



SCENIC RIVERS LAND TRUST

PROTECTING ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY'S LAND AND WATER

Date: February 28, 2023
Bill Number: SB 470 – Natural Resources – Land Conservation – Establishment of Goals and Programs (Maryland the Beautiful Act)
Committee: Senate – Budget & Tax
Position: Support

Scenic Rivers Land Trust supports the Maryland the Beautiful Act (SB 470).

SB 470 would set a goal for Maryland to have 30% of its lands conserved by 2030 and 40% by 2040. Keeping a significant portion of our land wild and open allows nature and our communities to be resilient towards severe weather, helps our food systems to survive, and gives Maryland residents places of beauty, solace, and recreation.

Not only does it set a goal to measure our progress by, but it also increases the pace at which land trusts can save vulnerable parcels. A \$10,000,000 revolving loan program will allow land trusts to access funds in the nick of time to save an imperiled and important property. This is critical to these nonprofits (Scenic Rivers Land Trust being one of them) that witness precious properties slip through their fingers because they couldn't get grant funding fast enough. Often grant funding takes two to four years to obtain, which far too long when a property is already on the open market.

For example, in 2020 a 45-acre property became available for sale that was on our "Top 100" list of most important properties to conserve in Anne Arundel County. The landowners were only willing to wait a year for us to raise funds and purchase the property. Unfortunately, \$2.7 million is difficult for a small nonprofit to raise in that short amount of time. The landowners now have a contract with a developer, and they have recently submitted a subdivision application to build 40 homes.

I am delighted to see that in light of setting goals to increase the pace of conservation, this bill also provides annual funding to land trusts for stewardship, which is vital funding in ensuring that the land we protect stays protected in perpetuity. Our portfolios of conserved land are ever growing, and therefore we need ever increasing funding to keep a watchful eye and provide a helpful hand on the 93,000+ acres of land protected by local land trusts.

By passing the Maryland the Beautiful Act, we can help ensure that nature and people will continue to thrive in Maryland today and long into the future. We appreciate your service and respectfully request a favorable report.

Sincerely,

Sarah Knebel
Executive Director
Scenic Rivers Land Trust