

HB1267 PRR and BARC MD-IWLA comment letter.pdf

Uploaded by: Curt Howard

Position: FAV



Maryland Division
The Izaak Walton League of America
707 Conservation Lane
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20878-2983

DATE: March 31, 2026

TO: Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment
Senator Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice-Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment

RE: Support MD HB1267- Patuxent Research Refuge and Beltsville Agricultural Research Center – Zoning Classification (Protecting Patuxent Research Refuge Act)

Honorable Senators Feldman and Kagan:

On behalf of the Maryland Division-Izaak Walton League (MD-IWLA), I am asking you to support HB1267- Patuxent Research Refuge (PRR) and Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC)– Zoning Classification. This bill will allow local zoning and restrictions on development to preserve the natural areas of the PRR in Anne Arundel and Prince George’s Counties and BARC in Prince George’s County if the federal government decides to surplus these properties and transfer ownership. The PRR has been referred to as the ‘green lungs’ of this region, providing 13,000 acres of forest, meadow, and wetlands that give its urban and suburban visitors a respite from the surrounding intense development. With many unique and sensitive species found at the PRR, development could stress these natural areas in ways that would be irreversible. The large undeveloped areas at BARC add their own natural filters from pollution and for wildlife habitat.

The PRR provides hiking, birding, fishing and hunting opportunities not readily available elsewhere in this very developed part of Maryland. With fewer fishing and hunting opportunities in this area, it is likely there will be a decline in people getting licenses and permits to pursue these activities. This will reduce revenues for the state of Maryland and provide fewer dollars for protecting and enhancing natural areas and wildlife. Many of our members became highly motivated conservationists because of their fishing and hunting experiences.

Chartered in 1945, the MD-IWLA (www.marylandiwla.org) includes over 4,300 avid anglers, hunters, and outdoor sports enthusiasts across Maryland who are committed to the wise stewardship of our soil, air, woods, waters, and wildlife.

Please support HB1267 and assure that the unique PRR natural areas and the BARC campus will maintain their critical functions as undeveloped and low intensity uses in this highly developed part of Maryland.

Sincerely,

Curt Howard, President
Maryland Division-Izaak Walton League of America

Support for HB 1267 senate final ga .pdf

Uploaded by: gary allen

Position: FAV

Support for HB 1267 - The Protecting Patuxent Research Refuge Act

Mr. Chair and Members of the Education, Energy, and Environment 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

Audubon_EEE_Fav_HB1267PatuxentResearchRefuge.pdf

Uploaded by: Jim Brown

Position: FAV



Maryland Office
2901 E. Baltimore St
Baltimore, MD 21224

March 27, 2026

To: Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the Maryland Senate Committee on Education, Energy and the Environment

From: Audubon Mid-Atlantic - Jim Brown, Policy Director

Subject: Support for House Bill 1267, Protecting Patuxent Research Refuge Act

Audubon Mid-Atlantic submits this testimony in support of House Bill 1267 to protect important habitat, publicly accessible open space, and natural climate solutions at Patuxent Research Refuge and Beltsville Agriculture Research Center. Audubon Mid-Atlantic is the regional office of the National Audubon Society, representing over 35,000 Marylanders who advocate for the protection of birds, bird habitat, and policies protecting both birds and human communities in the face of increasing environmental challenges, habitat loss, pollution, and climate change. Along with the undersigned, independent Audubon Chapters across Maryland, we enthusiastically support HB 1267

Over 400 species of birds rely on Maryland's waterways, forests, marshes, and meadows either year-round or on their annual hemispheric migrations. The habitat at both the Patuxent National Wildlife Research Refuge and the Beltsville Agricultural Center is critical to many of those species, both those that live here year-round, and those that rely on Maryland during their annual hemispheric migration. The forest, meadow, wetland and stream habitats found in Patuxent are vital to the very birds that help define Maryland's identity from the iconic Baltimore Oriole, Great Blue Heron and Bald Eagle to numerous waterfowl and colorful spring warblers and songbirds that come to Maryland on their annual migration. HB 1267 will ensure this habitat stays intact for the birds and people that rely on it.

Patuxent National Wildlife Refuge is a globally and regionally Important Bird Area and therefore should be given significant protection from future detrimental land-uses. In Maryland, Audubon has worked with state and federal agencies to develop recognition of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in every region of the state. IBAs are identified by the National Audubon Society in collaboration with local authorities as places of critical local and hemispheric importance to the survival of resident and migrating birds for the habit they provide. The IBAs in Maryland represent the highest quality remaining habitats for vulnerable bird species. As is the case with Patuxent, these IBAs often overlap with some of our most significant, and most visited natural areas and public lands. IBAs are therefore given the utmost protection from development pressures and are often within or near our most iconic parks and preserved land.

In addition to protecting important habitat in Maryland, HB1267 also supports the already adopted Maryland state goals agreed to in the Irreplaceable Natural Areas Act of 2022, the Maryland The Beautiful Act of 2023, and the newly adopted Sustainable Growth Principles enacted in 2025.

Science tells us birds are in decline due to habitat loss. 1/3 of all Maryland bird species experienced significant population declines in the past 50 years. HB 1267 will help reverse this trend and hold Maryland up as a leader in habitat conservation and maintenance of publicly accessible open space.

Sincerely,

Jim Brown, Policy Director
Audubon Mid-Atlantic

Lisa Garrett, President
Prince George's Audubon Society

Julie Dunlap, Advocacy Chair
Audubon Society of Central Maryland

Ben Springer, Advocacy Chair
Southern Maryland Audubon Society

HB1267_Maryland Native Plant Society_Simmons, Fult

Uploaded by: Judy Fulton

Position: FAV



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.

Testimony: HB1267
Position: FAVORABLE
Page 2

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,

Rod Simmons
Board, Maryland Native Plant Society
simmons22041@gmail.com

Judy Fulton
President, Maryland Native Plant Society
Jfulton5@gmail.com

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->

HB1267_ S_BBC_Lambrow_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Kathy Lambrow

Position: FAV

**HB 1267 – PROTECTING PATUXENT RESEARCH REFUGE ACT – WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN
FAVOR OF THE BILL**

To: Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

I write on behalf of the Baltimore Bird Club's Conservation Committee to voice our strong support for the passage of HB 1267 – Protecting Patuxent Research Refuge Act.

The Patuxent Research Refuge has been a valuable, important, and iconic refuge and research center since it was created by Executive Order of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1936. The Refuge is an irreplaceable resource for wildlife conservation, ecological research, environmental education, and outdoor recreation. It is the only site in the National Wildlife Refuge System with a primary mission of wildlife research.

The Refuge was purposely sited adjacent to the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC), established by the USDA in 1910, so that the two units could coordinate their research work on environmental factors affecting wildlife and domestic animals. The landscape that encompasses BARC and Patuxent Research Refuge is considered the most intensively studied and documented natural area in the world. The DDT research cited by Rachel Carson's in her book *Silent Spring* was conducted on plots at Patuxent that are still in existence, allowing long-term comparison of DDT uptake data. At BARC, long-running soil nutrient experiments have led to improvements in agricultural practices through the Mid-Atlantic region. Many other examples of long-term research exist on the 13,000 acres occupied by Patuxent Research Refuge and 6,500 acres occupied by BARC.

The Refuge and BARC preserve rare, large tracts of unbroken forest in central Maryland, crucial for migratory songbirds and deserve protection.

Enacting HB 1267 will help ensure permanent protection of these vital habitats, preserve critical research sites used by scientists and students, and maintain public access to the Refuge for birdwatchers, educators, and nature enthusiasts. Protecting the Refuge and BARC advances Maryland's commitments to biodiversity, climate resilience, and science-based resource management, while supporting the health and well-being of local communities through ecosystem services such as water quality improvement, mitigation of air pollution, and flood mitigation.

For these reasons, the Baltimore Bird Club (a chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society, Inc.) urges you to support and advance HB 1267. We appreciate your consideration and are available to provide additional information in support of the bill.

Sincerely,



Kathy Lambrow
Chair, Conservation Committee



Cylburn Arboretum
4915 Greenspring Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21209-4168
410-733-5837

HB1267_Maryland Native Plant Coalition_Hoffman_EE

Uploaded by: Kirsten Hoffman

Position: FAV



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

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

The Maryland Native Plant Coalition is in strong support of HB1267, which seeks to protect and preserve the Patuxent Research Refuge and the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center.

