



Wild Ones Chesapeake Bay  
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*Deeply rooted in native plants,  
promoting native landscapes  
through education, advocacy and  
collaborative action.*

**Testimony:** HB1267, Patuxent Research Refuge and Beltsville Agricultural Research Center - Zoning Classification (Protecting Patuxent Research Refuge Act)

**Committee:** Economic Matters

**Hearing Date:** March 6, 2026

**Position:** FAVORABLE with Amendments (see page 2 for Proposed Amendments)

Chair Valderrama, Vice Chair Charkoudian, and honorable members of the Committee:

Located in Southern Maryland, Wild Ones Chesapeake Bay<sup>1</sup>, a 71-member chapter of the national organization Wild Ones<sup>2</sup>, strives to preserve native biodiversity through the preservation, restoration, and establishment of native plant communities across Southern Maryland. **I strongly urge you to please support HB1267**, the Protecting Patuxent Research Refuge Act, for the benefits it will bring to our local ecosystems, including the native plants and creatures (biodiversity) that call Maryland home. We must take every step we can to save our treasured Chesapeake Bay and its watershed for future generations. This bill provides a critical layer of protection for one of Maryland's most vital natural and scientific assets.

The Patuxent Research Refuge and the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC) represent the largest contiguous block of forest between Washington, D.C. and Baltimore. This "green lung" is essential for:

- **Protecting Water Quality:** The land serves as a natural filter for the headwaters of the Anacostia and Patuxent Rivers, helping Maryland meet its Chesapeake Bay restoration goals.
- **Ensuring Climate Resilience:** Large, unfragmented forests are our best defense against the "urban heat island" effect and provide significant carbon sequestration.
- **Safeguarding Global Research:** The refuge is a world-renowned site for wildlife biology. Allowing transit projects or industrial development to fragment this habitat would permanently compromise decades of ongoing scientific data.

HB1267 is a common-sense measure that ensures these lands remain zoned for "Open Space" or "Resource Conservation," regardless of any future changes in federal ownership. It honors our commitment to future generations by ensuring this land is not lost to short-term commercial interests or disruptive transit infrastructure.

The USGS Bee Lab, which lies within the Patuxent Research Refuge, is a special place for me. For the past two years, members of Wild Ones Chesapeake Bay, along with several partner organizations, have propagated native plants from seeds collected on the Refuge. These native plants were grown onsite at the Refuge and distributed freely to residents and community groups in Southern Maryland to help restore the biodiversity that is being lost due to development and fragmentation of our ecosystems.

I can't stress this enough. We must take every step we can to save our treasured Chesapeake Bay and its watershed for future generations. I respectfully urge a **favorable report** on HB1267 and wildly appreciate your support!

*Marlene Smith*, President, Wild Ones Chesapeake Bay

<sup>1</sup>Wild Ones Chesapeake Bay Chapter, <https://chesapeakebay.wildones.org/>

<sup>2</sup>Wild Ones Natural Landscapers, LTD, a nationwide nonprofit organization with local chapters throughout the country, including 5 chapters in Maryland, <https://wildones.org/>



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Proposed Amendments:

**Page 3, 4-217, (C), amend to add (3) and (4):**

(3) DOES NOT PERMIT CONVERSION OF UNDEVELOPED AREAS TO USES FOR AGRICULTURE, ACTIVE RECREATION, FORESTRY, OR OTHER PLANT HARVESTING; AND

(4) REQUIRE PUBLIC HEARINGS FOR REVIEW OF ANY OF PROPOSED USE OF DEVELOPED AREAS.

**Page 4, 25-211, (B) amend and add:**

IF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OR ANY ASSIGNEE SELLS, LEASES, LICENSES, OR OTHERWISE ENCUMBERS ANY PORTION OF THE PROPERTY KNOWN AS THE BELTSVILLE AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH CENTER OR ANY OTHER U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE PROPERTY IN BELTSVILLE OR ITS VICINITY, THE DISTRICT COUNCIL SHALL CONTINUE A ZONING CLASSIFICATION FOR THAT PROPERTY THAT ~~RESTRICTS THE USES TO OPEN SPACE OR RESERVED OPEN SPACE~~. :

- (1) RESTRICTS THE USES TO OPEN SPACE, RESERVED OPEN SPACE, OR OTHER RESOURCE CONSERVATION USES; AND
- (2) DOES NOT PERMIT COMMERCIAL, INDUSTRIAL, OR RESIDENTIAL USES; AND
- (3) DOES NOT PERMIT CONVERSION OF UNDEVELOPED AREAS TO USES FOR AGRICULTURE, ACTIVE RECREATION, FORESTRY, OR OTHER PLANT HARVESTING; AND
- (4) REQUIRE PUBLIC HEARINGS FOR REVIEW OF ANY OF PROPOSED USE OF DEVELOPED AREAS.

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