



## HB1270: Opposed

Dear Economic Matters Committee,

As Engage Mountain Maryland's (EMM) Communications Director, HB1270 raises numerous member concerns and reeks of corporate ambitions, overshadowing common sense, good governance, and stewardship that keeps "land" in Maryland.

The entire premise of the bill caters to a bidding process, ignoring practical long-term solutions that avoid violating protected lands, not just in Garrett County but statewide. Moreover, until the bill's introduction, no engagement efforts were made to gather public opinion about overturning wildland protections in Western Maryland. It wasn't until EMM that advocates for community engagement started sharing information about the bill that a NextEra-sponsored online survey appeared, postcards arrived by mail, and DNR announced an "Open House" event for public input. These requests for public comment came too late for a bill hearing scheduled just days away.

This bill undermines land preservation goals of valuable and unique places in our state that act as setbacks to headwaters and unspoiled ecosystems. As of February 2024, more than 30 percent of Maryland's land is preserved. The state's goal is to conserve 40 percent of its land by 2040. Simply stated, HB1270 back peddles the state's respective goals, and "wildlands" by definition, are supposed to be protected for the health and well-being of present and future generations.

Unfavorable testimony is easy to qualify, leaving this committee with an unsolved problem. However, the solution to meeting the immediate energy and environmental goals is simple. The current Potomac Edison line that cuts through Garrett County's wildlands could be upgraded to fulfill the transmission capacity needs NextEra proposes to provide, avoiding unnecessary decimation of protected land. However, this solution may force NextEra to forfeit the project award to Potomac Edison.

Of the four contenders for the transmission line project, Potomac Edison submitted the highest bid and NextEra the lowest, with NextEra rated "high risk" regarding meeting their proposed below-market construction estimate. Why not accept a proven company like Potomac Edison that submitted a "low risk" cost assessment? The company already retains ROW (Right Of Way), which was established before Garrett County's wildland protections were adopted. This path forward makes HB1270 unnecessary, honors the land preservation goals of

Maryland, and justifies any added expense.

Garrett County elected officials often characterize the protected wildlands as "wasted" or impeding economic growth, providing nothing to Garrett County's people. Some things have experiential intrinsic value, not based on capitalist perspectives, such as hiking, breathing in dense forest air, or fishing a pristine stream. Garrett County's entire economy revolves around outdoor recreation, tourism, second homes, and vacation rentals, all nestled in an increasingly rare landscape. Nature's bounty is Garrett County's calling card, and ignoring that fact is misguided, ignorant, and shortsighted.

Maryland has a solid track record of respecting the environment and natural lands, broadly benefiting those who live and visit the state. HB1270 asks to bypass land protections for profit, usurping the sitting Governor's exclusive authority. The bill further invites other protected areas to be invaded at the will of overly ambitious legislators. I urge this committee to cast an unfavorable vote for HB1270, with the broader view of Maryland's development goals as grounds.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Stutzman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Mark Stutzman, Communications Director  
Engage Mountain Maryland