



HB 723 - Natural Resources - Forest Preservation and Retention

Position: SUPPORT

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Potomac Conservancy recommends a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 723 from the Environment and Transportation Committee.

Maryland's Forest Conservation Act, passed in 1991, introduced a minimum floor for mitigation when forests are cleared for development. But these standards are not equipped to address today's challenges to climate and clean water. An unbalanced reforestation ratio of a quarter acre planted for each acre cleared, combined with other credits, means that nearly two-thirds of a forested site can be felled with no replanting required at all. Without clear definitions and protections for the state's most valuable priority forests, too many are left fragmented and vulnerable to degradation.

Rapid deforestation is stripping Maryland's ability to absorb rainwater as streets, parking lots, and rooftops replace natural ground cover. And our climate crisis is only making rain and storm events more intense and harder to manage. Our region's record-setting rainfall in 2018 sent pollution levels soaring with disastrous short-term consequences for the Potomac's health. If left unchecked, polluted stormwater runoff in urban and suburban areas will continually increase and undo decades of progress to return clean streams to our communities.

HB 723 will update and strengthen forest goals and definitions to provide clarity and reflect new data, protect and conserve more forest land and tree canopy, and give local governments significantly greater flexibility to pursue solutions that meet local development priorities and advance equity. In summary, this legislation raises the standard for forest conservation, while also giving local governments and developers the tools they need to succeed in meeting it.

Potomac Conservancy respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE** report from this Committee on HB 723.