



P.O. Box 278
Riverdale, MD 20738

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB378 “Natural Resources - Black Bear Conflict Reduction and Damage Reimbursement Fund - Uses”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 15, 2023

The Maryland Sierra Club supports HB378, which expands the scope and application of the current “Black Bear Damage Reimbursement Fund” (Maryland Natural Resource Code 10-423.1) and renaming the fund, the “Black Bear Conflict Reduction and Damage Reimbursement Fund.” Alterations proposed by HB378 will increase the current Fund’s efficiency by:

- 1) Including funding for programs that encourage the use of preventative measures to reduce conflicts between citizens and Black Bears, reducing damages to business and property.
- 2) Increasing both the minimum and maximum amount of damages that can be reimbursed by the “Black Bear Damage Reimbursement Fund” per person on an annual basis.
- 3) Changing the qualifiers in grant application to extend eligibility to landowners, local governments, park and recreation departments, non-profit organizations, business, tribes, and higher education institutions.
- 4) Securing the continuation of the “Black Bear Conflict Reduction and Damage Reimbursement Fund” as a non-lapsing special fund to be controlled by the State Treasurer and State Comptroller.

The American Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*) is a keystone species in the ecological cycle of Maryland’s food web. Through a diet rich in edible plant life, Black Bears are responsible for the dispersal of seeds over large territories. The fish they consume and later deposit as scat, spreads marine-derived nitrogen onto the forested areas that surround lakes and rivers. The habitual grubbing Bears perform assist in the decomposition of dead logs and stumps while creating openings in the forest cover for sunlight to stimulate regeneration of young trees. Bears are consumers of carrion, further aiding the natural world’s cycle of decomposition and regrowth.

The American Black Bear characteristically avoids human contact and can be deterred from entering areas where people dwell using noises like soft radio music and ringing wind chimes. The sensitive nose of Bears is quick to avoid smells such as diluted ammonia and bleach. Securing food crops and also using tightly lidded trash containers can help in reducing odors that attract Black Bears. These are just a few of the non-lethal practices for which HB378 would provide funding to encourage, teach, and develop additional innovations.

It is in our conservational interest to invest in the prevention of conflict with Maryland’s population of Black Bears. The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club asks for a favorable report.

Rev. Melina Frame
Sierra Club Natural Places Committee
mellframe@yahoo.com

Josh Tulkin
Chapter Director
Josh.Tulkin@MDSierra.org

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.