



P.O. Box 660  
Mt. Airy, MD 21771

**Committee: Environment and Transportation**

**Testimony on: H. B. 1358, Natural Resources -- Establishment of Gwynns Falls State Park**

**Position: Support Establishment of Gwynns Falls State Park**

**Hearing Date: March 6, 2024**

In 1904, the landscape design firm Olmsted Brothers envisioned Gwynns Falls as integral to a masterplan for a sweeping system of Baltimore parks. Their plan highlighted the rugged scenery and watershed values of the city's stream valleys, arguing that scenic recreational amenities should be protected and equitably distributed throughout the city. My organization, the Audubon Society of Central Maryland (ASCM), supports equitable public access to natural spaces and strongly supports HB 1358, Establishment of Gwynns Falls State Park.

In 2020, ASCM was vividly reminded of the importance of scenic, accessible natural landscapes. The pandemic sparked increased visitation to our two wildlife sanctuaries in Frederick County where bird watchers, photographers, walkers, and many others can enjoy fresh air, bird song, rural vistas, time with family and friends, and much more. Everyone deserves access to scenic recreational areas that support their physical, mental, and spiritual health and community connections.

One of the largest wooded urban parks on the East Coast, the Gwynns Falls stream valley has been recognized at least since the Olmsted plan as a natural treasure. The mature trees are more valuable than ever, serving in the densely developed region as a rare 1,000 acre oasis for Scarlet Tanagers, Hermit Thrushes, Magnolia Warblers, and other imperiled songbirds. Studies confirm that exposure to birdsong improves mood and cognitive function compared with traffic soundscapes, but less affluent city neighborhoods tend to support lower bird diversity. The birds and their wooded habitat at Gwynns Falls can offer a boost to the wellbeing of people as well as birds in the region. (Hammoud et al., 2022; Stobbe et al., 2022)



P.O. Box 660  
Mt. Airy, MD 21771

The proposed city-state park partnership is an exciting and timely opportunity. It would deploy state funds to hire park staff, improve trails and bridges, launch educational programs, remove litter and invasive plants, and restore the park's function as a vital contributor to Baltimore's green infrastructure. The ecological and cultural benefits would extend well beyond the city itself, drawing visitors eager to experience rugged forest scenery in an urban landscape.

In 2024, it is time to fulfill the 1904 Olmsted vision through a city-state partnership, working together to permanently establish and maintain Gwynns Falls State Park.

Julie Dunlap, Ph.D.  
Advocacy Chair  
[advocacy@centralmdaudubon.org](mailto:advocacy@centralmdaudubon.org)

Hammoud, R., Tognin, S., Burgess, L. *et al.* Smartphone-based ecological momentary assessment reveals mental health benefits of birdlife. *Sci Rep* **12**, 17589 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-20207-6>

Stobbe, E., Sundermann, J., Ascone, L. *et al.* Birdsongs alleviate anxiety and paranoia in healthy participants. *Sci Rep* **12**, 16414 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-20841-0>