

HB0717 PresMD FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Nicholas Redding

Position: FAV



PRESERVATION MARYLAND

February 12, 2025

Hon. Marc Korman
Environment and Transportation Committee
Taylor House Office Building, Room 250
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland

RE: HB0717 FAVORABLE

Chairperson Korman,

On behalf of the staff and Board of Preservation Maryland and our thousands of statewide supporters, I thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in **SUPPORT of HB0717**.

In an uncertain budget climate, we feel this bill is critical and will allow the state to build on investments first made during the Great Maryland Outdoors Act that make our public lands more accessible and resilient. It accomplishes this by enabling partnerships and providing for innovative redeployment of acquisition funds toward immediate public lands' needs.

First, this bill addresses the ongoing need to activate and care for our public lands by allowing stateside Program Open Space funding (exceeding \$80M in any FY) to be deployed to support stewardship, maintenance, and operation of state lands and parks. The legislation will also increase private support by enabling the department to enter into agreements with foundations for the various public land units with a focus on increasing private philanthropic support. Just like the state, counties and municipalities need to make local parks accessible which this bill will support via flexibility with local park dollars. Once a county hits its land protection goals, this legislation allows for local side Program Open Space to be used on park improvements, care, and maintenance.

This bill also focuses on the plan for future workforce needs, instead of buying land and determining how to staff it later, this bill will require the department and DBM to identify necessary staffing levels at the outset – so Marylanders enjoy the benefit of a well-maintained and appropriately staffed park – from rangers to lifeguards. We support this legislation as we believe its passage would enhance the Department of Natural Resources' efforts to maintain historic resources under the agency's care and also address challenges the agency and its partners face in making public lands more accessible.

HB0717 is an important piece of legislation, and we urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,

Nicholas A. Redding, President & CEO

Friends of MD State Parks Testimony- Support For H

Uploaded by: Tim Casey

Position: FAV



Friends of Maryland State Parks
is a statewide, independent, all-volunteer, citizen 501 (c) 3 organization.
*We are dedicated to **preserve, protect, enhance, and advocate** for our state parks.*

Friends of Maryland State Parks Support for HB717

Date: Feb 10, 2025

The Friends of Maryland State Parks are in favor and supportive of HB717.
The Friends recognize that amendments are being offered.
The Friends are supportive of HB717 with these amendments.

Respectfully submitted,

Tim Casey

Friends of MD State Parks 501 (3) All-Volunteer Non-Profit
Tim Casey, Secretary, 17 Lochwynd Court Phoenix, MD 21131
443 801 6272 tjwcasey@comcast.net
<http://friendsofmdparks.org/>

20250212 HB 0717 Natural Resrouces Public Land Acq

Uploaded by: Travis Breeding

Position: FAV



House Bill 717

Natural Resources—Public Lands—Acquisitions, Staffing, Operations, and Funding

Position: **FAV**

Date: **February 12, 2025**

To: **Environment and
Transportation**

On behalf of the Caroline County Commissioners, we wish to express our strong support for **House Bill 717 – Natural Resources—Public Lands—Acquisitions, Staffing, Operations, and Funding**, particularly the provisions that provide greater flexibility for local governments in utilizing Program Open Space (POS) funds. As a resource challenged rural county that has met its land acquisition goals based on the 2022 LPPRP, and has made significant investments in land acquisition through POS, we need the ability to direct funding toward the development and enhancement of these properties to better serve our residents.

While POS has been instrumental in preserving open space, the reality is that land alone does not meet the needs of our communities. Without the necessary infrastructure—trails, facilities, playgrounds, and accessibility improvements—these spaces remain underutilized. The ability to have the flexibility to apply planning and acquisition POS funds toward developing what we already own, rather than being restricted to further acquisitions when we have met our prescribed goals, is critical to ensuring that our public lands are accessible and beneficial to the people they were meant to serve.

Additionally, we urge the General Assembly to consider making these provisions retroactive so that unencumbered planning and acquisition POS funds for counties like ours, which have already met our land goals, can access additional funding to improve and develop these sites. This is especially important in Caroline County, where the need for recreational amenities and infrastructure far outweighs the need for additional land purchases.

House Bill 717 takes a thoughtful approach to balancing conservation with practical use, and we appreciate the effort to ensure that local governments have the flexibility to meet the needs of their communities. We respectfully request your support for this bill and stand ready to provide any additional information you may need.

Sincerely,

J. Travis Breeding, President

HB 717 Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Ann Jones

Position: FWA



PARTNERS *for* OPEN SPACE

HB 717 – Natural Resources – Public Lands – Acquisition, Staffing, Operations and Funding Hearing House Environment and Transportation Committee – February 12, 2025

POSITION: Support with Amendments

Dear Chair Korman, Vice-Chair Boyce and Distinguished Committee Members:

Partners for Open Space support many of the provisions of HB 717. We are encouraged by the efforts to make the acquisition process more efficient by allowing state side Program Open Space to use an Easement Valuation System. The proposed foundation supporting DNRs parks will no doubt be successful as many residents recognize the tremendous value of and support for the outdoor recreational economy.

