



Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: H.B. 878—Vernal Pool Wetlands Protection Act of 2025

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 19, 2025

The Audubon Society of Central Maryland (ASCM) is a 501C3 nonprofit with a mission to protect birds, other wildlife, and their habitats, and we recognize the vital contributions that vernal pools play in supporting invertebrates, amphibians, and other species in wetlands throughout the state of Maryland. In our shared interest in protecting these crucial ecological services, ASCM strongly supports HB 878, the Vernal Pool Wetlands Protection Act of 2025.

Often small and easily overlooked, these temporary wetlands play outsized roles in forested ecosystems. In early spring they are home to fairy shrimp and nurseries for wood frogs and spotted salamanders. As the season progresses, they become a buffet for birds like great blue herons and barred owls, as well as rare and endangered species like the rusty blackbird. These quiet temporary ponds are fountains of abundance that maintain the health and biodiversity of numerous forests.

Yet dredging, logging, agricultural expansion, and widespread urbanization have seriously diminished these unique sources of biodiversity and ecosystem services. The threats of a warming climate make their future still more uncertain, especially in the face of the recent withdrawal of federal protections under the Clean Water Act. We do not even know how many remain in the state or where many are located.

Other states such as Massachusetts and Rhode Island have set examples by enacting laws and regulations that protect vernal pools and their margins; our state lacks a basic definition that could be used to begin this essential work. This year, Maryland can take a major step toward fostering biodiversity, forest health, and water quality by adopting a clear and accurate definition of vernal pools in our state.

ASCM's members throughout Howard, Carroll, and Frederick counties care about wildlife diversity and abundance throughout the state. ASCM's own Audrey Carroll Wildlife Sanctuary in Mount Airy, Maryland, hosts wood frogs in its woodland vernal pools. We urge you to pass the vitally important Vernal Pool Wetlands Protection Act of

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2025 to define vernal pools as a crucial step toward assuring that these ephemeral wetlands continue to enrich our woods and watersheds long into the future.

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