

SB0300_DNR_SUP_EEE_1-31-24.pdf

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Position: FAV



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

January 31, 2024

BILL NUMBER: Senate Bill 300 – First Reader

SHORT TITLE: Natural Resources-Wildland Areas-Belt Woods Wildland

DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: SUPPORT

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION

The Departmental makes a minor modification to the Wildlands Law to facilitate plans to structurally stabilize two historically significant barns within the Belt Woods Wildland. In accordance with the advice of the Department’s Office of the Attorney General, existing restrictions and limitations on the use of mechanized equipment within designated wildlands prevent the Department from preserving these important historical structures. (Existing language allows the Department to remove the structures, but there is no provision for stabilizing, repairing or restoring them.) The proposed language is identical to that which already exists for two other wildland areas.

The Department has also worked with the Maryland-National Park and Planning Commission on a potential amendment for the Committee’s consideration to ensure that they are consulted prior to the work. That amendment is attached to this testimony.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Belt Woods was designated as a Wildland in 1997 to protect the unique old growth forest and sensitive species on the site. However, Belt Woods Natural Environment Area is on the Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties (PG:74A-38). The property was once known as “Oatland” or “Home Farm” and it was an investment property owned by the Calvert/Stuart families and primarily occupied by enslaved peoples. Two barns on the site have been identified as being eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

Likely built in about 1825 by enslaved labor, the Calvert Barn is an excellent example of an early 19th century tidewater tobacco barn. It is constructed using traditional tidewater building techniques and is a remarkably large and intact example. It is among the largest early 19th century tobacco barns in Prince George’s County, if not in Maryland. Furthermore, it possesses integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association and is eligible for listing under Criterion C of the National Register of Historic Places. The Seton Belt Barn, built between 1890 and 1900, is a large, distinctive barn with unique elements of Victorian design, such as pyramidal-shaped and louvered cupolas, a jerkinhead roof, and jigsaw pendants on the overhanging eaves lending an attention to decoration that is rarely seen on functional agricultural structures. The Seton Belt Barn

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embodies the distinctive characteristics of a unique type, period, and method of construction, and it also possesses high artistic values. Furthermore, it possesses integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association and is eligible for listing under Criterion C of the National Register of Historic Places.

Both of these barns have been deteriorating with the passage of time and are in need of significant repair. In previous fiscal years, funds were set aside for the work, but the Department was unable to move forward given the Wildland restrictions. At the recommendation of the Office of the Attorney General, the proposed language will allow historic study, stabilization and restoration of the structures within the Wildland after consultation with Maryland Historical Trust. The language proposed to be added already exists in the law for two other wildland areas (Mattawoman and Chapman). Unlike Belt Woods, these two wildlands were added more recently, and the importance of the historic features of the sites were recognized, and measures allowing for their preservation was included in their initial Wildland designation.

BILL EXPLANATION

This bill would enable the Department - in consultation with the Maryland Historical Trust - to move forward with structural assessment, stabilization and possible restoration of the historic barns at Belt Woods. It would allow the use of mechanized equipment within the Wildlands, but only for this stated purpose related to historic preservation, ensuring the protective intent of the Wildland law is maintained.

BY:

(To be offered in the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee)

AMENDMENT TO SENATE BILL 300
(First Reading File Bill)

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 3, after line 18, insert:

“(5) IN ADDITION TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF PARAGRAPH (4) OF THIS SUBSECTION, PRIOR TO THE DEPARTMENT UNDERTAKING ANY ACTIVITIES ON THE SETON BELT BARN, THE DEPARTMENT SHALL CONSULT WITH THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION.”; and in line 19, strike **“(5)”** and substitute **“(6)”**.

HB300 PresMD FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Nicholas Redding

Position: FAV



PRESERVATION MARYLAND

January 30, 2024

Hon. Brian J. Feldman
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 11 Bladen St.
Annapolis, Maryland

RE: SB300 FAVORABLE

Chairperson Feldman,

On behalf of the staff and Board of Directors of Preservation Maryland and our thousands of statewide supporters, I thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in **SUPPORT of SB300** – a piece of legislation that will allow the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (“DNR”) to preserve historic structures in the Belt Woods Natural Environment Area.

Preservation Maryland is the nonprofit, statewide voice for historic preservation that harnesses the power of historic places by revitalizing and reinvesting in communities, advocating, and building the historic trades workforce for the benefit of all Marylanders. (Learn more at: presmd.org)

This piece of simple legislation provides the department with the authority to rehabilitate historic properties at the site – some of which date to the late 18th century. Currently, the department is forbidden from making any improvements to the site, which is considered a Special Maryland Wildland. Just 8 miles from the D.C. border, the site is a National Natural Landmark and is one of the remaining stands of old growth hardwood forest on the Atlantic seaboard. The legislation will not change the status, protection, or preservation of the forest, but only permit the department to expend funds to stabilize the equally important 18th-century structures on-site before they are lost.

SB300 is a vital piece of legislation, and we urge a favorable report.

Favorable

Sincerely,

Nicholas A. Redding, President & CEO