



Maryland Forests Association, Inc.

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Maryland's voice for forest, wildlife, and natural resource management

February 27, 2025

The Honorable Senator Brian Feldman, Chair
The Honorable Senator Cheryl Kagan, Vice-Chair
Maryland Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: SUPPORT SB946/ HB894 Endangered and Threatened Species- Incidental Taking – Bats

Dear Chairman Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee,

The Maryland Forests Association, representing the entire forest supply chain—including private landowners, loggers, and foresters—urges your strong support for SB946. This critical legislation will allow the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to establish a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and issue incidental take permits for bat species. This will ensure that necessary land management activities can continue while contributing to bat conservation efforts.

Why This Legislation Matters

The recent listing of the Northern Long-eared Bat (NLEB) as an endangered species—and the likely listing of additional bat species—has placed Maryland's forest industry in a precarious position. Without a state-authorized HCP, routine forest management activities could face excessive restrictions, threatening the economic viability of the forestry sector, which contributes \$3.3 billion annually to Maryland's economy and supports nearly 13,000 jobs, as noted in the 2022 Beacon Study from Salisbury University.

While bat populations are indeed in decline, the primary cause is White-Nose Syndrome, a devastating fungal disease that spreads during winter hibernation—not sustainable forestry practices. However, due to the broad interpretation of the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA), forestry operations are now at risk of being significantly curtailed despite their minimal impact on bat populations.

The Threat to Maryland's Working Forests

Bats are known to exist in every county in the state. Under new federal guidance, tree harvesting and timber stand improvement work is effectively restricted from April through September where bats are known to exist, often the only viable months for timber harvesting in Maryland, particularly on the Eastern Shore and in Western Maryland's challenging terrain. These constraints:

- Make it nearly impossible for landowners and loggers to plan and execute forest management plans.
- Threaten the economic stability of Maryland's rural communities that depend on forestry.
- Create regulatory uncertainty, discouraging long-term investment in forest management and conservation.

Federal law provides a mechanism for states to mitigate these impacts through HCPs and incidental take permits, which balance conservation efforts with economic and land management needs. However, Maryland's current law does not allow the state to develop an HCP for bats—unlike other species, such as the Delmarva Fox Squirrel and the Tiger Beetle. SB946 simply adds bat species to the list of those eligible for HCPs, providing a practical, science-based framework for conservation.

A Proven Conservation Tool

HCPs are widely used across the country to support both species recovery and land management. By passing this legislation, Maryland would:

- Align itself with federal conservation practices already in place in 21 other states.
- Provide forest landowners, loggers, and businesses with clear, practical guidelines for compliance.
- Ensure conservation strategies are tailored to Maryland's unique landscapes and economic realities rather than adopting one-size-fits-all federal mandates that may be unworkable for our state.

The Urgency to Act

Without this legislation, Maryland's forestry sector will be forced to operate under federal guidelines that are impractical and economically damaging. This could result in:

- Unintended consequences, including increased development pressures on forested lands as landowners struggle with regulatory burdens.
- The loss of forestry-related jobs and revenue in rural communities.
- Reduced forest health due to the inability to properly manage timber stands.

We urge you to support SB946 / HB894 to ensure Maryland has a practical, science-driven path forward—one that protects bat populations while allowing responsible forestry and land management to continue. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth D. Hill
Executive Director
Maryland Forests Association