

Support for HB 1267 - The Protecting Patuxent Research Refuge Act

Chair Valderrama and Members of the Economic Matters Committee,

My name is Gary Allen, former Mayor of Bowie and a frequent visitor to the Patuxent Research Refuge. I am here today to express my strong support for the Patuxent Research Refuge and Beltsville Agricultural Research Center Zoning Classification Bill. This legislation is a crucial step in safeguarding our natural resources, promoting environmental sustainability, and preserving these important areas for future generations.

Importance of the Patuxent Research Refuge

The Patuxent Research Refuge is a vital ecological asset in our region, home to diverse wildlife and essential habitats. By designating this land with strict zoning classifications that restrict its use to open space and resource conservation, we are not just protecting these areas for the future; we are fostering biodiversity and ecological balance. These federal properties are part of a unique environmental cluster of more than 100,000 acres, often referred to as the "green lungs" of the Washington metro region.

Key Benefits

1. Biodiversity:

- The Refuge is home to numerous species, some of which are recognized as threatened or endangered. Maintaining this land as open space allows these species to thrive and supports overall ecological health.

2. Climate Resilience:

- In the face of a growing urban population, these areas play a significant role in local climate resilience planning and implementation.

3. Agricultural Innovation:

- The Beltsville Agricultural Research Center is a cornerstone of agricultural innovation, contributing significantly to sustainable farming practices and national food security. Ensuring this Center remains focused on open space will support:
 - Continued access to land as an educational resource for the agricultural community, students, and the broader public, promoting health and a deeper understanding of our regional history.

Economic Considerations

While some may argue that imposing zoning restrictions on these areas could hinder economic development, protecting our remaining open spaces and natural resources will ultimately yield long-term economic benefits. They are the “Natural Capital” of this region. For instance:

- The Patuxent Research Refuge already attracts visitors for birdwatching, hiking, and other recreational activities. Preserving this area enhances its appeal and generates economic opportunities in ecotourism.

- The Beltsville Agricultural Research Center continues to foster agricultural research that benefits local farmers and the economy, ensuring continued innovation that boosts productivity and sustainability in Maryland's agricultural sector.

Community Support

I think the community's voice is clear: area residents want these areas protected. Numerous local organizations and citizens have expressed their support for this bill, recognizing its importance for environmental stewardship and economic sustainability.

Community meetings and forums have shown overwhelming support for preserving the Patuxent Research Refuge and the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center. Residents understand that these spaces are invaluable to their quality of life and the health of the environment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I urge you to support the Patuxent Research Refuge and Beltsville Agricultural Research Center Zoning Classification (Protecting Patuxent Research Refuge Act). This bill is not merely about zoning; it is about safeguarding our region's natural heritage, promoting sustainable practices, and investing in our community's future. By passing this legislation, we take a significant step toward ensuring that these vital areas remain protected for generations to come.

Thank you for your time.

Gary G Allen, Maryland Forestry Foundation