We appreciate DNR's efforts to find a long term, sustainable source of funding for park operations, maintenance and development. However, the proposal to redirect funding from the current land acquisition balance to other state park functions is not a sustainable solution. The income that the state receives from the transfer tax varies greatly from year to year in response to the real estate market. Indeed, the current balance in the DNR acquisition fund is largely the result of an "over-attainment" of \$122 million, or 43% of the projected FY 24 revenue. But this year the transfer tax revenue was reduced by \$85 million or roughly 38% of the total projected FY26 transfer tax revenue. It is precisely this volatility and response to the market that makes the transfer tax an excellent land acquisition tool, but a very poor tool to use for ongoing expenses and salaries.

If legislation must be passed to reduce some of the fund balance, it should be clearly designated as a transfer from the Special Fund to the General Fund and re-paid over the subsequent 3 fiscal years. A permanent reallocation of the acquisition funds will significantly decrease the likelihood that we can meet the state goal of preserving 40% of the land in Maryland by the year 2040, in addition to making it more difficult to acquire the infill parcels that enhance access to the existing park system. We urge your continued support of the funding for these critical programs, while we work together to find creative solutions to fund the ongoing operation, maintenance and development needs of Maryland's state parks.

Thank you for your consideration.

Charlotte Davis, Co-chair
Partners for Open Space

Owen Bailey, Co-chair
Partners for Open Space

Partners for Open Space Steering Committee Members

Baltimore County Land Trust Coalition, Ann Jones; **Chesapeake Bay Commission**, Mark Hoffman; **Chesapeake Bay Foundation**, Matt Stegman, **Chesapeake Conservancy**, Mark Conway; **The Conservation Fund**, Bill Crouch; **The Eastern Shore Land Conservancy**, Owen Bailey; **Forever Maryland/Harford Land Trust** Kristen Kirkwood; **Maryland Association of County Parks and Recreation Administrators** Jessica Leys; **The Nature Conservancy**, Michelle Dietz; **League of Conservation Voters**, Kristen Harbeson; **Potomac Conservancy**, Anna Mudd; **Rural Maryland Council**, Charlotte Davis; **The Southern Maryland Heritage Area Consortium**, Lucille Walker; **The Trust for Public Land**, Kent Whitehead.

HB 717 - favorable with amendments.pdf

Uploaded by: Anna Griffith

Position: FWA



HB 717 - Natural Resources - Public Lands - Acquisition, Staffing, Operations, and Funding

Position: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

Date: February 12, 2025

Contact: Anna Mudd, Potomac Conservancy

Dear Chairman Korman and Members of the Committee:

Potomac Conservancy is the region's leading clean water advocate, fighting to ensure the Potomac River boasts clean drinking water, healthy lands, and vibrant communities. We combine the grassroots power of over 30,000 supporters with conservation and policy initiatives to restore the Potomac River to full health. Our organization requests a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** report for House Bill 717 - Natural Resources - Public Lands - Acquisition, Staffing, Operations, and Funding.

Established under the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in 1969, Program Open Space symbolizes Maryland's long-term commitment to conserving our natural resources while providing exceptional outdoor recreation opportunities for our citizens. Today more than 6,900 park and conservation area projects have been assisted through Program Open Space Local grants.

The provision in House Bill 717 that concerns Potomac Conservancy would allow the Department of Natural Resources to redirect up to \$50 million from the current acquisition funding balance to the park operation, maintenance and improvements. There would then be a cap in place that the balance in DNR acquisition could never exceed \$80 million. Potomac Conservancy suggests that if funds must be reallocated it is made clear that the funds need to be paid back over 3 years in accordance with legislation that was passed in 2016. If funding is cut and not paid back, Maryland will lose countless opportunities to preserve land that is increasingly vulnerable to development pressure in the Potomac region.

For these reasons, **Potomac Conservancy requests a FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS report for House Bill 717 - Natural Resources - Public Lands - Acquisition, Staffing, Operations, and Funding.**

Sincerely,

Anna Mudd
Senior Policy Director
Potomac Conservancy

HB717_crouch_FWA

Uploaded by: Bill Crouch

Position: FWA



Committee: Environment and Transportation Committee

Bill Number: House Bill 717- Natural Resources - Public Lands-Acquisition, Staffing, Operations, and Funding.

