

Wednesday, February 15, 2023

TO: Brian Feldman, Chair of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee, and Committee Members

FROM: Michelle Dietz, The Nature Conservancy, Director of Government Relations; and Cait Kerr, The Nature Conservancy, Climate and Conservation Policy Analyst,

POSITION: Support SB 320 - Natural Resources - Wildlife Advisory Commission - Membership

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports SB 320 offered by Senator Brooks. TNC is a global conservation organization working to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. In Maryland, our work focuses on delivering science-based, on-the-ground solutions that secure clean water and healthy living environments for our communities, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing resilience in the face of a changing climate. We are dedicated to a future where people and nature thrive together.

SB 320 aims to alter the Wildlife Advisory Commission's membership by appointing an academic wildlife expert, in addition to representatives from the farming community, hunting or fishing communities, wildlife preservation community, and the passive wildlife recreation community. This change would expand the Commission's expertise and ability to protect threatened and endangered species.

Each year, the United States loses an area the size of Delaware to development and unsustainable use. This land and biodiversity loss can often be irreversible. Here in Maryland, the lands, waters, and species that surround us are irreplaceable resources. They are an invaluable part of our heritage, our economy, and our identity. Climate change and a wide range of human activities are impacting habitats at an unprecedented and unsustainable rate. By introducing new perspectives and expertise to the Wildlife Advisory Commission, Maryland can take marked steps to reverse biodiversity loss in our state.

The Appalachians are one of the most resilient, diverse, and productive ecosystems on Earth. TNC has prioritized conservation across this ancient chain of forested mountains, valleys, wetlands and rivers as a global imperative due to the high biological diversity of species, the carbon stored in the forests and the rich history and culture of this landscape, beginning with the original Indigenous stewards. The section of the Appalachians running through West Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania are a critical corridor for species migrating in response to climate change. This section, known as the Allegheny Front, is a priority landscape to preserve the rich biodiversity of the larger Appalachian range as climate change drives species to move and adapt. Serving as a habitat bridge between vast conservation lands in the southern and northern Appalachians, the Allegheny Front plays a critical role in keeping this continental ecosystem connected. The Wildlife Advisory Commission is critical to protecting the diverse species that rely on Maryland's unique landscape and adding new expertise and perspectives to the Commission will create additional capacity to achieve this mission.

TNC commends Senator Brooks for advancing legislation to maintain biodiversity in Maryland and across the region.

Therefore, we urge a favorable report on SB 320.