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Testimony in Support of  
Senate Bill 946 – Endangered and Threatened Species – Incidental Taking - Bats  
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
Tuesday, March 4, 2025

The Rural Maryland Council **SUPPORTS** Senate Bill 894 – Endangered and Threatened Species – Incidental Taking – Bats. This bill authorizes the Secretary of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources to issue an incidental taking permit for the Indiana bat, the northern long-eared bat, and the tricolor bat if an applicant submits a conservation plan that specifies the impact that will likely result in the taking, steps to minimize the impact and alternative actions to the taking the applicant considered.

Maryland's law authorizes conservation plans and incidental take permits for two species, Delmarva Fox Squirrels and Tiger Beetles. This legislation adds the Northern Long-eared Bat (NLEB), the Tricolor Bat (TCB) and the Indiana Bat as other species for which Habitat Conservation Plans can be developed and an incidental take permit. Without such a plan and permit, “taking” one of these three bat species would be prohibited and unlawful. For those industries and land users who are comfortable with the federal guidance that covers their activities, there is no need to enter into the measures of a habitat conservation plan. For those, like the timber industry, who believe the seasonal restrictions on logging in the federal guidance are unworkable, a state conservation plan, in cooperation with the Department of Natural Resources, hopefully, will provide an opportunity to ensure the bat’s survival through conservation measures that are more acceptable for Maryland than those currently in the federal guidance document.

Forest land is the second largest land-use in Maryland, with 2.5 million acres, nearly 40% of all state land. The industry provides 8,813 jobs and produces \$2.63 billion in economic output. An acre of forest produces 12,000 board feet on average or three truckloads of logs. Maryland grows enough wood annually to build 50,000 homes per year. Today, there are 24 billion board feet of sawtimber standing on timberland, however the forest product industry in Maryland only harvests 22% of Net Annual Growth each year. (<https://maryland-forestry-resources-salisburyu.hub.arcgis.com/>)

There are 14,833 private forest landowners. Strong local markets for wood result in forest landowners investing in better management of their forest, which in turn enhances the multitude of non-timber benefits forests provide. If our forests lose their economic value to the people who own them, we will likely lose the forests.

Forests require management and maintenance. An unmanaged forest may not produce the vegetation most wildlife requires, leading to less diverse wildlife habitats. Unmanaged forests may also become more susceptible to disease and insect damage. A managed forest is a healthy, sustainable forest. The Rural Maryland Council asks for a favorable report of SB 946.

*The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county, and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county, and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.*

“A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland”