



Maryland Native Plant Society

APPRECIATION CONSERVATION EDUCATION

Testimony: HB1267 Patuxent Research Refuge and Beltsville Agricultural Research Center - Zoning Classification (Protecting Patuxent Research Refuge Act)
Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Hearing Date: March 31, 2026
Position: FAVORABLE

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and honorable members of the Committee:

The Maryland Native Plant Society (MNPS) strongly supports House Bill 1267. It is critical legislation to protect and maintain in perpetuity the preservation of over 18,000 acres of one of the Baltimore-Washington region's most endangered wildlands at Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC) and Patuxent Research Refuge (PRR).

Researchers with the Maryland Native Plant Society were the first to identify the Atlantic Coastal Pine Barrens communities at BARC and PRR, the result of decades of extensive field studies and research, in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources' Wildlife & Heritage Program and with federal and interstate researchers in the U.S. National Vegetation Classification project.¹⁻² This was the first documentation of this globally rare community type in Maryland. Specifically, the southernmost extent of the globally rare Atlantic Coastal Pine Barrens occupy the "sand belt" of northern Prince George's and Anne Arundel counties of Maryland's Western Shore.¹

Additionally, hundreds of uncommon to highly rare plants, animals, wetlands, and natural communities were discovered and documented for both BARC and PRR, although the importance of a simple sum of these is dwarfed by the critical value of the irreplaceable natural landscape of both properties as a whole. Just considering the plants, the survey found a total of 443 representing 249 genera in 94 families. The majority of the plant species are typical of the coastal plain, with many at or near their western limits in Maryland, which adds to their uniqueness. Furthermore, the survey found 22 state-listed, uncommon to highly rare plant species that are at risk for disappearing from the state and so need our protection.¹

House Bill 1267 provides a long overdue safeguard to inappropriately sited proposals like data centers, solar farms, the Maglev project, and real estate development. Though Presidents Reagan and George H.W. Bush attempted to close or reduce BARC in the past, and the current Trump administration is reportedly attempting to sell off both BARC and PRR, Congress has consistently protected it, with recent 2025-2026 efforts by the USDA to close it facing strong, bipartisan pushback and legislative attempts to secure funding.⁴ HB1267 not only expands land use restrictions to include prohibiting commercial, industrial, or residential uses in BARC, but also extends these restrictions to PRR lands.

The Maryland Native Plant Society promotes awareness, appreciation, and conservation of Maryland's native plants and their habitats. Our engaged, active members represent all 24 state jurisdictions, from the coastal plain beaches to the western mountains. We reach 20,000 followers on social media. MNPS is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization incorporated in Maryland.

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Although urban sprawl and its effects have substantially encroached into the region, this vast area still encompasses thousands of acres of high quality forest, wetlands, streams, and plant communities, many of which are highly rare or unique in the Baltimore-Washington region. These exceptional natural areas throughout BARC and PRR should be protected and preserved. We thank Delegates Lehman, Pena-Melnyk, Barnes, Bartlett, Bofo, Chang, Holmes, Rogers, and Taylor for their hard work and diligence in sponsoring the bill.

The Maryland Native Plant Society urges a favorable report on House Bill 1267.

Respectfully,

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References:

¹Simmons, R.H. 2021. 'Endangered Pine Barrens Communities of the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center' [PowerPoint presentation]. Maryland Native Plant Society Monthly Program.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XQrOBivM6eg&t=29s>

²Simmons, R.H. 2024. 'Relictual Floras and Habitats of the Washington, D.C. Region' [PowerPoint presentation]. 102nd Annual Meeting of the Virginia Academy of Science, University of Mary Washington, Fredericksburg, Virginia.

³Simmons, R.H., J.M. Parrish, M.D. Tice, and M. T. Strong. 2008. Conservation Priorities and Selected Natural Communities of the Upper Anacostia Watershed. *Marilandica* 12: pp. 1–22.
https://mdflora.org/Resources/Publications/Marilandica/marilandica_v12_n1.pdf

⁴Munro, D. (2025, September 8). Uncertain fate for site of USDA research center in Md. targeted for closure. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2025/09/08/usda-beltsville-agricultural-research-center->