Position: Favorable with Amendments

Hearing Date: February 12, 2025

The Conservation Fund is a top-ranked national nonprofit that protects land and water resources across America. We protect wildlife habitat, working forests and farms, parks, battlefields, historic sites and more. Our land conservation work brings economic benefits, whether we are saving working forests that provide timber and jobs or recreation destinations that provide tourism dollars. We know how lucky we are in Maryland to have Program Open Space as a tool for protecting natural resources and driving natural resource economies state-wide.

Program Open Space is a nationally respected land conservation program. It is the funding mechanism that has allowed early achievement of the goal to protect 30% of the state by the year 2030 (30x30). Program Open Space will no doubt be critical to achieving the added goal of protecting 40% of the state by 2040. 40X40. Both conservation goals were passed by the Maryland legislature, recognizing the critical importance of land conservation to human health, biodiversity, water quality, and climate adaptation.

In part, HB 717 allows the Department of Natural Resources at their discretion to “sweep” state land acquisition (“Stateside”) funds more than \$80M at the end of a fiscal year to the existing *Forest or Park Reserve Fund* for operations, maintenance, and staffing. The “Stateside” component of Program Open Space that primarily provides funding for public access resulting in health and economic benefits for Maryland residents. While we understand the significant nature of Maryland’s current budget shortfall and recognize that acquisition and operations funding are both essential; it is imperative that the Department of Natural Resources maintain the ability to capitalize on outstanding conservation acquisitions when those opportunities arise. Historically, the State land acquisition component of Program Open Space has endured the brunt of numerous diversions. Program Open Space was intended to reflect actual market forces. When the real estate market is “good”, more money flows to Program Open Space and vice versa. Potentially diverting funds overrides this market driven feature of Program Open Space.

Maryland’s parks, forests, natural areas, and historical sites contribute greatly to the quality of life in Maryland. Visitation to these resources is also a significant economic driver. With many parks having to close because of capacity, Marylanders have voiced the demand for publicly accessible protected lands. Maryland’s Program Open Space gives us the ability to meet that increased demand and capture the economic benefits that come with it.

The Conservation Fund holds a favorable position with the inclusion of key amendments.

HB0717-ET_MACo_SWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Dominic Butchko

Position: FWA



House Bill 717

Natural Resources - Public Lands - Acquisition, Staffing, Operations, and Funding

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**
WITH AMENDMENTS

To: Environment and Transportation Committee

Date: February 12, 2025

From: Karrington Anderson and Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS HB 717 WITH AMENDMENTS** to ensure greater flexibility in the use of Program Open Space (POS) Local allocations. This bill allows flexibility for future allocations for POS funds if the Department of Natural Resources and Department of Planning certify that the acquisition goals have been met. Department-sought amendments will clarify the intended beneficial effects on local jurisdictions who have met State-set land preservation goals.

Since its inception in 1969, POS has enabled the State of Maryland and its counties to expand public access to recreational spaces and natural areas, delivering immense health and economic benefits to communities across the state. Over time, counties' ability to reach lofty land acquisition goals has been a variable, but those who have done so now require more resources for park maintenance and facility improvements. The current rigid allocation structure does not adequately address evolving needs, resulting in inefficiencies in fund utilization, especially given recent reductions in state funding due to declining transfer tax revenues.

HB 717 presents a valuable opportunity to modernize POS Local allocations by allowing counties to direct resources toward vital park enhancements, including upgrades to playgrounds, recreation centers, and other facilities, while maintaining appropriate oversight through the Department of Natural Resources and acreage-per-capita considerations.

Given the fiscal constraints facing local governments, county Recreation and Parks departments are striving to maximize the effects of limited resources through innovative and efficient solutions. Granting counties increased discretion in the use of POS Local funds will allow them to better meet the diverse recreational needs of their residents while ensuring responsible stewardship of public resources.

For these reasons, MACo urges a report of **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** on HB 717.

(Amendment language on reverse side)

DNR Amendments with MACo support:

On page 15, strike beginning with “provided” in line 26 down through “subtitle” in line 28; and in line 29, strike the opening bracket; and in the same line before “Except” insert an opening bracket.

On page 16, strike beginning with “its” in line 2 down through “renewal” in line 4 and substitute “**ITS:**

A. APPORTIONMENT NOT YET ENCUMBERED AS OF JULY 1, 2025;

B. FISCAL YEAR 2026 APPORTIONMENT; AND

C. FUTURE ANNUAL APPORTIONMENT.

2. A LOCAL GOVERNING BODY MAY USE THE APPORTIONMENT IN SUBSUBPARAGRAPH 1 OF THIS SUBPARAGRAPH”;

and after line 21, insert:

“(d) If land is donated to local governing bodies during the fiscal year, 75 percent of the appraised value the Department approves may be applied as a portion of, or all of, the local governing body's share of the project's cost for the projects referred to in [§ 5-904 of this subtitle] SUBSECTION (C) OF THIS SECTION.

