



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

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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**

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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**

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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

Contact: Dylan Behler, Director, Legislative and Constituent Services  
dylan.behler@maryland.gov ♦ 410-260-8113 (office) ♦ 443-924-0891 (cell)

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**

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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)”**.