



HB 731 and SB 635 Wildlife Connectivity and Crossings Act

TESTIMONY of DR. MARK SOUTHERLAND for VERNAL POOL PARTNERS -- Favorable

I received a Ph.D. and Smithsonian Fellowship in freshwater ecology and have consulted for federal, state, and local agencies on water resource issues for 30 years. I am the founder of **Vernal Pool Partners** and have served with the Maryland Academy of Sciences' Science Council, Maryland Water Monitoring Council, Howard County Environmental Sustainability Board, Howard County Conservancy, Patapsco Heritage Greenway, and Safe Skies Maryland.

This bill will:

- Promote collaboration between the State Highway Administration and Department of Natural Resources to identify and advance needed wildlife crossing projects
- Establish a Wildlife Connectivity Fund and leverage federal funding
- Promote sustainable growth in comprehensive land use plans
- Ensure effective outcomes through performance metrics and measurable outcomes
- Enhance public awareness of wildlife collisions and the need for habitat connectivity

Vernal pools are especially valuable local ecosystems that provide stepping stones for mammals, bird, reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates across urban, suburban, rural, and wildland areas. Breeding amphibians, such as wood frogs and mole salamanders (including the endangered tiger salamander), can only exist where they can migrate from their upland foraging habitats to breeding pools each year. Mortality on roads during breeding migrations can be catastrophic to these amphibian populations.

I urge you to pass the Wildlife Connectivity and Crossings Act to help reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and support habitat connectivity for wildlife across the state.