“(e) If federal funds are received for any approved local project after it was funded by the State in accordance with [subsection] SUBSECTIONS (b) AND (C) of this section [or § 5-904 of this subtitle], the applicant shall reimburse the State in an amount equal to the federal contribution. The reimbursement shall be reserved for other projects approved for the applicant up to the limit of the share allocated to the local governing body.”.

HB717_Kurtz_FWA

Uploaded by: Josh Kurtz

Position: FWA



Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Josh Kurtz, Secretary
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

February 12, 2025

BILL NUMBER: House Bill 717 – First Reader

SHORT TITLE: Natural Resources - Public Lands - Acquisition, Staffing, Operations, and Funding

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: Support with Amendments

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT'S POSITION

The Department supports HB 717 because it will improve the Department's ability to operate, manage, and acquire state parks, forests, and wildlife management areas for all citizens by making several key fiscal and operational changes. The changes include setting a formula for the Department requesting additional positions as acres are acquired, and increasing funding opportunities for operations including authorizing the Department to create affiliated foundations and utilize limited funding from the Program Open Space (POS) Stateside land acquisition fund balance in certain circumstances. These provisions will increase the long-term sustainability of the Department to manage existing lands and continue acquiring lands to meet state land conservation goals and the continued demand for public access from citizens. The bill also provides local jurisdictions with increased flexibility to spend their POS Local funds on either acquisition or development projects if they have met their land acquisition goals which ensures protected lands provide meaningful access to Marylanders

The Department requests the Committee's consideration of amendments to address comments received from the State Ethics Commission, clarify the positions requested for acres acquired only applies to fee simple acquisitions and not conservation easements, ensure that the Department's land exchange authority doesn't apply to conservation easements, incorporate the Maryland Association of Counties' amendment to allow the POS Local provision to apply to unencumbered balances and FY 2026 allocations, remove the limitation on how much POS Local funds a local government may spend on eligible capital renewal projects, and a technical correction. These amendments are the result of communications and feedback among affected stakeholders.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

STAFFING

The Department currently owns over 504,000 acres statewide that are managed as part of state parks, state forests, wildlife management areas, and fisheries management areas. As the Department has acquired an additional 135,000 acres of land over the past 20 years, the number of authorized positions within the land management units actually decreased through FY 2023. The Great Maryland Outdoors Act provided additional positions for the Maryland Park Service in FY 2024 which brought total DNR land management unit positions back to the FY 2003 staffing levels (see charts below). This impacts the Department's ability to effectively manage existing lands and to acquire new lands for public open space and recreation to meet the high demand for these spaces across the state since staff are already stretched thinly.

Contact: Emily Wilson, Director, Legislative and Constituent Services (Acting)
emilyh.wilson@maryland.gov ♦ 410-260-8426 (office) ♦ 443-223-1176 (cell)

FUNDING

Transfer tax revenues fund the Department's land conservation and recreation programs and operations. When transfer tax revenues are low, the Forest and Park Reserve Fund does not receive sufficient funding from the transfer tax to maintain level funding for operations and maintenance. When transfer tax revenues are high, Program Open Space Stateside receives more funding than program activity in a given fiscal year based on staff capacity and project schedules resulting in program balances that carry over from year to year. Over the past three years, the POS Stateside project pipeline has averaged \$90 million. While maintaining a POS Stateside fund balance is critical to allow us to continue acquisitions in years with low funding, the language in HB 717 ensures that DNR has funds available to continue POS Stateside acquisitions needed to meet the 40x40 land conservation goal and the high demand for public access while providing additional operating funds for safe, clean, user-friendly, and operable Maryland public lands.

