

Wednesday, February 7, 2024

TO: Marc Korman, Chair of the House Environment and Transportation Committee, and Committee Members

FROM: Cait Kerr, The Nature Conservancy, State Policy Manager; Michelle Dietz, The Nature Conservancy, Director of Government Relations

POSITION: Support HB 22 Agriculture - Pollinator Habitat Plan - Requirements for State Highway Administration

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports HB 22 offered by Delegate Ruth. HB 22 will extend pollinator habitat planning to include areas along state highways. This bill is consistent with the Maryland Pollinator Protection Plan released by the Maryland Department of Agriculture in 2016. According to this report, pollinator-friendly native plants along roadsides can balance maintenance challenges including controlling erosion, stopping invasive weeds' spread, protecting driver safety, and providing attractive vistas for drivers. HB 22 seeks to promote pollinator diversity and population growth, while also enhancing our state's roadways.

Pollinators are inextricably linked to human well-being through food production and food security. We face numerous challenges to pollinator diversity and population growth. Habitat loss is one of the leading causes of population and biodiversity decline. Many pollinators have coevolved to depend on specific native plants. Planting diverse, pollinator-friendly native plants boost pollinators' survival rates by providing forage, shelter, and connections between fragmented habitats.

Native plants not only provide protections for pollinators, they also manage stormwater, control sediment, and improve our watersheds' health. Diverse native plant communities can reduce soil erosion, stabilize slopes, decrease water runoff, and resist weeds, which reduces maintenance costs. In the winter, they can trap and prevent snow from blowing into roads. They're less likely than invasive plants to encroach on adjacent lands. Native plants also provide a safe and aesthetically pleasing driving environment.

TNC commends Delegate Ruth on introducing this bill, which aims to protect and grow Maryland's pollinator populations while also reducing long-term maintenance needs and expenses for state highways

Therefore, we urge a favorable report on HB 22.