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March 6, 2025

OPPOSE: HB1270 - Natural Resources - Wildland Areas - Overhead Transmission Lines

Chair Wilson and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland League of Conservation Voters (LCV) is in opposition to HB1270, which would create an unprecedented, blanket exception to one of our state's regulatory processes. If passed, HB 1270 would grant an exception for a single corporation the access to run high voltage overhead transmission lines through three of our state's Type 1 State wildlands.

Passage of this legislation would set a dangerous precedent: it would be the **first time** the state of Maryland opens up these wildlands to new transmission lines. Moreover, the legislation would explicitly circumvent the process already established on how such an exception can be made, if necessary, to use the land within these parcels to run new transmission lines. This process was established within the statute that established the wildlands designation, and should thus be followed in this case, as well. The private company supporting this legislation has yet to avail themselves of this important state process.

Indeed, HB1270 seeks an exemption to a process already in place for the benefit of a single corporate entity, making it easier and less expensive for them to move forward with a transmission route through wildlands. Defeating this legislation leaves the possibility for this project open, but ensures it goes through an appropriate process already prescribed in existing law. Passing this legislation, however, would preempt the existing robust process for this type of permission, that includes soliciting public comment necessary to make any changes to our wildlands and with agreement from the Governor, as stated in the statute.

Wildlands make up a tiny fraction of the acreage of the conserved land in Maryland, (Maryland Wildlands total 65,956 acres across 14 Counties. This is 13% of Maryland Department of Natural Resource's managed lands and less than 1% of Maryland's overall land.) They are exceptional lands, conserved as the least affected by human development and containing sensitive habitat. The fact that two of the three wildland parcels considered for exception in this legislation already had overhead transmission running through them at the time of their establishment says less about a lack of conflict with this type of land use and more about how little pristine wilderness Maryland has available to preserve. For this reason, granting exceptions to land use in



and through our established Wildlands should follow the established process as written in statute (bold text added for clarity)¹:

.05 Prohibited Activities — State Wildlands Preservation System.

A. Except when expressly permitted under Regulation .03 or .04 of this chapter, the uses and activities in §§B—G of this regulation are prohibited in a wildland.

*B. Permanent Roads, Structures, and Installations. Unless necessary to meet the minimum requirements for the purposes of the administration of the area, permanent roads, structures, or installations may not be located or constructed within a wildland. **Except following public notice and hearing, the Governor, within a specific area and in accordance with any regulations the Governor considers desirable, may determine that the following permanent structures and installations in wildlands will serve the interests of the State and the State's people, and may recommend to the General Assembly passage of a bill authorizing:***

(1) The establishment and maintenance of reservoirs;

(2) Water conservation works;

(3) Power projects;

(4) Transmission lines; and

(5) Other facilities needed in the public interest, including road construction and maintenance essential to development and use of specific areas.

Maryland LCV and the undersigned organizations are deeply concerned with the major shift in policy and establishment of poor precedent that this bill represents and we strongly urge you to give this bill an unfavorable report.

Audubon Mid-Atlantic

Chapman Forest Foundation

Baltimore Green Space

Chesapeake Legal Alliance

Beaverdam Creek Watershed Watch Group

Corsica River Conservancy

Blue Water Baltimore

Engage Mountain Maryland

Catoctin Land Trust

Friends of Nanticoke River

¹From *Code of Maryland Regulations* (COMAR). Direct access: <https://dsd.maryland.gov/regulations/Pages/08.01.02.05.aspx>



Mattawoman Watershed Society

Sparks–Glencoe Community Planning Council

Montgomery Countryside Alliance

St. Mary's River Watershed Association

National Parks Conservation Association

Sugarloaf Alliance

Potomac Conservancy

The 6th Branch

Sierra Club Maryland Chapter

Waterkeepers Chesapeake

Southern Maryland Audubon Society