



# Maryland Forests Association, Inc.

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*Maryland's voice for forest, wildlife, and natural resource management*

February 1, 2025

The Honorable Delegate Marc Korman, Chair  
The Honorable Regina Boyce, Vice-Chair  
Maryland Environment & Transportation Committee  
House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: HB286 Local Comprehensive Planning and State Economic Growth, Resource Protection, and Planning Policy

Dear Chairman Korman, Vice-Chair Boyce, and Members of the Committee,

**The Maryland Forests Association (MFA) is favorable to the passage of HB286 with amendments.**

The Maryland Forests Association, Inc. (MFA) is a non-profit 501 c(3) membership-driven organization established in 1976 that represents the forest supply chain statewide. The Mission of the Maryland Forests Association is to conserve and enhance forests in Maryland by:

- increasing awareness of the diverse, public benefits of forests;
- supporting the sustainable use of forest resources;
- promoting economic opportunity for forest landowners and
- maintaining a viable local forest products industry.

We strive to accomplish this mission by monitoring and influencing legislation and regulations that affect forests and the forestry community. MFA is concerned that the new "Planning Principles" do not formally recognize the critical economic, environmental, and cultural benefits of rural-based timber production.

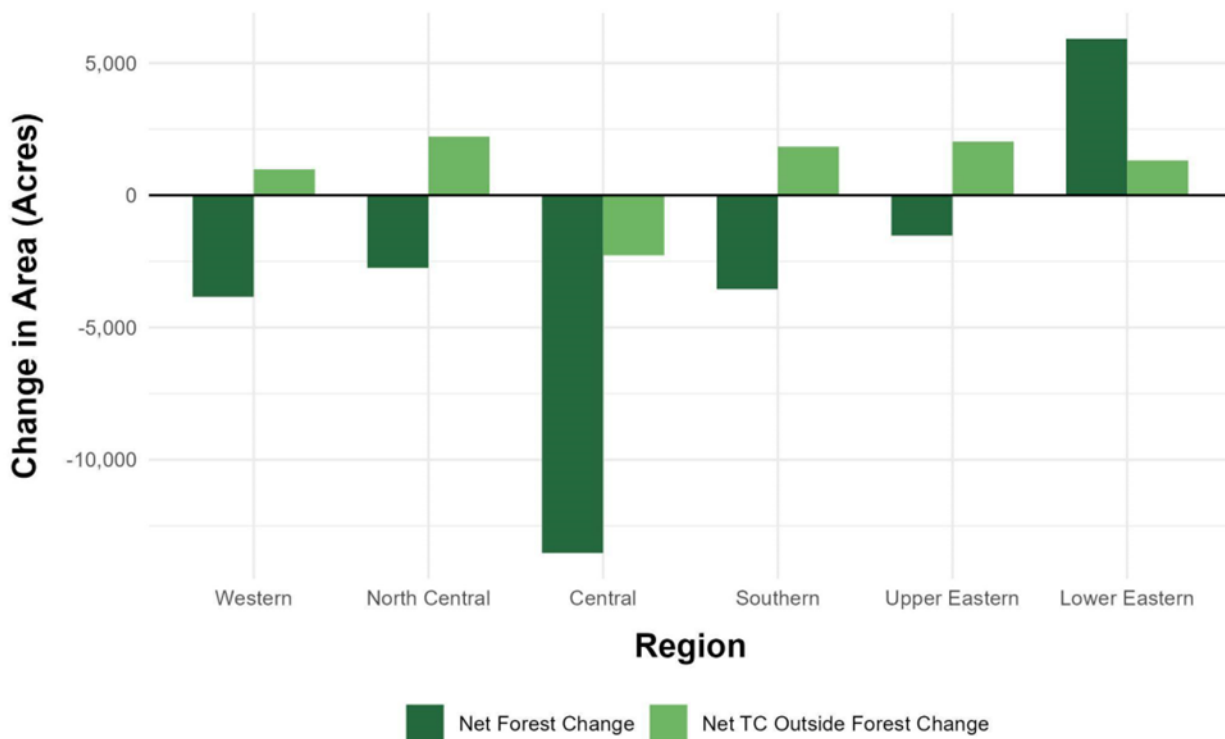
To further explain our concern, below are three of the 12 former "Visions" that would be repealed by the new legislation:

(8) Economic Development: economic development and natural resource-based businesses that promote employment opportunities for all income levels within the capacity of the State's natural resources, public services, and public facilities are encouraged.

(10) Resource Conservation: waterways, forests, agricultural areas, open space, natural systems, and scenic areas are conserved.

(11) Stewardship: government, business entities, and residents are responsible for the creation of sustainable communities by collaborating to balance efficient growth with resource protection;

Maryland's Forests are great for the environment and the economy. According to the [2022 Beacon Economic Impact Study](#) for Natural Resource-Based Industries, the forestry sector is a \$3.3 billion industry. Our forests, which cover approximately 40% of our state, are also the highest and best land use for protecting the Chesapeake Bay. The Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology shows that the only gain in forest cover in Maryland is coincidentally on the Lower Eastern Shore, where we have the most abundant timber markets. Proof that markets give landowners the confidence to retain and invest in their timberland. See the graph from the study below:



Not all of Maryland has the markets mentioned on the lower shore. The forestry sector has been declining for decades. MFA has been working with numerous partners to implement the [Economic Adjustment Strategy](#). The Maryland Department of Planning has been a great partner and has assisted in publishing this [Forestry Guidance Document](#).

In light of climate change, sea-level rise, invasive species, and other persistent threats, these markets are more important now than ever. The planning process is critical to maintaining, retaining, and expanding the forestry sector so we can be responsive to the forests' ever-changing needs. We fear the omissions in this bill could stifle the progress we have made.

While the proposed new Principles on "Place" and "Ecology" seem to have some nexus to Maryland's "natural resources potentially," the emphasis of the proposed new "Planning Principles" seems otherwise to be focused mainly on the "built environment" and overlooks rural natural resource-based industries. As such, we would like to suggest that a new "Principle" be added along the lines of the following:

**Rurality Sustained:** Our State's agricultural, forestry, and seafood industries provide consumers with a plethora of life-sustaining food and fiber products. Moreover, Maryland's rural working landscapes also offer tangible environmental and open space benefits and are important to Maryland's cultural heritage and quality of life.

As our motto, "Forests Forever," suggests, we advocate for land conservation programs that ensure our farms and forests remain viable working landscapes that provide food and fiber for future generations.

In closing, our forests need a variety of markets to keep them productive and healthy. We ask that HB286 be amended to reflect this sentiment, providing important guidance to current and future planning directors, staff, and policymakers. Please feel free to contact me, Beth Hill, at 410-463-1755 or via email at [beth@mdforests.org](mailto:beth@mdforests.org) if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth D. Hill  
 Executive Director  
 Maryland Forests Association