Right in the heart of highly populated central Maryland are two incredibly unique wildlife habitats, the Patuxent Research Refuge and the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC). Together they make up the largest contiguous expanse of open space and wildlife habitat in the Baltimore-Washington region.¹ Both are currently owned and managed by the federal government; however, this situation could change. HB1267 puts a plan in place to preserve these vitally important properties in the event of a change in ownership of the land.

The Patuxent Research Refuge, established by President Franklin Roosevelt in 1936, is the only US wildlife refuge, out of over 570, created to support wildlife research.² The Refuge lies partially in Anne Arundel County and partially in Prince George's County. With over 13,000 acres of forests, meadows and wetlands, the Refuge provides vital habitat for migratory birds, amphibians, and forest-interior dwelling species (FIDS).

BARC, in Prince George's County, was established in 1910 and expanded in the 1930's during the Great Depression under Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace, who believed that "research was the best way to advance agriculture and preserve the environment."³ At 6,500 acres, BARC is comprised of various research and agricultural facilities but also contains high quality forests, wetlands, streams, and accompanying plant and wildlife communities.

Together these two properties encompass over 18,000 acres of open areas and serve as the "green lungs" in the midst of highly developed central Maryland.⁴ Although some of the BARC acreage is agricultural research land, the majority is natural habitats that provide extensive environmental, health and economic benefits to our state. These large natural areas capture rainfall and runoff, and stabilize soils, thereby reducing erosion. The many plants produce oxygen and trap pollutants like nitrogen, keeping it out of our waterways. The forest helps lower temperatures, a critical function in paved urban areas that suffer from heat-island effects. The natural areas promote human health by giving us tranquil spaces to experience nature's beauty. Additionally, the large tract of forest provides critical unfragmented, "interior" versus edge forest areas that many birds and other wildlife species need to reproduce and survive.⁵

Central Maryland is a highly developed and paved area of our state where much of the forested land is fragmented. Forest fragmentation, the “whittling away of forest tracts into increasingly smaller and more isolated patches” occurs as we construct housing, commercial districts, and roads, and engage in logging and agriculture.⁶ Small, fragmented forests do not provide the same environmental conditions as large uninterrupted forests, such as higher humidity and complex layering of canopy, midlevel and lower level vegetation. A forest fragment also has a much higher proportion of edges than interior space. Forest edges facilitate the encroachment of non-native invasive plants, allow greater light and wind penetration, and provide easier access for avian and mammalian predators. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources defines edge habitat as the forest area within 300 feet of the forest edge.⁷

FIDS, including certain migratory and non-migratory birds, box turtles, bats, frogs and salamanders, require interior forest spaces for food, shelter and nesting. 90% of Maryland’s forested land is privately owned⁸, and 70% of family-owned forests are less than 10 acres in size. Achieving the interior forest conditions necessary to support FIDS typically requires a forest of at least 50 acres.⁹ The natural areas of the Patuxent Research Refuge and BARC provide this necessary interior forest space, which is increasingly rare in Maryland.

For the many reasons outlined above, the preservation of the natural areas at Patuxent Research Refuge and BARC are of critical importance for the health of our ecosystems and Marylanders. The benefits these natural areas provide to our state’s residents and wildlife alike are priceless and should be preserved for our own and future generations.

The Maryland Native Plant Coalition asks for a FAVORABLE report on HB1267.

Respectfully,
Kirsten Hoffman
Maryland Native Plant Coalition
hoffman01@yahoo.com

References

¹ Patuxent Research Refuge. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Accessed March 4, 2026.

<https://www.fws.gov/apps/refuge/patuxent-research/about-us>

² Patuxent Research Refuge. About Us. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Accessed March 4, 2026.

<https://www.fws.gov/apps/refuge/patuxent-research/about-us>

³ Celebrating 100 Years of Beltsville Agricultural Research. United States Department of Agriculture. AgResearch Magazine. Accessed March 4, 2026. <https://agresearchmag.ars.usda.gov/2010/apr/research/>

⁴ Patuxent Research Refuge. About Us. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Access March 4, 2026.

