



February 28th, 2025

Re: **Support** of SB946- Endangered Species- Incidental Taking- Bats

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

My name is Shelby Watson-Hampton, and I'm the Director of the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC), a division of the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland. SMADC's mission is to support farms, farmers, and the future of agriculture and conservation in rural communities.

As such, 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 ensuring conservation efforts are balanced with the needs of 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 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 forestry, 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. For example, although less than 1% of Maryland's forestland is harvested annually, 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.

It is also essential to recognize that this issue extends beyond forestry. The listing of bat species has broad implications, affecting activities such as the maintenance or removal of structures with bats, tree removal, land clearing, utility right-of-way maintenance, road construction, and bridge and large culvert replacement. These routine activities could face unnecessary delays or restrictions without proper planning measures.

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

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Shelby Watson-Hampton

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Director

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