



FOREVER
MARYLAND

Enhancing and Advancing Land Conservation

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Date: February 24, 2023
Bill Number: SB 470 - Natural Resources - Land Conservation - Establishment of Goals and Programs (Maryland the Beautiful Act)
Committee: Senate – Budget & Tax
Position: Support

Forever Maryland supports, SB 470 (Maryland the Beautiful) for the purpose of increasing the conservation of Maryland’s most important lands, while providing new support for monitoring and the stewardship of these lands. This bill sets a new state land preservation goal; creates a Rapid Response Revolving Loan Fund to help smaller and medium sized land trusts secure critical lands, quickly; and supports community nonprofits in improving the stewardship and health of lands.

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Approximately 29% of Maryland’s physical lands (not including waterways) are protected. The Maryland the Beautiful Act would create a new statewide conservation goal of conserving 40% of Maryland land by 2040, but it doesn’t stop there. Under direction of the Smart Growth Subcabinet, a plan would be put in place to achieve “40X40.” This bill provides greater resources to help the on-the-ground nonprofit land trusts, local governments, and other organizations that are working directly with landowners to conserve their land and improve the health of the lands.

This bill supports a one-time funded local Land Trust Revolving Loan Program, capitalized at \$10 million and administered by the Maryland Environmental Trust, to help local land trusts rapidly secure priority properties to accelerate private land conservation. After the land is eased, the funds would be paid back to the revolving loan fund program. The bill would also create a Maryland Environmental Trust “40X40 Implementation Grant” to help coordinate and support the implementation of greater land conservation.

Additionally, the Maryland the Beautiful bill would greatly improve upon the current *Keep Maryland Beautiful* grant program to support long-term stewardship of eased lands – especially agricultural lands, forest lands, or lands facing high degree of climate or invasive species threats. Greater support would also go to the current Citizen Stewardship Grant program, to support nonprofits that are on the front lines of community-led efforts to clean and green communities across the state.

Land trusts are tasked with permanently protecting Maryland’s most important spaces. From reduced flooding, carbon sequestration, species protection, increased local foods, greater recreation opportunities and much more, eased lands can provide numerous ecosystem services and public benefits.

We appreciate your service and respectfully request a favorable report.

For further information, please contact Forever Maryland’s Program and Policy Director, Josh Hastings, at 410-251-5268 or Josh@ForeverMaryland.org.

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