

P.O. Box 278 Riverdale, MD 20738

Testimony on: HB878, Department of the Environment - Water Resources - Protection of Vernal Pools (Vernal Pool Wetlands Protection Act of 2025) Committee: Environment and Transportation Hearing Date: February 19, 2025 Position: Support

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports HB878 because of the benefits of vernal pools to amphibians, other wildlife, and native plants.

**Critical, Unique Habitat for Rare Species**: Vernal pools seasonally alternate between wet and dry conditions, and these isolated systems do not harbor fish, which devour invertebrates and amphibian eggs. Consequently, these shallow ephemeral ponds and their surroundings are fragile, remarkable habitats that host rare plants and animals not typically found elsewhere. To survive and breed, these organisms have developed unique behaviors, structures, and physiologies. For example, the resident pretty Yellow Water Crowfoot wildflower (*Ranunculus flabellaris*) and the attractively colored Eastern Tiger Salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum*) are endangered, according to the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Besides highly state-rare residents, many other animals depend on the vernal pools for food, including predatory amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals.

**Crucial Services to the Environment and Humans**: Vernal pool depressions can stop or slow floodwaters, prevent erosion, filter out pollutants that could damage the Chesapeake Bay, and allow water to infiltrate down into our vital aquifers. Furthermore, resident ambystomatid salamanders can provide mosquito-control services. According to one research study, mosquito larvae were 98% less dense in wetlands when these salamanders were present.

**Threats and Protections for Vernal Pool Habitats**: The existence of these small, unique environments is threatened because they are often filled, drained, paved over, and bulldozed. Without protections, these easy-to-miss seasonal pools are being destroyed by development and agriculture. If these valuable habitats disappear, biodiversity will suffer. A quarter of all state-listed threatened and endangered amphibians depend on vernal pools, according to a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency assessment of Mid-Atlantic seasonal pools.

I remember when my now-grown sons were two little boys, out exploring the wilds of our suburban neighborhood. I did not realize that they were busy adventuring until they returned sopping wet, eyesshining with delight, and excitedly told me all about the army of frogs singing and laying eggs in our local shallow pond. We have the responsibility to protect these natural habitats for future generations.

Vernal pools are crucial for the health of the environment, the services they provide, and the biodiversity they contain. The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club respectfully requests a favorable report for HB878.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America's oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.

## REFERENCES

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