



Senate Bill 0968
Howard County – Patuxent River Wildland – Use of Motor Vehicles and
Motorized Equipment
Ho. Co. 5-25
In the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Committee Hearing on March 11, 2025
Position: FAVORABLE

Trail Riders of Today (TROT) urges the committee to favorably report and pass Senate Bill 0968.

Senate Bill 0968 would allow, *for very limited purposes and by agreement with designated volunteers only*, trails in the Patuxent River Wildland (Wildland) to be cleared by mechanized means. The bill will keep park users safe, allow emergency responders to do their jobs, and keep the park thriving for years to come.

TROT is a nonprofit dedicated to enjoying, maintaining, and expanding sustainable trails for equestrian use. TROT members, in partnership with other organizations, volunteer countless hours maintaining and clearing established trails in the Wildland. Because of the wildland designation, this work has been done with hand tools or, in some cases, with the assistance of *actual* horsepower, when TROT members have utilized their horses to drag fallen trees off trails. While this is an impressive display of dedication and strength by our members (and, in some cases, their horses!), it is not sustainable. Without further action, the Wildland's multiuse recreational trails will be lost or, in the worst possible outcome, a Wildland visitor will sustain a serious injury deep in the forest, and emergency responders will be unable to reach them.

Senate Bill 0968 strikes a delicate balance between preservation and safety. The Wildland comprises 1,579 acres of the much larger Patuxent River State Park (Park). The Park spans portions of Howard and Montgomery counties and is 6,700 acres in total. TROT deeply respects the importance of wild spaces. However, this must be balanced with the reality that the Park is situated in a densely populated semi-urban area nestled between Baltimore, Frederick, and Washington, DC. The Park receives many visitors, some of whom are underprepared for the Park's conditions or for sudden weather changes, and may require rescue or emergency care. Looking at a map, the Wildland bifurcates the Park, meaning loss of trails within the Wildland makes it very difficult for emergency responders to not only reach distressed visitors within the Wildland, but also to move efficiently from one side of the Park to another.

SB 0968's volunteer allowance would be limited: only specific volunteers who carry insurance, are appropriately credentialed, (if necessary, such as chainsaw certification), and have entered into an agreement with the Department of Natural Resources would be permitted to utilize motorized equipment on currently existing trails in the Wildland.

TROT does not support any amendment to SB 0968 that disallows volunteer user agreements. The Park's resources are already maximized; trail maintenance can only be achieved in partnership with volunteers. This is not a new concept; the Park might look to its sister park, Patapsco Valley State Park, for an example of a successful volunteer trail maintenance model.

TROT urges passage of SB 0968, without amendment, to preserve navigable and safe trails for all users of the Patuxent River Wildland, especially emergency responders tasked with lifesaving duties within the Patuxent River State Park.

If you would like additional information on this bill or the underlying issues it addresses, please contact Courtney Frye, TROT's Howard County Area Coordinator, at boardmember06@trot-md.org, or Meaghan McDermott, TROT Board Member and Howard County resident at boardmember04@trot-md.org

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