



Maryland Farm Bureau

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February 17, 2025

To: House Environment and Transportation Committee

From: Maryland Farm Bureau, Inc.

RE: **Support of HB894 Endangered and Threatened Species - Incidental Taking - Bats**

On behalf of the nearly 8,000 member families of the Maryland Farm Bureau, I submit written testimony in support of HB894 Endangered and Threatened Species - Incidental Taking - Bats. This proposed legislation would enable the establishment of Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs) and incidental take permits for bat species in Maryland. This legislation is crucial to ensuring a balanced approach to both conservation and forest management.

The recent listing of the northern long-eared bat as endangered, along with the potential for additional bat species to receive similar protections, presents significant challenges to Maryland's forest management practices. Current federal guidelines now restrict logging from April 1 to September 30 in bat habitats, impacting operations not only on federal and state lands but also on private lands tied to federal funding or permits. Without an approved HCP, forestry activities could be effectively halted for half the year, posing a major threat to Maryland's rural economy.

Bat species are present in every Maryland county, and White Nose Syndrome, a fungal infection, is the primary driver of bat population decline rather than sustainable forestry practices. Federal and state laws prohibit any "taking" of endangered species, broadly defining this to include activities that disrupt their life cycles. Unlike other species, such as the Delmarva Fox Squirrel, Maryland law currently lacks provisions for HCPs specifically for bats. The forestry sector has a total economic impact of \$3.3 billion and supports 12,890 jobs across the state, yet less than 1% of Maryland's forests are harvested annually. Without legislative changes, forest management in Maryland will face unnecessary restrictions that could negatively impact both conservation efforts and economic stability. SB946 / HB894 does not mandate the creation of an HCP but ensures that this option remains available, allowing responsible forest management to coexist with bat conservation efforts.

Forestry is not the cause of bat population decline, but with the right regulatory framework, it can be part of the solution.

Maryland Farm Bureau supports HB894

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tyler Hough', with a horizontal line above it.

Tyler Hough

Director of Government Relations

Please contact Tyler Hough, though@marylandfb.org, with any questions