<https://www.fws.gov/refuge/patuxent-research/about-us#:~:text=The%20refuge%20is%20the%20largest,vulnerable%20due%20to%20habitat%20loss>

⁵ Forest Health. Chesapeake Bay Program. Accessed on March 4, 2026.

<https://www.chesapeakebay.net/issues/whats-at-risk/forest-health>

⁶ Jones, C., J. McCann, S. McConville. A Guide to the Conservation of Forest Interior Dwelling Birds in the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area. May 2001. p. 1.

⁷ Jones, C., J. McCann, S. McConville. A Guide to the Conservation of Forest Interior Dwelling Birds in the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area. May 2001. p. 4.

⁸ Conservation Programs and Practices for: Forest Interior Wildlife Habitat. United States Department of Agriculture. Accessed on March 4, 2026. <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2022-10/Forested%20Habitats.pdf>

⁹ The FIDS are Alright?. Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay. April 5, 2019. Accessed March 4, 2026.

<https://www.allianceforthebay.org/2019/04/the-fids-are-alright/>

HB1267, FAV, Ed En Env.pdf

Uploaded by: Lore Rosenthal

Position: FAV

*Lore Lyon Rosenthal
2 Gardenway, Unit R
Greenbelt, MD 20770
301-345-2234H
SimplicityGroupsMD@gmail.com*

Committee: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment

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

Organization: Individual

Person Submitting: Lore Lyon Rosenthal

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: March 31, 2026

Dear Senator Feldman and members of the committee,

I am writing in favor of **HB1267 - Patuxent Research Refuge and Beltsville Agricultural Research Center - Zoning Classification (Protecting Patuxent Research Refuge Act)**

Maryland and the East Coast needs more open space. In order to prevent the most several impact of global warming, we need green space (trees, plants, and grasslands) to breath clean air for us. The Patuxent Refuge and Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (along with the Goddard Space Flight Center) are fondly referred to as the “Lungs of the Chesapeake”. They represent a large swatch of uninterrupted green space. Without them, we have very little contiguous land mass to regulate our climate.

In addition, both Patuxent and BARC participate in agricultural research. For example, they evaluate which vegetable and plant species will be able to survive and withstand higher temperatures that are anticipated in future years. This research assures us that we will not become “food insecure” and we will have enough food in the future.

If the zoning of these lands is changed, we run the risk of development overrunning this green space.

For all these reasons, I recommend **a favorable report on HB1267**

Thanks,

Lore Lyon Rosenthal

HB1267 LEHMAN WRITTEN TESTIMONY SENATE.pdf

Uploaded by: Mary Lehman

Position: FAV

DELEGATE MARY A. LEHMAN
Legislative District 21
Prince George's and
Anne Arundel Counties

Government, Labor, and
Elections Committee

Chair
Local Government/Bi-County
Agencies and Administration
Subcommittee



The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 163
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3114
800-492-7122 Ext. 3114
Mary.Lehman@house.maryland.gov

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**HB1267 – PATUXENT RESEARCH REFUGE AND BELTSVILLE
AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH CENTER – ZONING CLASSIFICATION
(PROTECTING PATUXENT RESEARCH REFUGE ACT)**

FAVORABLE

Good afternoon Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Honorable Members of the Education, Energy and Environment Committee,

For the record my name is Delegate Mary Lehman, requesting a favorable report on House Bill 1267, Protecting Patuxent Research Refuge Act.

This bill will limit future development of the Patuxent Research Refuge and Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC) and protect them as open space or a relative preservation zoning. It will ensure that even in the event of selling or leasing the property known as the Patuxent Research Refuge, it will be perpetually protected within the zoning classes of open space, reserved open space, or any other resource conservation uses.

The Patuxent Research Refuge encapsulates almost 13,000 acres of land that is home to over 230 species in need of conservational protection and over 1,250 species total. This plot of land is also the only refuge in the US established specifically for wildlife research, an essential field that ensures sustainability of our environment. As an example of the research that has come out of this facility, Rachel Carson based her landmark book, *Silent Spring*, largely off their findings on how the use of DDT effects the thickness of eggshells and hatch rates for the bald eagles living in this area. Another example of exemplary conservation work that has been done at PPR is the recovery of whooping cranes. Their population was once at a low of 16 wild individuals and has now risen to over 400 largely in part to Patuxent's work.

