourage passing SB541 & HB727 are as follow:

Strategic Positioning: Parks & Recreation Commission

This Commission provides oversight and transparency through management control of the objectives of this legislation. It requires "best practice processes" of a Park Service Comprehensive Strategic Master Plan and Independent Expertise to review and advise on the Plan's goals and measures the results expected and achieved. This is an effective and efficient closed-loop system.

Access for All: Recreation, Culture, Historic, Diversity, and Equality of Access

- Creates and expands Land Acquisition of new and existing State Parks by allocating \$60M to improve expanded Recreation, Cultural & Historic Preservation, Diversity, and Equality of Access to meet the high-quality experience all Maryland citizens statewide deserve.
- Increases the capacity to offer Water-based Recreation Opportunities to meet citizen demand.
- Ensures Design Principles to effectively accommodate persons w/ disabilities and seniors.
- Focuses on Transportation, Connectivity, and Access to and w/in State Parks in response to the growth in attendance, doubling in the last decade to 20 million visitors.
- Reduces w/ the intent to Eliminate Closures due to continued growth in visitor demand.
- Reduces Park Degradation due to Overcrowding.
- Preserves and interprets the story of Black Marylanders and for the underserved, minorities, and other underrepresented communities.
- Authorizes the establishment of a new Freedman's State Park, a needed historical preservation connection to Black Marylanders.

Current State Park System: Human & Natural Resources, Buildings & Facilities, Roads & Parking

- Increases Rangers and Park Staff by 100, which has grown by only 4.6% over the last decade.
- Increases Critical Maintenance funding by \$80M to begin reducing the backlog.
- Increases Capital Improvements funding by \$70M for long-delayed projects.

Human Resources Management: Rangers, Park Maintenance Staff

- Requires timely reviews of Organizational Staffing and Pay Equity.
- Provides Park Staff w/ Emergency Services Responder Designation for occupational benefits and protections recognized as commensurate w/ their job requirements.

¹ Reference is the 2007 Maryland State Parks Funding Study, available upon request.



Friends of Maryland State Parks Foundation

is a statewide, independent, all-volunteer, citizen 501 (c) 3 organization.
We are dedicated to **preserve, protect, enhance, and advocate** for our state parks.

Friends of Maryland State Parks Written Testimony Great Maryland Outdoors Act SB541 & HB727

Good Organizational Systems:

- Recognizes and fosters the need for Sustainable Ecological Practices related to water quality, energy use, use of natural resources, and climate change-related resiliency.
- Recognizes and encourages Design Principles in Interpretation and Programming explaining natural and cultural resources, and enhancing equity in access.
- Implements the use of best practice Asset Management and Evaluation Systems for inventory, project management, project prioritization, and facility conditions assessments.
- Implements a strategically designed Volunteer Management System for 1000's of volunteers.

Quality of Life Benefits: State Parks improve citizens' quality of life², through increased property values, clean air and water, and offset climate change and pollution. When surveyed and polled, citizens continue to rate state parks very high in natural and historic/cultural resources, conservation, family values, and healthy lifestyle through recreation opportunities.

Economic Benefits: State parks are a major contributor to the economy³.

In 2021 it is estimated, at a minimum, state parks generated:

- \$50+ million in taxes & \$17+ million in visitor fees;
- \$25 to \$1 return on investment & \$1.3 billion in economic impact⁴;
- over 13,000 Full-Time Equivalent Jobs.

Volunteers:

5000 Volunteers and all the individual state parks Friends groups across the state have donated over 200,000 hours each year valued at over \$5.7 million⁵ and will be strategically managed.

- Skilled volunteers provide training and expertise in many highly technical areas.
- Volunteers provide diversity in the state park workforce.
- Volunteers provide unique perspectives, valuable insights, and can be some of the best advocates for parks and communities.
- Volunteer hours and numbers have long been significantly underreported due to a lack of up-to-date reporting software, and a lack of full-time volunteer and partnership coordinators in both parks and headquarters offices.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mel Poole, President, keeper1916@comcast.net

Tim Casey, Secretary, 17 Lochwynd Court Phoenix, MD 21131

443 801 6272 tjwcasey@comcast.net

Friends Website <http://friendsofmdparks.org/>

² Multiple Goucher polls since 2013, the 2016 MD State Parks Strategic Investment Plan (published in December 2016 & available upon request) and ongoing, continuous Park Service surveys.

³ 2010 Maryland State Parks Economic Impact & Visitor Study published in March 2011. Numbers are estimated for 2021 & non-pandemic inflated.

⁴ Maryland Outdoor Recreation Economic Commission Final Report December 2019. Park Service budget is .00115 of the state operating budget.

⁵ Reference is a highly conservative estimate using actual data from Jerusalem Mill, Cunningham, & Gambrills State Parks, & the non-profit IndependentSector.org & U of MD School of Public Policy for MD hourly volunteer rate of \$28.54. The calculation is available upon request.