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**Committee: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs**

**Testimony on: HB 882 “Natural Resources – Pocomoke River Wildland – Alteration of Boundaries”**

**Position: Support**

**Hearing Date: March 22, 2022**

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly supports this bill to expand and adjust the boundaries of the Pocomoke River Wildland. This adjustment would add nearly 80 acres to the protected wildlands and allow for the creation of the Eastern Shore Rail Trail, which would run over 50 miles allowing increased access to the area for outdoor recreational activities.

The Sierra Club supports increasing the area of protected wildlands by adding a parcel of State Forest lands, which will benefit the overall ecology of the Wildland. Protecting trees and forests is beneficial to storm water management, mitigation of climate change effects, providing habitat for plants and animals, and providing clean air for Marylanders. Additionally, the change in boundaries would extend uninterrupted Wildland shoreline by 3,860 feet.

Creation of a recreational trail will improve access for people to enjoy and appreciate the forest and river while hiking, biking, fishing, and birding. We recommend that habitat be only minimally disturbed during construction of the trail so that the effect of edge habitat is minimized and the forest canopy overhead is maintained. In addition to benefiting wildlife, this will also create a more shaded and pleasant trail experience for people. This new trail would connect the town of Snow Hill’s protected area to the Wildland, bringing communities together and providing economic benefits to Worcester County.

In summary, this bill would both protect forest and wetland areas as well as improve the public access to enjoy the river and forest. We ask for a favorable report.

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