This is the largest plot of undeveloped, natural forest between DC and Baltimore, and it needs to maintain that title. As a green lung between the two major cities, its ecological functions are irreplaceable with functions such as carbon sequestration, stormwater drainage, heat-island mitigation, and climate resilience.

The Patuxent Research Refuge is also constrained by former military testing zones. The refuge acquired the land formerly known as Fort Meade, an allotment that is over 8,000 acres of past military testing grounds that are dangerous to develop.

The current federal administration has shared its wishes to close the BARC facility. It is another unique research facility with over 6,500 acres of natural environment. BARC has been essential in pioneering the research that has led to the grass in your backyards, the type of mosquito repellent you use, and even the turkeys you eat for Thanksgiving. The facility has proven valuable for not only all Marylanders, but all Americans.

For Maryland residents, the benefits are plentiful. PRR area provides an avid birding experience, beautiful views, opportunities for students (many can find internships at this location), and families interested in environmental conservation to observe untouched natural beauty in the backyards of many urban communities.

In a time where the future of many research facilities, and public lands in general, is unknown, it is essential that Maryland protects what is established and aids the active contributions to the betterment of our ecosystems. These landscapes are irreplaceable. We cannot simply replace 13,000 acres of mature forest, nor replicate the scientific impacts of these facilities elsewhere.

I respectfully ask the committee for a favorable report on HB1267.

Michael Brown FAV

Uploaded by: Michael Brown

Position: FAV

HB1267_Senate_PDF-Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Michael Brown

Position: FAV

**HOUSE BILL 1267 - RELATING TO ZONING PROTECTIONS FOR THE
PATUXENT RESEARCH REFUGE AND THE BELTSVILLE AGRICULTURAL
RESEARCH CENTER.**

FAVORABLE

Chairman, vice chair, and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environmental Committee.

I, **Michael Brown, 10 Southway, Greenbelt, MD 20770**, am requesting your support of House Bill 1267 (HB 1267), relating to zoning protections for

- The **Patuxent Research Refuge (PRR)** and
- The **Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC)**.

This bill is a common-sense and forward-looking measure that will safeguard two irreplaceable federal research and conservation assets located in our state.

Purpose: Both PRR and BARC provide **critical habitat** for hundreds of bird, mammal, reptile, amphibians, and plant species, and functions as a vital **green corridor** in an otherwise intensely developed region between Washington, D.C., and Baltimore.

- PRR's programs inform migratory bird management, endangered species recovery, pollutant impact assessment, and other core federal and state conservation responsibilities. the PRR is often described as the "**green lungs of Central Maryland,**" because its large forested and wetland areas help clean the air and provide critical habitat in Central Maryland between Washington, DC and Baltimore.
- BART is the U.S. Department of Agriculture's **premier and largest research campus**, covering thousands of acres and employing hundreds of scientists and staff in Maryland. BARC has been at the forefront of research on crop improvement, soil health, climate-resilient agriculture, and animal health, producing practical benefits for farmers, consumers, and taxpayers across the country. Recent federal actions have recognized both its national importance and its vulnerability, including new funding to protect and modernize facilities.

Both Facilities continue to face **significant development pressures**. Large-scale infrastructure proposals, such as the previously considered Maglev route, demonstrated how quickly these lands could be threatened by projects inconsistent with their conservation and research missions.

Growth -- HB 1267 takes a **more responsible** and predictable future growth approach. By establishing appropriate zoning frameworks for these areas, the bill ensures that local and state land use decisions will be consistent with the federal purposes. Instead of relying on ad hoc battles, HB 1267 creates a clear, proactive policy line that says: **these lands are special, and their primary purposes are research, conservation, and public benefit**, not speculative development. This bill does not freeze communities in amber or prevent **reasonable, compatible uses**. Rather, it protects the core functions of these federal campuses while still

allowing surrounding areas to grow in ways that respect scientific, ecological, and federal investment priorities. Compatible uses – such as

- **educational** partnerships,
- low-impact **recreation**, and
- collaborative **research** facilities

continue, but harmful, irreversible conversion of **critical habitat and research land** is discouraged or barred.