SECTION 1-109

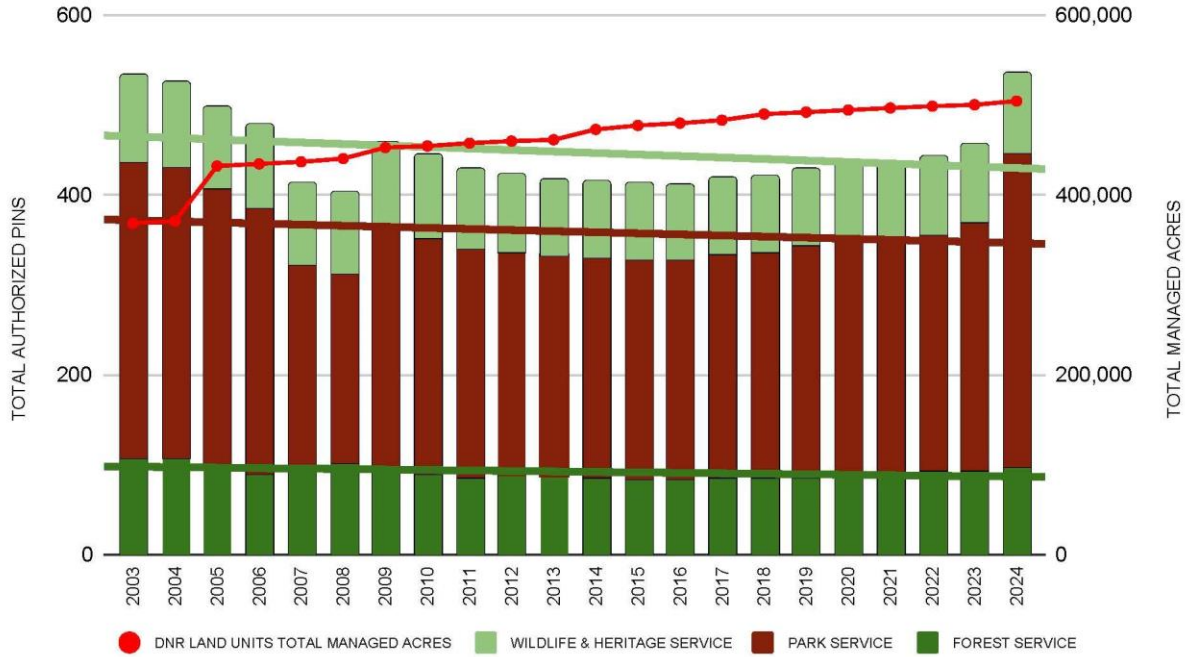
HB 717 codifies the Department's authority to use an easement valuation system. The Board of Public Works has approved DNR using an easement valuation system (EVS) for POS Stateside and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program permanent conservation easements. This section would update the statute to reflect current practice based on those BPW approvals.

BILL EXPLANATION

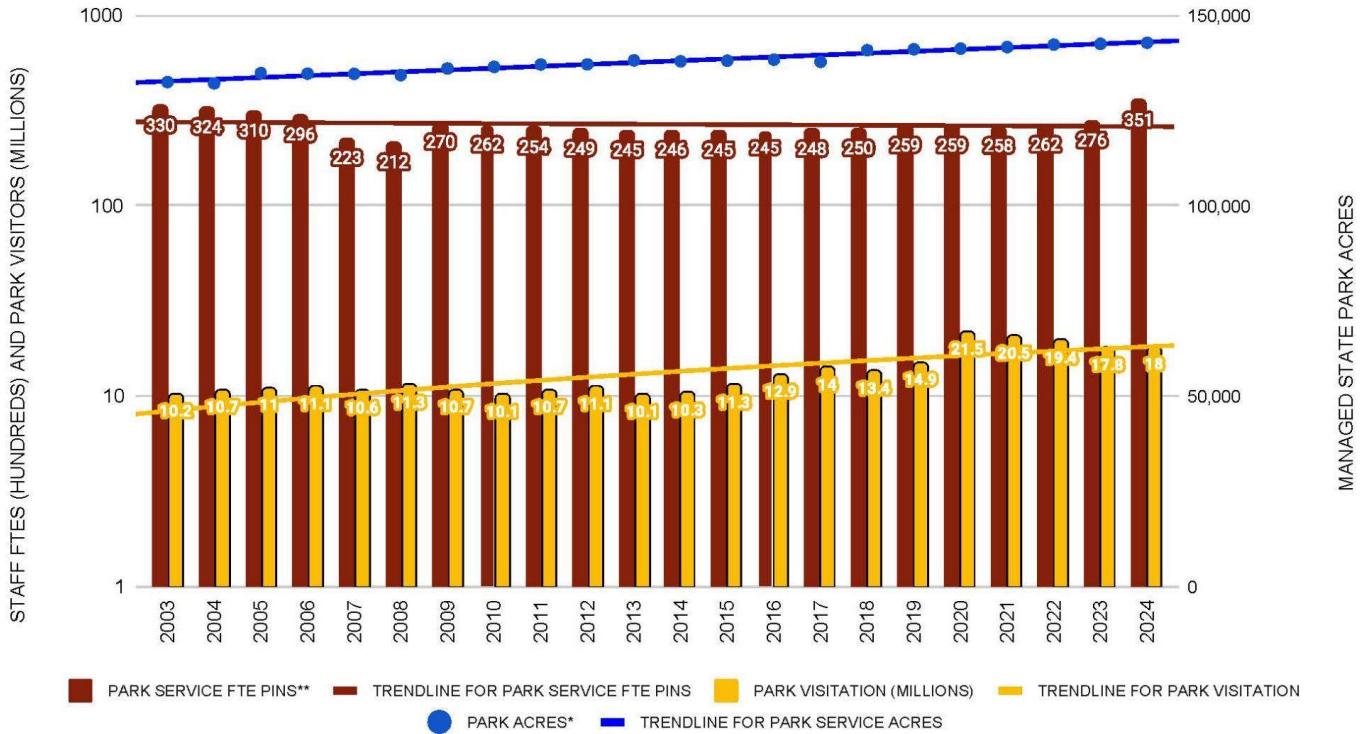
HB 717:

