



HB1129 and SB902 Wildlife Crossing Legislation

TESTIMONY OF DR. MARK SOUTHERLAND -- Favorable

I received a Ph.D. and Smithsonian Fellowship in freshwater ecology and have consulted for federal, state, and local agencies on water resource issues for 30 years. I am the founder of Vernal Pool Partners and have served with the Maryland Academy of Sciences' Science Council, Maryland Water Monitoring Council, Howard County Environmental Sustainability Board, Howard County Conservancy, Patapsco Heritage Greenway, and Safe Skies Maryland.

Finding Wildlife Passage Opportunities

Maryland's Wildlife Crossing Bill will encourage the State Department of Transportation and the Department of Natural Resources to work together to identify the most strategic locations for incorporating crossings and wildlife passage features into transportation projects to help reduce road impacts on imperiled species and reduce wildlife-vehicle collision risks for motorists.

Creating Safety and Finding Funding

The bill will address the high number of animal-vehicle collisions and move Maryland toward a safer future for both people and wildlife. It will help fund wildlife crossing projects and the needed research needed. Agencies can use grant funds to support administrative costs for activities outlined in this bill. It will also require the State Highway Administration to coordinate with the Department of Natural Resources and apply for relevant federal funding opportunities for highway crossing projects.

Wildlife-Vehicle Collisions are Killing Migrating and Imperiled Wildlife

According to Maryland's State Wildlife and Action Plan, the Wood Turtle is classified as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need. Mortality due to road crossings in Wood Turtle habitat is one of the greatest threats to Wood Turtles due to their slow movement and terrestrial nature. Many other species are highly vulnerable to collisions in areas where roads and their habitats overlap—this is especially true of vernal pool species that migrate from their terrestrial foraging habitat to aquatic breeding habitat, often on the other side of roads. Obligate vernal pool species include wood frog, spotted salamander, marbled salamander, and the state endangered eastern tiger salamander.

The Time is Now. If we wait, we will continue to lose important wildlife from direct mortality and fragmentation of our ecosystems.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Southerland". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Vernal Pool Partners