Economics: HB 1267 represents **sound fiscal stewardship**. The federal government has already invested billions of dollars over decades in infrastructure, scientific programs, and natural capital at PRR and BARC. State and local governments benefit from

- high-quality jobs,
- collaborative **research projects**,
- visitor **spending**, and
- **educational** programs

connected to these sites. Discouraging incompatible development to encroach on or degrade these lands would put those long-term economic benefits at risk and potentially invite future federal disinvestment or relocation.

Some may argue that additional zoning protections could constrain future transportation or economic development options. In reality, this bill encourages better planning by clearly defining where high-impact projects should not go, thereby redirecting growth toward more suitable locations. Rather than creating uncertainty for investors or agencies, HB 1267 provides clarity and reduces the likelihood of **costly litigation, community conflict, and project delays** that often arise when development is proposed in ecologically or scientifically sensitive areas.

Environmental: HB 1267 also advances Maryland's

- climate,
- biodiversity, and
- water quality goals.

The natural areas provide flood mitigation, carbon storage, and water filtration benefits that support the health of the Patuxent River and the Chesapeake Bay watershed. BARC's research directly supports adaptation to climate change and the development of more resilient, sustainable agricultural practices, which are essential to our country and Maryland in particular. Also this Bill works to meet its **greenhouse gas reduction and food security** objectives.

Summary: For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 1267 because it reflects the values of Maryland residents who have consistently expressed support for protection **support: open space, conserving wildlife habitat, defending scientific integrity and responsible growth** against short-sighted political and/or economic pressures. By passing this bill, the general assembly will be honoring years of local advocacy and ensuring that future generations can continue to learn from, work at, and enjoy these remarkable lands.

HB1267_EEE_MDSierraClub_FAV_2026March31.pdf

Uploaded by: Michael Wilpers

Position: FAV



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

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly supports House Bill 1267 because it takes important steps to protect two ecologically important natural areas from future development should the federal government decide to vacate them: the Patuxent Research Refuge (PRR) and the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC). The bill helps to ensure that these properties retain their extensive, undeveloped natural areas, which together form the largest contiguous forest between Baltimore and Washington, DC.¹

For the last 100 years, the 6,500-acre facility at BARC has contributed to significantly advancing agricultural knowledge and technologies that provide the country with healthy crops and animals, natural resources, sustainable agricultural systems, and safe products. Currently, one of the ongoing projects is devoted to breeding and growing hybrid American chestnut trees resistant to the blight that killed 99 percent of this keystone species in the early twentieth century, before which time it had significant economic value as a food crop and wood product for the eastern half of the country.

While much of the landscape at BARC is utilized for research, significant portions are wild, spared from development thanks to their location within a federal reservation. These natural areas contain forests, grasslands, streams, and wetlands, including unusual and irreplaceable habitats such as vernal pools, magnolia bogs, and pine barrens. They support over 230 species of birds, rare freshwater mussels, three globally rare plant communities, and 25 state rare, threatened, or endangered plant species.² BARC ranks second among the top 100 birding “hotspots” in Prince George’s County, second only to the Patuxent Refuge’s Central Tract.³

Despite BARC’s tremendous value, the USDA Secretary laid out a plan in July 2025 that it will be “vacated” as part of the large-scale reorganization of USDA.⁴ Not surprisingly, the Department’s subsequent report on the comment period showed overwhelming opposition to

¹ “Patuxent Research Refuge” [web page], U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (no date).
<https://www.fws.gov/refuge/patuxent-research/species>

² R. H. Simmons, et al., “Conservation Priorities and Selected Natural Communities of the Upper Anacostia Watershed,” *Marilandica* (Maryland Native Plant Society), vol. 12, no. 1, 2008, pp. 1-23.