1. Authorizes the Department to create affiliated foundations in support of our public lands and operations
2. Requires the Department to request new positions to manage newly acquired lands based on a specific formula (at least one new position per 400 acres of new land acquired),
3. Authorizes the Governor to transfer a portion of the Program Open Space Stateside fund balance for operational needs when it has *at least* \$80 million in unencumbered funds *and* existing fund sources are insufficient to cover current staffing and operational needs.
4. Codifies the Land and Property Management Program established in the Department to process real property transactions that involve property owned by the Department including housing leases in accordance with the Department's Residential Housing Policy.
5. Increases the amount of their POS Local allocation counties can use for development projects from 75% to 100% if they have met their land acquisition goals in the most recent Local Land Preservation, Parks, and Recreation Plans (LPPRP).
6. Makes technical updates to the Natural Resources Article as it relates to the definition of "real property interest".
7. Codifies the Department's authority to use an easement valuation system.

DNR LAND UNIT ACRES MANAGED AND AUTHORIZED FTE PINS 2003 to 2024



PARK SERVICE FTE PINS AND PARK ACRES COMPARED WITH VISITATION - 2003 TO 2024



BY:

(To be offered in the Environment and Transportation Committee)

AMENDMENTS TO HOUSE BILL 717
(First Reading File Bill)

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 1, strike beginning with “exempting” in line 4 down through “Law;” in line 5; strike in their entirety lines 17 through 21, inclusive; and in line 24, strike “5–905(c)(1)” and substitute “5–905(c)(1), (d), and (e)”.

AMENDMENT NO. 2

On pages 2 through 8, strike in their entirety the lines beginning with line 13 on page 2 through line 12 on page 8, inclusive.

On page 8, in line 25, and on page 9, in lines 2 through 3, in each instance, strike “REAL PROPERTY” and substitute “FEE SIMPLE”; and on page 8, in line 29, strike “REAL PROPERTY” and substitute “FEE SIMPLE INTEREST”.

On page 9, in line 26, after “paragraphs” strike “(2) and (3)” and substitute “(2), (3), AND (4)”.

On page 10, after line 28, insert:

“(4) THE DEPARTMENT MAY NOT DISPOSE OF CONSERVATION EASEMENT INTERESTS UNDER SUBSECTION (F) OF THIS SECTION.”

On page 15, strike beginning with “provided” in line 26 down through “subtitle” in line 28; and in line 29, strike the opening bracket; and in the same line before “Except” insert an opening bracket.

On page 16, strike beginning with “its” in line 2 down through “renewal” in line 4 and substitute “ITS:”

A. APPORTIONMENT NOT YET ENCUMBERED AS OF JULY 1, 2025;

B. FISCAL YEAR 2026 APPORTIONMENT; AND

C. FUTURE ANNUAL APPORTIONMENT.

2. A LOCAL GOVERNING BODY MAY USE THE APPORTIONMENT IN SUBSUBPARAGRAPH 1 OF THIS SUBPARAGRAPH"; and after line 21, insert:

“(d) If land is donated to local governing bodies during the fiscal year, 75 percent of the appraised value the Department approves may be applied as a portion of, or all of, the local governing body's share of the project's cost for the projects referred to in [§ 5-904 of this subtitle] SUBSECTION (C) OF THIS SECTION.

“(e) If federal funds are received for any approved local project after it was funded by the State in accordance with [subsection] SUBSECTIONS (b) AND (C) of this section [or § 5-904 of this subtitle], the applicant shall reimburse the State in an amount equal to the federal contribution. The reimbursement shall be reserved for other projects approved for the applicant up to the limit of the share allocated to the local governing body.”.

HB717 SWA CC 2.10.25.pdf

Uploaded by: Mark Conway

Position: FWA



Saving the Chesapeake's Great Rivers and Special Places

Earl Conservation Center | 1212 West Street | Annapolis, MD 21401

www.chesapeakeconservancy.org | 443.321.3610

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Date: February 10, 2025
Bill Number: **HB 717 - Natural Resources - Public Lands - Acquisition, Staffing, Operations, and Funding**
Committee: House Environment and Transportation Committee
Position: Support with Amendments

Chairman Korman and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

Chesapeake Conservancy supports an *amended* HB 717 - Natural Resources - Public Lands - Acquisition, Staffing, Operations, and Funding, for the purpose of allowing the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to thoughtfully and more strategically address staffing and land acquisition.

