



February 28, 2025

Re: **FAVORABLE SB946** - Endangered Species- Incidental Taking- Bats

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagen, and Members of the Education, Energy & Environment Committee,

The Frostburg Outdoor Recreation Economy Institute serves as a regional hub to coordinate and lead economic & community development, support outdoor economy focused education, train the regional workforce to fill the needs of the outdoor economy, foster academic research, and catalyze entrepreneurialism & business development in the outdoor recreation sector.

I am writing to express my strong support for SB946 / HB894, which aims to add the Northern Long-eared Bat (NLEB) and other bat species to the list of species in Maryland authorized to have a “Habitat Protection Plan” (HCP) and incidental take permit issued by the Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources. This legislation is critical to ensure conservation efforts are balanced with the needs of recreation development, tourism, farms, forests, and property management projects.

The proposed legislation does not mandate the creation of an HCP but preserves the ability to establish one if necessary. This would provide a structured framework for reasonable conservation measures while allowing essential land use & management activities to continue. Our organization values having a plan that is clear, consistent, and can be effectively implemented on the ground in a timely manner.

While bat populations are in decline, the primary cause is white-nose syndrome—a devastating fungal disease that spreads during winter hibernation. Land use activities, including recreation infrastructure development & tourism, are not the driving force behind this decline. Bats are present statewide. Endangered Species Law closely scrutinizes any activities that might impact them, no matter how small the risk. With that said, the potential regulatory impacts could be significant without the passage of this bill.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has already outlined conservation measures to mitigate potential risks, and federal law allows for incidental take permits and HCPs to provide clarity and structure for compliance. By passing this legislation, Maryland would align itself with the federal Endangered Species Act and join 21 other states with proactive bat management plans.

The listing of bat species has broad implications, affecting activities such as the maintenance or construction of camping shelters, trail maintenance & construction, hazard tree removal, and access to rock climbing areas. These routine activities could face unnecessary delays or restrictions without proper planning measures.



For these reasons, I urge you to support SB946 / HB894, which would allow for responsible conservation planning while ensuring that necessary land & recreation management activities can continue.

Thank you for your time and consideration.
Sincerely,

Jeffrey Simcoe
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