³ “Prince George’s, MD,” hotspots, eBird (Cornell Lab of Ornithology), <https://ebird.org/region/US-MD-033/hotspots>

⁴ “Department of Agriculture Reorganization Plan,” Secretary Memorandum: SM 1078-015, 7/24/2025
<https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/sm-1078-015.pdf> (“Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC): this facility will be vacated over multiple years to avoid disruption of critical USDA research activities.”)

closure from different types of constituents.⁵ Of more than 14,000 comments received on USDA's overall reorganization, 82% opposed the plan. For BARC specifically, "the dataset comprises 2,185 comments submitted to the USDA and Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC), with a 92% negative sentiment . . . citing risks to ongoing research, environmental impacts, and regional economic reliance."⁴ Fortunately, in November 2025, Maryland Senators Van Hollen and Alsobrooks secured full funding of BARC for fiscal year 2026, postponing any closure for the time being, but leaving the site vulnerable in subsequent years.⁶

Adjoining BARC to the east, the Patuxent Research Reserve encompasses more than 12,500 acres of natural areas that offer the public 23 miles of trails and the National Wildlife Visitor Center. Together, the North and South Tracts attract more than 200,000 visitors annually to hike, fish, and enjoy nature.⁷ Two hunting seasons in fall and spring provide opportunities for hunting deer and wild turkey, with more than 5,000 people taking part annually.⁷ The Visitor Center draws between 40,000 and 60,000 visitors each year.⁷

The facility also serves as the Department of Interior's largest center for environmental science and education, including the USGS Bird Banding Laboratory, the North American Breeding Bird Survey, the USGS Bee Lab, the Northeast Amphibian Research and Monitoring Initiative, and the Fish Passage Design and Analysis Laboratory. While the federal government has not explicitly targeted the PRR for closure, attempts to drastically cut staff there are cause for concern about the property itself. To date, the Department of Interior's attempts at mass layoffs have faced legal challenges, and court proceedings are ongoing.⁸

HB1267 will help protect these valuable natural areas lands as habitats and public amenities in case the federal government sells or otherwise transfers ownership or management. For these reasons, the Maryland Sierra Club respectfully requests a favorable report on HB 1267.

Michael Wilpers
Biodiversity & Natural Places Team
wilpersm@gmail.com

Josh Tulkin
Chapter Director
Josh.Tulkin@MDSierra.org

⁵ "USDA Reorganization Summary and Analysis of Feedback," U.S. Department of Agriculture, 12/8/2025 <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/usda-reorg-comments-analysis-12082025.pdf>;

O. Kelley, "USDA Reveals Public Comment Support for BARC as Funding Showdown Looms," *Greenbelt News and Review*, 1/1/2026 <https://www.greenbeltnewsreview.com/news-stories/usda-reveals-public-comment-support-for-barc-as-funding-showdown-looms/>

⁶ U. S. Senator Chris Van Hollen [website], "Van Hollen, Alsobrooks Announce Protections for BARC & Over \$25 Million in Direct Funding for Local Projects Supporting Economic Development, Emergency Response, Veterans, Infrastructure, & More," Nov. 25, 2025 https://www.vanhollen.senate.gov/news/press-releases/van-hollen-alsobrooks-announce-protections-for-barc-and-over-25-million-in-direct-funding-for-local-projects-supporting-economic-development-emergency-response-veterans-infrastructure_more;

J. Thompson, "Advocates and Lawmakers Are Fighting to Save the USDA's Flagship Campus," *Sierra Magazine*, 1/29/2026. <https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/advocates-and-lawmakers-are-fighting-save-usda-s-flagship-campus>

⁷ B. Knudsen, *Patuxent Research Refuge: Comprehensive Conservation Plan*. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (2013), pp. 3-44 to 3-55. https://www.fws.gov/sites/default/files/documents/PWR_2022_RevisedCCP.pdf

⁸ Federal Workers Legal Defense Network, "Federal Court Litigation Relating to Federal Workers," 2/25/26 <https://workerslegaldefense.org/litigation-tracker>

written testimony RJD on HB 1267 Senate EEE March

Uploaded by: Richard Dolesh

Position: FAV



Friends of Patuxent Research Refuge, Inc.

10901 Scarlet Tanager Loop • Laurel, Maryland 20708-4011

<http://www.friendsopatuxent.org> • (301) 497-5789

Email: friendsprrr@friendsopatuxent.org

Supporting wildlife conservation, education, and research at the Patuxent Research Refuge, a National Wildlife Refuge of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Eastern Ecological Science Center of the US Geological Survey

Testimony of Richard Dolesh, Chair of the Board of Directors, Friends of the Patuxent Research Refuge on HB1267, Protecting Patuxent Research Refuge Act

March 31, 2026, Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

My name is Richard Dolesh. I am the chairman of the board of directors of the Friends of Patuxent, a nonprofit all volunteer group that has supported the mission of the Patuxent Research Refuge for 32 years. We appreciate the opportunity to testify today in support of HB 1267.