This bill makes minor changes to current ethics laws as they affect the Department and directors or officials within an affiliated foundation under the Department's purview. Within the Natural Resources article, this bill defines "real property interest" – meaning a non-leasehold interest in real property and includes a fee simple acquisition interest, conservation easement interest, or another perpetual easement interest. Additionally, this bill establishes that a "Land and Property Management Program" exists within DNR, and that it is responsible for "processing lease agreements, easements, and other property-related documents" as well as issuing leases for housing Department employees.

The Department may allow affiliated foundations to work with associated organizations within the Department for the purposes of enhancing equitable use of, and access to, lands managed by the Department for: recreation and conservation; restoring or maintaining public access to natural resources; or towards ongoing operation and maintenance activities within lands managed by the Department.

Lastly, this bill allows for Program Open Space stateside funds, in excess of \$80M at the end of a fiscal year, to be able to be transferred to the existing *Forest or Park Reserve Fund*. While Chesapeake Conservancy supports the intent of this provision, we feel that if a funding cap should exist, the proposed \$80M cap is too low. Furthermore, any amount over a cap, shall be redistributed through current conservation programs.

As noted in Section 5-903 (pages 14 and 15), we suggest that:

- **any additional Program Open Space stateside fund balance, in excess of \$100,000,000, be allowed to be redistributed through the current transfer tax formula** and towards the state's other vital land conservation programs.

For further information, please contact Mark Conway at (443) 321-3610 or MConway@ChesapeakeConservancy.org.

We greatly appreciate your consideration and thank you for your service.

Sincerely,

Mark Conway
Executive Vice President, Chesapeake Conservancy

HB 717 Natural Resources - Public Lands - Acquisit

Uploaded by: Michelle Dietz

Position: FWA

Wednesday, February 12, 2025

TO: Marc Korman, Chair of the House Environment and Transportation Committee; and Committee Members

FROM: Michelle Dietz, The Nature Conservancy, Director of Government Relations; Cait Kerr, The Nature Conservancy, State Policy Manager

POSITION: Support with Amendments HB 717 Natural Resources - Public Lands - Acquisition, Staffing, Operations, and Funding

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) supports with amendments HB 717 requested by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR). TNC is a global conservation organization working to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. In Maryland, our work focuses on delivering science-based, on-the-ground solutions that secure clean water and healthy living environments for our communities, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing resilience in the face of a changing climate. We are dedicated to a future where people and nature thrive together.

TNC is part of a global effort to preserve the world's remaining wild and near-natural habitats, with the goal of protecting 30 percent of the planet by 2030. We recognize that investing in land management is a key piece of realizing our desired impact from meeting that goal. Here in Maryland, the lands and waters that surround us are irreplaceable resources. They are an invaluable part of our heritage, our economy, and our identity. Economists have estimated that nature contributes trillions of dollars to the global economy each year, in the form of ecosystem services such as pollination and water filtration and storage. Maryland's outdoor recreation economy generates 109,000 direct jobs, \$14 billion in consumer spending, \$4.4 billion in wages and salaries, and \$951 million in state and local tax revenue. Investing in management staff and resources allows our state to optimize land use for the greatest environmental and economic benefits. Improving access to our state's lands brings Marylanders closer to our cultural heritage, fosters land stewardship, and offers health benefits from recreation. HB 717 aims to dedicate funding, staff, and resources to strengthen Maryland's investment in managing and maintaining our lands.

TNC recommends the following amendments to HB 717,

Under Article – Natural Resources

- **Page 9, lines 1-3:** We support the staffing formula shared within the bill language, with the exception of easement acreage. We would like to request the addition of following language at the end of line 3 - NOT INCLUDING ACREAGE FROM CONSERVATION EASEMENTS
- **Page 12, lines 5-9:** We would like to request the addition ECOLOGICAL MANAGEMENT AND RESTORATION within the list of operation and maintenance activities within lands managed by the department.
- **Page 14, lines 26-30, Page 15, lines 1-23:** Regarding the transfer of funds from Program Open Space State Land Acquisition balance to the list of other activities performed by DNR for maintenance and management of these lands. TNC requests that bill language include provisions to pay back any funds moved from the acquisition account to the management account on a three-year timeline. Our recommendation is in line with the amendments shared by the Partners for Open Space.

Maryland's protected lands are an heirloom that we all have the opportunity to experience and the responsibility to steward for future generations. Our intent in sharing these recommendations and testimony for HB 717 is to continue elevating the need for strong partnerships and dedicated funding streams for meeting the needs of our protected areas. TNC appreciates DNR's work on this bill and we look forward to working with agency partners on implementing this legislation and the programs resulting from it. We also thank the committee for your consideration of our recommended amendments to the bill.

Therefore, we urge a favorable with amendments report on HB 717.

