

Samantha Pedder testimony on HB 983 (Maryland House of Representatives)  
Environment and Transportation Committee  
Friday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023

Thank you, Chairman Barve, for the chance to submit both oral and written testimony in support of HB 983 to advance conservation funding and support increased access to hunting and outdoor recreation for *all* people in Maryland.

My name is Samantha Pedder, and I am testifying on behalf of this bill for many personal and professional reasons. First, I am a landowner in Worcester county, Maryland, and have been since 2018. I've held a hunting or fishing license in this state as a non-resident almost every year for more than a decade. My family and I have treasured our time hunting and fishing in this state and have spent countless hours pursuing Maryland's natural resources – from the eastern shore to the forests of western Maryland. I also have mentored numerous new hunters in this state, teaching them to shoot firearms and taking them on their first hunts or fishing trips. As you can imagine, this state and its natural resources have significant meaning to me as a sportswoman. It is an honor to contribute to this conversation and support the continued successful management of these resources by the MD Department of Natural Resources (MD DNR).

Beyond my personal interests, I hold two degrees in wildlife and natural resource management and a master's in business administration. My career has been dedicated to assisting conservation organizations in "R3," or recruiting, retaining, and reactivating hunters and other outdoors people. I've worked on R3 efforts since 2011, when your northern neighbors, the Pennsylvania Game Commission, first employed me. I've traveled the country for my former employers, visiting state fish and wildlife agencies in their home offices and working with them to develop their R3 strategies. Just as MD DNR has recently done, I've helped agencies to host summits to engage user groups in their R3 strategy, and I've also reviewed and/or written R3 plans for the agencies. MD DNR also very recently had their statewide R3 plan endorsed – another milestone accomplishment for this agency investing in R3.

Some may know that this bill has been referred to as the "R3" bill in your state, and I can understand why. The term, R3, has become synonymous with modernizing agencies' and other organization's efforts to engage people of *all backgrounds* in outdoor recreation. For an agency, R3 might mean investing in new programs targeting adult hunters rather than just youth. They might go about this by adjusting fees for college students to pay in-state rather than non-resident prices. An investment in R3 might also be conducted by connecting urban and exurban audiences, people historically who may have yet to have had access to hunting and other outdoor recreation or outdoor education, with information and opportunities to become participants and stewards of Maryland's natural resources themselves

You see, the language in this bill could be considered a page from an R3 plan. This is the ideal situation for a state fish and wildlife agency to be in – one in which the mandates of this bill align with their current priorities AND provide extended funding to activate this plan. Capacity is often another constraint, and yet this bill again allocates eight new positions to the Wildlife Conservation, Education, and Outreach Program – these will be employees implementing the newly endorsed R3 plan in your state. The timing of this bill is very significant for your agency's success in implementing its R3 efforts, and I could personally not be more excited to see what your agency will do – if this bill is passed.

Overall, the conservation community is at an inflection point – the list of "needs" for conservation and wildlife management continues to increase while the agencies' budgets to do that management have not. I've worked with your agency's employees for several years now, and I can attest that they have the ability AND the motivation to implement these plans and ensure that the increased funding allocated to their agency is truly an investment, with the dividends yielding long-term support and participation inclusive of *all Marylanders* in hunting and other outdoor recreation. You can set your agency on the path to success with the passage of this bill.

As a non-resident license buyer, I am more than willing to pay an increased fee because, in my experience, this agency will ensure that those dollars are dedicated to conserving the resources I cherish, and more importantly provide increased opportunities for equitable access to these resources by people of all backgrounds. After today, with your approval, your state will be one-step closer to continuing to provide a positive future for wildlife management and outdoor recreation in Maryland. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of this legislation. It is my honor to provide my thoughts and opinions, and I thank you for your time.