



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

February 21, 2024

Environment and Transportation Committee

HB 631

Beaver Population Support– Habitat Restoration- Ecosystem Services- Conservation

FAVORABLE

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), on behalf of our Maryland supporters, strongly supports House Bill 631, the Beaver Believer Act. This legislation provides a basis for Counties to create local laws that promote, protect, and support beaver and their associated habitat. This bill will initialize an essential step towards linking and expanding the regional benefits of beaver on the landscape to improved stream and wetland function across Maryland as well as improving the overall health and vibrancy of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

Intense exploitation of beaver over the last 400 years reduced a pre-colonial North American beaver population estimated to be in the 10's (if not 100's) of millions, and some millions in Maryland, to little more than scattered vestiges by the 1800s. Midway through the 1800's, Maryland saw beaver nearly go extinct, and by the turn of the 20th century, the wetlands and habitat that they engineered and created for millennia had been drained and purposed to agriculture. Lost with the beavers was the fundamental role they played in shaping how water flowed across the landscape in our watershed and along the Chesapeake's some hundred thousand tributaries.

Present day beaver populations are in recovery and their numbers in Maryland are rising as they return to the streams and tributaries where they once flourished. As they do, and where support is in place to allow it, they can create wetlands and habitats for an array of species and provide ecosystem services and benefits as we learn more about how critical they are to improving ecosystem function at the landscape level.

Ongoing research continues to highlight that supporting the return of beavers in substantial ways will regulate the discharge of water across the watershed, increasing available ground water and reducing damage from flooding. Expanding beaver activity resulting in beaver ponds and impoundments will increase the ability to filter water and trap sediments while helping to process nutrients- including removing nitrogen loads. As beaver wetlands are formed and riparian habitats are enlarged, diverse habitat for other wildlife - insect, invertebrate,

mammal, bird and fish, including trout and other important fish with critical habitat needs - are also expanded.

This legislation will complement and amplify the process-based ecological stream restoration work that the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and local environmental organization are working and collaborating to implement. The passing of this legislation will help build opportunity, awareness and infrastructure to utilize the ecological changes that beaver bring, promoting improved water quality, aquatic habitat, and floodplain habitat that are an essential component of bay restoration goals.

With the return of beaver and connected support of their populations, it is important that effective and humane approaches are ready and built into responses when beaver occupation comes into conflict with landowners and human infrastructure. The HSUS and many others have worked for decades to help develop effective tools and approaches to address beaver activity related to tree damage and damming of water flow in various kinds of impoundments. Researchers, practitioners and organizations continue to advance, develop and refine an expanding suite of tools and service infrastructure to address conflicts with beaver. Those include fencing and protective barriers that can restrict beaver activity and protect trees where they are not wanted, and economical flow devices that can control water levels in beaver impoundments where necessary while allowing beaver to remain. Having these solutions ready will make it possible for beavers to exist alongside human infrastructure and allow the significant ecosystem benefits and services to extend to all Marylanders.

We thank the committee for its consideration of this legislation and request a favorable vote on HB 631.

Resources

Thompson, S., Vehkajoki, M., Pellikka, J. and Nummi, P. (2021), Ecosystem services provided by beavers *Castor* spp.. *Mam Rev*, 51: 25-39. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mam.12220>

Hood, Glynnis. *The Beaver Manifesto*. Rocky Mountain Books, 2011.

Donegan, Claudia. "Leave It to Beavers: Keystone Species Provides Nature-based Restoration." *Maryland Natural Resource magazine*, Vol. 23, No. 4, Winter 2021.

Blankenship, Karl. "Can beavers help build a better Chesapeake Bay?" *Bay Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 10, January-February 2022.