



3070 M Street, NW
Washington, DC 20007
202.888.2037 (main)
www.prknetwork.org

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Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

Potomac Riverkeeper Network is a member supported organization with the mission of protecting the public's right to clean water in the Potomac watershed. The Potomac River is the Nation's River and provides drinking water for more than 6 million residents in the watershed. The Potomac River is also one of the largest contributors of nutrient loading to the Chesapeake Bay. The reintroduction of native freshwater mussel species, which can filter up to 10 liters of water per day, will aid in the removal of nutrients and sediment before they reach the mouth of the Potomac and the Chesapeake Bay.

Today, we are adding our support for House Bill 1042, the Maryland Agricultural BMP Best in Show Program, and specifically, the inclusion of mussels restoration as a best management practice.

Potomac Riverkeeper Network has worked tirelessly for decades to patrol and monitor agriculture and stormwater impacts on our waterways and has long supported cattle exclusion fencing, conservation easements, and riparian buffers. While land-based conservation practices go a long way to reducing pollutant loading to our water systems, they do not adequately capture 100% of runoff from farms, concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), roads, and bridges.

A report from the Chesapeake Bay Program's Science and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) report released in May of 2023 confirmed that the region will not meet the Chesapeake Bay Plan goals by 2025, especially for agriculture and stormwater runoff.

Many of the best management practices identified in this legislation are well known. Emerging knowledge of the ability of freshwater mussels to perform the same ecosystem services as oysters to improve water quality by filtering out pollution and cleaning our water has been documented in the 2020 Chesapeake Bay Program's Science and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) Workshop Report, *"Incorporating Freshwater Mussels into the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Efforts"* (STAC Publication 21-004). Freshwater mussels once existed in the millions across the freshwater rivers and streams of the Chesapeake Bay. They provide the same water filtering abilities as oysters (10-15 gallons per day), they live much longer than oysters (up to 100 years), and can go where oysters can't, up into freshwater systems, where much of the pollutants originate. They also capture carbon to make their shells, and may contribute to reducing climate impacts through carbon sequestration.

The only barrier to the use of freshwater mussels to help achieve Maryland's nutrient reduction goals has been its lack of recognition as a best management practice. This legislation will effectively remove that barrier and allow for the inclusion of freshwater mussel restoration and augmentation efforts as credit toward the nutrient reduction goals.

The inclusion of freshwater mussels in this legislation and the passage of this legislation as written is vital to ensuring we achieve Maryland's Chesapeake Bay Plan goals. Now is the time to invest in nature-based resilient solutions to reducing the impacts from agriculture and urban stormwater runoff.

Thank you,

Emily Franc
Potomac Riverkeeper Network