

ShoreRivers Testimony SB281.docx (1).pdf

Uploaded by: Benjamin Ford

Position: FAV



**Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 281
Natural Resources – Submerged Aquatic Vegetation – Alteration or Removal Requirements**

January 26, 2024

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT** of **SB281**.

This legislation seeks to strengthen the criteria necessary for the alteration or removal of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) in the state of Maryland. This bill will require anyone seeking to modify SAV in tidal waters to seek approval from the Department of Natural Resources prior to disturbing SAV in any way. It will also reduce the allowable(?)width of areas of disturbance from 60 feet to 20 feet, allowing much more SAV to remain undisturbed. I believe that protecting and preserving these underwater ecosystems is important for our environment, our economy, and our ecosystem's resilience.

Submerged aquatic vegetation plays a pivotal role in maintaining the health and balance of our watersheds by providing:

Biodiversity Preservation: SAV provides essential habitat and nursery grounds for a wide variety of aquatic species. By preserving these underwater meadows, we ensure the survival of diverse ecosystems, contributing to the overall biodiversity of Maryland's waters.

Water Quality Improvement: SAV serves as a natural filter, improving water quality by absorbing excess nutrients and pollutants. Their presence also **sequesters carbon, helping to mitigate the effects of climate change** and storm surge, and enhancing the resilience of coastal areas.

Economic Benefits: Preserving SAV contributes significantly to the economic well-being of our state. Healthy aquatic ecosystems support recreational activities such as fishing, boating, and bird watching, driving tourism while providing livelihoods for watermen and many local communities.

Additionally, as part of the 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement, **Maryland has committed to increasing SAV habitat to 185,000 acres of underwater grasses in the Bay**, with a measured target of 130,000 acres by 2025. **Progress reached an estimated 76,462 acres of underwater grasses in 2022, far short of the restoration goal.**

Senate Bill 281 serves to further cement Maryland's commitment to preserving the invaluable submerged aquatic vegetation in Maryland's waters. By establishing clear requirements for their alteration or removal, we can ensure the long-term health and sustainability of these ecosystems. I urge you to support this legislation and contribute to the lasting protection of Maryland's natural resources.

Sincerely,

Benjamin Ford, Miles-Wye Riverkeeper, on behalf of ShoreRivers

ShoreRivers

Isabel Hardesty, Executive Director
Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper | Matt Pluta, Choptank Riverkeeper
Ben Ford, Miles Wye Riverkeeper | Zack Kelleher, Sassafras Riverkeeper

SB 281 - CBF - FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Doug Myers

Position: FAV



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education*

Senate Bill 281

Natural Resources – Submerged Aquatic Vegetation – Alteration or Removal
Requirements

Date: January 31, 2024

To: Education, Energy and Environment Committee

Position: Favorable

From: Doug Myers
Maryland Senior Scientist

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** SB 281 which makes important clarifications and updates to Maryland's submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) removal statute. The bill will now require, rather than encourage, notification to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) when SAV removal is proposed. It also reduces from 60' wide to 20' wide the allowed removal of Submerged Aquatic Vegetation to aid navigation. It further expands these requirements to all tidal waters, not just the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Submerged Aquatic Vegetation is a crucial habitat for many Bay organisms. Blue crabs find cover amongst the leaves during molting. Numerous fish species find cover and food from the grass blades themselves or the rich growth of algae and invertebrates that cover the leaves. Migrating waterfowl graze on the decaying leaves and roots during the winter. This bill's reduction in allowable width of control and restriction to trimming or cutting would allow regrowth of the plant canopy from the roots and protection of carbon sequestration benefit in the below ground biomass as well as some biological habitat. In the case of utility or telecommunications rights of way or wastewater treatment plants, complete removal of the 20' corridor is still allowed.

Both current law and the bill exempt holders of a national pollution discharge elimination system permit or a publicly or privately owned sewage treatment plant from the requirement to consult with DNR prior to SAV trimming or removal. CBF is not advocating for an alteration to this exemption at this time, but note that there is potentially a significant amount of SAV removal or alteration that may occur outside of the supervision of the Department.

CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on SB 281.

For more information, please contact Matt Stegman, Maryland Staff Attorney, at mstegman@cbf.org.

Maryland Office • Philip Merrill Environmental Center • 6 Herndon Avenue • Annapolis • Maryland • 21403

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) is a non-profit environmental education and advocacy organization dedicated to the restoration and protection of the Chesapeake Bay. With over 200,000 members and e-subscribers, including 71,000 in Maryland alone, CBF works to educate the public and to protect the interest of the Chesapeake and its resources.