HB717 MACPRA Position 2-10-25.pdf

Uploaded by: Steve Miller

Position: FWA



MARYLAND ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY PARK & RECREATION ADMINISTRATORS (MACPRA)

HB717 Natural Resources – Public Lands – Acquisition, Staffing, Operations and Funding

February 10, 2025

MACPRA Position: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

The Maryland Association of County Park and Recreation Administrators (MACPRA) supports HB717 altering provisions of law regarding the Department of Natural Resources acquisition of real property and establishing a Land and Property Management Program in the Department. In addition to the benefits provided to the State Park system, the bill, as written, provides additional flexibility to Counties for how Program Open Space funds can be utilized, which is a high priority of County recreation and park professionals. This flexibility better equips Counties to address local needs for acquisition and/or development projects that enhance quality of life in the communities that we serve.

To this end, MACPRA would like to offer two additional amendments to the bill that would further enhance the ability of Counties to meet local recreational needs:

1. **To remove the \$25,000 / year ceiling when utilizing POS Acquisition funds to develop Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plans (LPPRP).** MACPRA proposes that Counties be permitted to apply for up to \$125,000 of acquisition funds in any given year to support the next LPPRP update. This simple change would save time and resources for locals and DNR staff.
2. **Amend language regarding the local match requirements for projects that utilize POS funding.** Based on land acquisition goals, Counties are required to provide a certain local match on development projects that utilize POS funds. However, the current law requires local match on the entire project rather than a local match to just the POS funding amount. This greatly limits the ability of Counties, particularly smaller ones, to stack or leverage grants off each other to accomplish bigger projects. MACPRA proposes that local match requirements should be applied only to the amount of POS funds utilized for a given project.

We would be pleased to work with DNR staff to craft specific language into the bill to include these proposals and appreciate any consideration the proposed amendments can be given.

The Maryland Association of County Park & Recreation Administrators (MACPRA) is an affiliate of the Maryland Association of Counties and represents the Parks and Recreation departments of all 23 counties and Baltimore City – the professionals engaged in the delivery of Parks and Recreation services throughout Maryland.

HB 717 - MML - OPP.pdf

Uploaded by: Angelica Bailey Thupari

Position: UNF



Maryland Municipal League
The Association of Maryland's Cities and Towns

TESTIMONY

February 12, 2025

Committee: House Environment & Transportation

Bill: HB 717 - Natural Resources - Public Lands - Acquisition, Staffing, Operations, and Funding

Position: Oppose

Reason for Position:

The Maryland Municipal League (MML) respectfully opposes House Bill 717, which authorizes transferring funds from Program Open Space to the Forest or Park Reserve Fund.

Program Open Space (“POS”) is designed to provide funding for the acquisition of land for public parks, recreation, and conservation. Local governments rely heavily on Program Open Space for our own recreation and open space development. POS is already in high demand, with all 157 municipalities and 24 counties eligible to apply for the \$32.1 million local pot in FY 2024. Many applicants are denied or do not receive the full funding they requested.

Reallocating these funds could reduce the already-limited money available for local projects, eroding our municipalities' ability to invest in their own parks and open space initiatives. Current POS funding is already stretched thin; we cannot afford depletion.

For these reasons, the League respectfully requests that the committee provide House Bill 717 with an unfavorable report. For more information, please contact Angelica Bailey Thupari, Director of Advocacy and Public Affairs, at angelicab@mdmunicipal.org or (443) 756-0071. Thank you for your consideration.

The Maryland Municipal League uses its collective voice to advocate, empower and protect the interests of our 160 local governments members and elevates local leadership, delivers impactful solutions for our communities, and builds an inclusive culture for the 2 million Marylanders we serve.

HB 717 - State Ethics Commission - Info Written On

Uploaded by: Kate Thompson

Position: INFO



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February 10, 2025

House Bill 717 – Natural Resources – Public Lands – Acquisition, Staffing, Operations and Funding

Testimony Before the Environment and Transportation Committee

The State Ethics Commission provides this informational written testimony to explain the impact of this proposed legislation as set forth in the agency's fiscal note submitted on this bill. The State Ethics Commission has been advised that an amendment will be offered on HB 717. As amended, HB 717 will not have a fiscal impact on the State Ethics Commission. The legislation would have a small operational impact that the agency can absorb with its current resources. The State Ethics Commission will be required to work with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to provide guidance and receive reports related to DNR officials or employees serving as an official or director of an agency affiliated foundation. This legislation provides for exemptions from certain conflict of interest provisions of the Public Ethics Law for agency employees serving in specific roles with the agency-affiliated foundation. The legislation, as amended, is consistent with prior legislation allowing similar exemptions for the employees of other State agencies who serve in various capacities with other agency-affiliated foundations with other State agencies such as the Maryland Stadium Authority, TEDCO and the University of Maryland Baltimore. In those instances, the exemption provisions for affiliated foundation activities are contained in the agency's specific enabling statute for the affiliated foundation rather than in the provisions of the Public Ethics Law.