

Dear Senators Augustine and Henson,

I am writing on behalf of the Southern Maryland Audubon, which represents over 650 members across four counties bordering major rivers in Maryland and the Chesapeake Bay. Our members are deeply committed to preserving and enhancing the natural habitat in our region.

We strongly support the establishment of a definition for “Ecological Restoration” as proposed in Senate bill SB722 and House bill HB1155. Meaningful discussion must begin with clear, standardized terminology. Passing this legislation will ensure consistent understanding of ecological restoration and associated project types, reducing confusion and miscommunication in the permitting process for ecological restoration projects and increasing the pace with which these projects can address habitat and species loss.

Maryland’s tidal salt marshes are an iconic, natural habitat that defines our state’s cultural identity, but are in crisis today. Tidal salt marshes in Maryland are being lost at an accelerated rate. Unless significant progress is made in the next 15 years, we could lose them forever. Tidal salt marshes are vital to our members’ well-being and their livelihoods:

- Rural economies such as farming, forestry, and trapping, depend on tidal salt marshes acting as a protective buffer from rising waters and saltwater intrusion.
- Commercial fishing depends on tidal salt marshes to provide nurseries for many significant fish species
- Protection for storm surge and flooding is provided by the unique vegetation found in the marshes in the Chesapeake Bay region, which has the capacity to reduce the energy and destructiveness of storm surges
- Water quality is improved when tidal salt marshes absorb excess nutrients from stormwater runoff
- Maryland Recreation and tourism offers a variety of water activities and beachfront experiences. Tidal salt marshes protect our waterfront destinations from storm surge damage and support a wide range of recreational activities including trapping, hunting, fishing, birdwatching and kayaking.

Passing this bill and establishing an official state definition of “Ecological Restoration” will strengthen Maryland’s Climate Implementation Plans, enhance collaboration between state and federal partners and help ecological restoration projects keep pace with urgent threats facing our ecosystems.

Very respectfully,

Jan de Regt
Representing 650 members of Southern Maryland Audubon