



February 7, 2025

Bill: <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2025RS/bills/hb/hb1270F.pdf>

Committees: Economic Matters

Testimony on: HB1270--Natural Resources—Wildland Areas—Overhead Transmission Lines

Position: Unfavorable –HB1270-- Unfavorable

The Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS) strongly opposes HB1270. This bill would permit construction of overhead transmission lines in three state-designated Wildlands. Wildlands designation is the highest level of protection accorded to state lands. SB0399 would open portions of the Big Savage Mountain, Bear Pen, and Dan's Mountain Wildlands to overhead transmission lines. The State has determined these areas to be critical ecosystems, wildlife habitat, or hold rare plant species. Any sort of development would disrupt or destroy these ecosystems, habitats, or rare plants. Wildland designation preserves the resource unimpaired for future generations.

Dan's Mountain Wildlands is an Important Bird Area¹ (IBA), and Big Savage Mountain Wildland falls within the Savage River IBA.² Bear Pen Wildland has a large, unbroken forest, making it valuable to forest interior dwelling bird species (FIDS), which are in steep decline. It also holds native brook trout, and a rare mammal, the fisher, a relative of weasels and otters. Portions of the forest show characteristics of Old Growth.³

All three wildlands are Type 1, which means they are virtually untouched by civilization, and ecologically vulnerable to human interference. They are open to passive outdoor recreation, such as hunting, fishing, hiking, birding, horseback riding, and nature interpretation. Overhead transmission lines will fragment the unbroken forest in these Wildlands that FIDS bird species depend on. Trees are felled along the line, and vegetation below the lines is permanently suppressed. Support roads destroy and fragment additional forest.

¹ Audubon Maryland—DC, Important Bird Areas, Dan's Mountain,

https://md.audubon.org/sites/default/files/dansmountain2009summary_0_0.pdf

² Audubon Maryland—DC, Important Bird Areas Program, Bird Blitz 2011-2012: Savage River, https://md.audubon.org/sites/default/files/savageriver_2011-2012.pdf

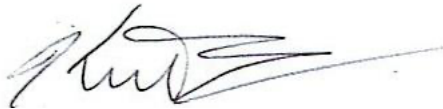
³ Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Maryland Natural Areas, Bear Pen Run, <https://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/Pages/NaturalAreas/Western/Bear-Pen-Run.aspx>

There are 38 Wildlands areas in Maryland, spread among 15 counties. A total of 65,956 acres are protected as Wildlands.⁴ The Wildlands Preservation System was established in 1973.⁵

Passage of HB1270 would set a terrible precedent. If these three Wildlands can be opened up for overhead transmission lines, it will be easier to open up all other Wildlands to development, and such things as mining. The strictest standard of protection from development of any kind for Maryland State Wildlands should be preserved, as the General Assembly stipulated in 1973.

Our members visit these Wildlands to admire the birds that live there. Big Savage Mountain, Bear Pen, and Dan's Mountain Wildlands all provide valuable habitat for our declining bird populations. North America has lost almost 30% of its birds since 1970.⁶ Loss of habitat is one on the major causes of these declines.

We urge the Committee to issue an unfavorable report for HB1270, to save these Wildlands from development, and avoid setting a precedent that would encourage development in the other Wildlands.



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⁴ Maryland Division of State Documents, .02 State Wildlands System, <https://dsd.maryland.gov/regulations/Pages/08.01.02.02.aspx>

⁵ Maryland Department of Natural Resource, The Maryland Wildlands Preservation System, <https://dnr.maryland.gov/land/Pages/Stewardship/Wildlands-Preservation-System.aspx>

⁶ Rosenberg, Kenneth V. et al, Decline of the North American avifauna, Science, VOL 366, NO. 6451, 19 September 2019, https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aaw1313?adobe_mc=MCORGID%3D242B6472541199F70A4C98A6%2540AdobeOrg%7CTS%3D1707754028