



Committee: House Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB 1155 Department of the Environment – Ecological Restoration

Position: Support

Hearing Date: March 26, 2025

I am the volunteer Advocacy Chair for the Audubon Society of Central Maryland. ASCM is a 501C3 nonprofit with a mission to protect birds, other wildlife, and their habitats. We appreciate the foresight of the Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee for keeping Maryland's ecological health as a priority in advancing SB 722 Ecological Restoration Definition to the House. Even in tough economic times, the long term health of our environment is a crucial investment in our state's prosperity. We support moving the Senate bill forward without further amendments.

At ASCM, we recognize ecological restoration as a powerful and creative approach to human interventions in the natural world. By returning natural processes to normal function, it fosters healing of species, ecosystems, and human-nature relationships that we all depend upon to survive and thrive. Grounded in ecological science, ecological restoration is pursued globally and at ASCM's two wildlife sanctuaries in Frederick County as an efficient and effective way to mitigate climate change and biodiversity loss, but it has not yet been clearly defined by the Maryland state government to facilitate state projects and state-non-profit collaborations. ASCM strongly supports SB 722, the Ecological Restoration Definition Act of 2025.

Early attempts at correcting human damage to natural communities often involved simple replacement of missing components, such as releasing bobwhite quail where they had disappeared due to overhunting and habitat loss. Pioneering studies in the 1930s revealed that sustained recovery of wildlife species requires an understanding of their year-round ecological needs and long-term efforts to repair and recover to pre-disturbance levels. As ecological science has progressed, the record of successful restorations has grown but so has complexity of planning and executing these long-term projects.

At ASCM sanctuaries, restoration projects have included removal of invasive species, planting of natives, and streambank erosion prevention, some supported by state funding. Even on our small properties, planning to repair damage from farming would be facilitated with a state definition of ecological restoration. Larger scale Audubon projects, such as salt marsh restoration on the Eastern Shore, would benefit even more from a clear, science-based, and widely-accepted definition of the goals and objectives

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of restoration activities. As climate change and biodiversity loss accelerate, the ability to identify, plan, and implement ecological restoration projects with clear aims becomes ever-more urgent. In 2025, Maryland can take a leadership role in fostering biodiversity, forest health, water quality, and a healthy climate by defining ecological restoration for projects throughout the state.

ASCM's members throughout Howard, Carroll, and Frederick counties care about wildlife diversity and abundance throughout the state. Volunteers at ASCM's Audrey Carroll Wildlife Sanctuary in Mount Airy and Fred Archibald Sanctuary in New Market have worked to restore warm season grasslands, streams, and woodland habitat for Maryland birds and other wildlife. We urge you to support the deeply important Ecological Restoration Act of 2025 to assure that restoration work continues and expands, healing our lands and waters and all that life that depends upon them.

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