



Larry Hogan, Governor
Boyd K. Rutherford, Lt. Governor
Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio, Secretary
Allan Fisher, Deputy Secretary

Bill Number: HB 882

Short Title: Natural Resources – Pocomoke River Wildland – Alteration of Boundaries

Department's Position: Support

Explanation of Department's Position

The Maryland Wildlands Preservation System is the state's counterpart to the federal government's National Wilderness Preservation System. Protected properties are designated as State Wildlands by the Maryland General Assembly. A State Wildland is a special protected area established by legislation that "overlays" all or part of a state park, forest, wildlife management area or other land unit.

As of today, there are over 65,956 acres of Wildlands in the state that are recognized as containing wilderness characteristics and otherwise outstanding and unique natural features worthy of preservation. There are three types of Wildlands defined; currently only types 1 and 2 have been identified in the Maryland Wildlands Preservation System.

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is proposing to add approximately 80 acres of the Pocomoke State Forest as new type 2 Wildlands. This bill would also exempt approximately two acres of Pocomoke State Forest from its statutory designation to allow the construction of an elevated walk-way trail that would connect the Town of Snow Hill directly to Pocomoke State Park. The public access trail would follow one of the old logging roads for over half of its length, while attempting to hug the outer portion of the property. The department has determined that construction in the pre-sited area would have no impact on rare species in the vicinity.

The trail would create a trail network from Snow Hill to Pocomoke City and has significant social, recreational and economic benefits. The trail would be developed through a collaborative planning process between the Maryland Forest Service, Maryland Park Service, and the Town of Snow Hill. Many county and local organizations are extremely eager to see it move forward as evidenced by the letters of support. It would also expand access and trail offerings to visitors, allowing them to have a unique opportunity to experience a Wildland, in keeping with one of the statutory purposes of establishing the Wildlands system.

As required by statute, a Public Hearing was held on the proposal on October 28, 2020. A total of 122 comments were received on the proposal during the 30-day public comment period. Of

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the comments received, 98% were in strong support for the proposal, including multiple organizations and local governmental agencies.

For these reasons, DNR respectfully requests the committee to grant a favorable report.

For any additional information, please feel free to contact our Legislative and Constituent Services Director, Bunky Luffman.