Arundel Rivers FAV SB109.pdf

Uploaded by: Elle Bassett

Position: FAV



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**Testimony encouraging a FAVORABLE report on Senate Bill 281 – Natural Resources –
Submerged Aquatic Vegetation – Alteration or Removal Requirements**

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

January 31, 2024

Dear Chairman Feldman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT OF SB281**, on behalf of Arundel Rivers Federation. Arundel Rivers is a non-profit organization dedicated to the protection, preservation, and restoration of the South, West and Rhode Rivers with over 3,500 supporters. Our mission is to work with local communities to achieve clean, fishable, and swimmable waterways for present and future generations.

Submerged aquatic vegetation, or “SAV,” are a critical part of the Chesapeake ecosystem – providing food, habitat and oxygen, while also absorbing nutrients, trapping sediment, and preventing erosion. SAV contributes to better water quality, benefiting the economy, society, and ecology of the Bay. As part of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement, signed in 2014, Maryland has committed to increasing SAV habitat to 185,000 acres of underwater grasses in the Bay.

Senate Bill 281 will better protect our SAV beds and habitat by adding “trim”, “alter”, and/or “cut” to the approved methods of control of SAV when necessary as opposed to “removal” or “eradication” of SAV. Additionally, this bill will reduce the amount of SAV allowed to be controlled from 60ft to 20ft for navigable access or utility work. Complete removal of SAV roots will result in the decimation of that bed. This bill will better allow for our trimmed grass beds to rebound in future years, supporting our state restoration goals of SAV.

Arundel Rivers Federation applauds the Department for bringing forward this bill and we enthusiastically encourage and support the protection of SAV to improve local water quality, the fisheries economy, and to meet our restoration goals. As such, we respectfully request a **FAVORABLE REPORT on SB281**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elle Bassett".

Elle Bassett
South, West and Rhode Riverkeeper
Arundel Rivers Federation

SB0281_DNR_SUP_EEE_1-31-24.pdf

Uploaded by: Josh Kurtz

Position: FAV



Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Josh Kurtz, Secretary
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

January 31, 2024

BILL NUMBER: Senate Bill 281 – First Reader

SHORT TITLE: Natural Resources - Submerged Aquatic Vegetation - Alteration or Removal Requirements

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: SUPPORT

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT'S POSITION

The Department supports the alteration of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) removal requirements in Maryland's tidal waters. Currently, there is no documentation on the impacts of SAV removal for boating access. Requiring notification, rather than in current law where it is encouraged, will allow documentation on how, where, and when SAV removal is occurring, minimizing the loss of benefits to crucial living and coastal resources that rely on SAV for habitat, food, and other essential ecosystem services.

Additionally, the Department supports reducing the width from 60 feet to 20 feet for when the SAV may be removed without the approval of the Department. This only applies to public utilities, telecommunications, marinas, and property owners seeking ample access to a navigable channel. Lowering this threshold will better align it with other boating access and navigation practices as well as continue to ensure that the Department has better information on SAV removal.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) is a critical measure of Chesapeake Bay health and an important indicator in setting and evaluating progress for Maryland's restoration goals and water clarity attainment. Currently, SAV abundance in Maryland's portion of the Chesapeake Bay is 33% of historical levels. Within Maryland's Coastal Bays, SAV is only 24% of historic levels.

Both underwater grasses and macroalgae provide critical habitat and food for recreationally and commercially important species, like blue crabs, fish, and waterfowl. Underwater grasses also add oxygen to the water, absorb nutrients, sequester carbon, trap sediments, and reduce shoreline erosion. Because they respond quickly to improvements in water quality, underwater grasses are critical measures of progress towards the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement and the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL).

Contact: Dylan Behler, Director, Legislative and Constituent Services
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BILL EXPLANATION

This bill makes changes to the rules regarding the removal of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) in the tidal waters of Maryland. It now requires, instead of just suggesting, that people notify the Department before removing SAV for boating access. The exemptions for property and marina access are also changed so that they apply to the tidal waters of the State (including the Atlantic Coastal Bays) and only allow trimming or cutting of SAV, not harvesting, cutting, or completely removing the SAV. The bill also reduces the affected width of SAV disturbance from 60 feet to 20 feet, which is in line with other boating access and navigation practices.