



Testimony in Support of House Bill 109
Natural Resources – Submerged Aquatic Vegetation – Alteration or Removal Requirements

January 26, 2024

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT** of **HB109**.

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 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

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