

HB257_FAV_Biodiversity_for_a_Livable_Climate

Testimony in Support of Maryland House Bill 257 (HB257)

**Presented by Philip Bogdonoff, President, Board of Directors,
Biodiversity for a Livable Climate**

Dear Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Philip Bogdonoff and I reside in Takoma Park, MD. I serve as the President of the Board of Biodiversity for a Livable Climate, a nonprofit organization dedicated to restoring ecosystems to address climate change, protect biodiversity, and ensure a livable future for all. I am writing to express our strong support for House Bill 257, which establishes a Food Forests and Foraging Program in Maryland.

This bill represents an innovative step forward for environmental restoration, food security, and community well-being. By creating food forests and legalizing foraging on designated state land, Maryland can take the lead in demonstrating how ecological restoration intersects with social equity and climate resilience.

The Role of Food Forests in Ecosystem Restoration

Food forests, whether cultivated or wild, are an example of regenerative land use. They mimic natural woodland ecosystems, creating thriving, self-sustaining habitats with layers of biodiversity—root crops, ground covers, shrubs, trees, and more. These spaces not only provide nutritious food for humans but also serve as critical habitats for pollinators, birds, and other wildlife.

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources' pilot projects, such as the Edible Trail in White Marsh Park, have already shown the promise of this approach. Yet, the current prohibition on foraging on state land limits access and reduces the potential benefits these areas could offer. HB257 will address this by formally establishing food forests and implementing a regulated foraging program.

Food Forests Build Community Resilience

Community food forests are much more than spaces for food production—they are places where nature and people thrive together. They foster social cohesion, create educational opportunities, and provide spaces for community events, recreation, and well-being. Moreover, food forests are inherently sustainable and regenerative, requiring little ongoing maintenance while boosting biodiversity, enhancing soil fertility, and improving water management.

The benefits of food forests directly align with Maryland's goals of increasing food security, mitigating the effects of climate change, and promoting environmental justice. As climate

extremes become more frequent, the resilience offered by food forests—through stormwater management, shading, and cooling—cannot be overstated.

Equity and Accessibility Through Foraging

HB257 thoughtfully balances ecological stewardship with accessibility. By requiring foraging permits and directing permit revenues to maintain and expand food forests, the program ensures both sustainability and equity. The inclusion of fee waivers for individuals with financial need demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity and ensures that the benefits of food forests can be shared by all Maryland residents.

A Path to a Sustainable Future

HB257 aligns with the mission of Biodiversity for a Livable Climate by demonstrating how restoring natural ecosystems can address pressing social and environmental challenges. This bill is a model for how states can support food sovereignty, protect biodiversity, and build resilience to climate change while bringing communities together.

I urge you to pass HB257 to establish the Food Forests and Foraging Program in Maryland. It is a visionary initiative that combines ecological restoration, food security, and community well-being in a way that benefits present and future generations.

Thank you for your leadership and for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Philip Bogdonoff

President of the Board
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