

Dear Chair and members of the committee,

March 4, 2025

I am writing to express my strong opposition to HB 1270, a bill that seeks to allow the construction of a transmission line through designated wildlands in western Maryland. This bill, if passed, would violate key provisions of the Maryland Wildlands Preservation System, the COMAR regulations governing wildlands, and the Maryland Natural Resources Code, and would undermine decades of conservation efforts in our state.

Violation of Maryland Wildlands Preservation System

As you may be aware, the Maryland Wildlands Preservation System, codified under MD Natural Resources Code § 5-1203, is designed to protect and preserve Maryland's irreplaceable natural areas. The lands designated as "wildlands" under this statute are recognized for their exceptional ecological, scenic, and recreational value, as well as their vital role in protecting biodiversity. These areas, such as Dan's Mountain Wildland, Bear Pen Wildland, and Big Savage Wildland, contain unique ecosystems that support rare and endangered species, making them irreplaceable natural resources that cannot be replicated or replaced once disturbed.

The proposed transmission line, as outlined in HB 1270, threatens to irreparably damage these critical habitats. The construction and maintenance of a transmission line across these sensitive areas would violate the very essence of the Wildlands Preservation System, which mandates the protection of these lands from any activity that could harm their ecological integrity.

Non-Compliance with COMAR Regulations

Additionally, the bill fails to comply with the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) on Wildlands, particularly Chapter 08.01.02. The COMAR regulations, Sections 01-06, establish strict criteria for the preservation of wildlands in Maryland. They prohibit activities that would significantly alter the natural state of designated wildlands, unless deemed necessary for public health and safety. Even then, such activities must undergo a thorough review process to ensure minimal impact.

The proposed transmission line would clearly violate these regulations by introducing an industrial infrastructure project that could lead to the fragmentation of pristine wildland habitats. This project would not only disrupt the ecological balance within these areas but would also potentially introduce invasive species, pollute local water sources, and hinder the ability of wildlife to thrive in these protected spaces.

Environmental Impact and Public Trust

The Dan's Mountain, Bear Pen, and Big Savage Wildlands are among the most ecologically significant areas in Maryland. These lands support diverse flora and fauna and provide critical corridors for wildlife migration. The proposed transmission line, part of the PJM/NextEra Energy Mid-Atlantic Resilience Link (MARL) Project, threatens to fragment these corridors and disrupt the delicate ecosystems that have been carefully preserved for generations. While the need for

infrastructure improvement is understood, the environmental cost of this project on designated wildlands is too great to justify.

Moreover, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has made it clear that these wildlands are essential for maintaining the state's natural heritage. The DNR's own descriptions of these wildlands highlight their irreplaceable value, and the agency's management of these areas reflects the state's commitment to long-term conservation efforts.

Call for Preservation

It is essential that we prioritize the preservation of our natural resources for future generations. Maryland's wildlands are not only integral to the health of our environment but also to the well-being of the communities that depend on clean air, clean water, and access to nature for recreation and tourism. The approval of HB 1270 would set a dangerous precedent, allowing corporate interests to override the public's interest in preserving our state's irreplaceable natural treasures.

In light of these concerns, I urge you to oppose HB 1270 and any legislation that seeks to authorize transmission lines or other industrial projects that threaten the integrity of Maryland's designated wildlands. I trust that you will consider the long-term environmental, ecological, and social costs of such a project and act in the best interest of all Marylanders.

Thank you for your time and attention to this critical matter. I look forward to your response and your continued leadership in protecting Maryland's natural heritage.

Matia Vanderbilt

Garrett County Resident