This legislation is needed for three important reasons:

First, To protect against future land use decisions that would be incompatible with the and existing character, quality, and integrity of these two federal facilities, the world-renowned, Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, and the other, Patuxent Research Refuge, a one-of-a-kind National Wildlife Refuge, that collectively protect nearly 20,000 of acres of natural land in Prince George's and Anne Arundel Counties.

After more than a century of stability, these lands are under a series of threats so severe that the State of Maryland and its local governments must take action to prevent future land use decisions that could destroy the value and character of these protected public lands and the communities that surround them. By way of example, just witness the ongoing struggles local governments and states are having over unplanned detention centers being implemented by the federal government right now around the country.

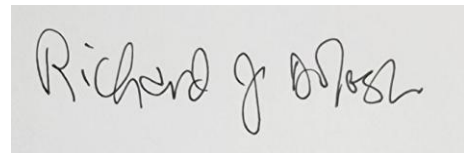
Second, this legislation is needed to assure the long-term preservation of these important conservation lands that have been protected for a century. It is clear from recent actions by the US Department of Agriculture to move thousands of employees out of the DC region and possibly dispose of the 6600 acres of the Beltsville Ag Center, that this facility and this land are clearly under threat, possibly in perhaps a matter of months.

The Patuxent Research Refuge has faced different kind of threats in recent years. One such example was the Super Conducting Magnetic Levitation Train, or MAGLEV, planned to take substantial amounts of refuge land by eminent domain and cause serious impacts to the Patuxent

River watershed. The Federal Railway Administration pulled the plug on this project last year, but it was a close call. Other threats abound.

The third reason this legislation is needed is to ensure that the affected counties and the State of Maryland have a say in any critical land use decisions that would affect Maryland lands and waters, especially these long-protected conservation lands. I cannot emphasize this point strongly enough. Maryland has a vital stake in what happens to these lands and waters in the future. What we allow to happen must be based on thoughtful well-planned decisions. The environmental and economic consequences to Maryland are profound. With this bill, Maryland intends to keep these lands as they have been for a century or more—in protected open space, preserving the ecological and environmental benefits of clean air and clean water and abundant wildlife for our communities and our citizens. And to ensure that we have the final say in how they might be changed or developed in the future.

For these reasons and more, the Friends of Patuxent Research Center support HB 1267. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important legislation and Friends of Patuxent Research Refuge encourage your support of this bill.

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light gray rectangular background. The signature reads "Richard J. Dolesh" in a cursive, slightly slanted script.

Richard Dolesh
Chair of the Board of Directors
Friends of Patuxent Research Refuge

Home address: 19603 Aquasco Road
Aquasco, MD, 20608
dolesh@gmail.com
301-848-8154

HB1267_IndivisibleHoCo_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Shantanu Ghosh

Position: FAV



HB1267

Patuxent Research Refuge and Beltsville Agricultural Research Center - Zoning Classification (Protecting Patuxent Research Refuge Act)

Testimony before Education, Energy, and the Environment

Hearing March 31, 2026

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Feldman and Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the committee, my name is Shantanu Ghosh, and I am representing Indivisible Howard County on behalf of its 1900+ members. Indivisible Howard County is an active member of the Maryland Legislative Coalition (with 30,000+ members). We are providing written testimony today **in support of HB1267**, which would conserve the Patuxent Research Refuge and the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center as open space, prohibiting commercial or residential development even if sold, leased, or transferred. We thank Delegate Lehman and co-sponsors for introducing this bill.

Both the Patuxent Research Refuge and Beltsville Agricultural Research Center represent some of the most significant remaining contiguous green space in central Maryland. The Patuxent Research Refuge alone encompasses more than 12,800 acres across Anne Arundel and Prince George's Counties, making it the only national wildlife refuge established specifically to support wildlife research.¹ In a region facing rapid suburban growth and increasing development pressure, maintaining protective zoning safeguards critical habitat for migratory birds, pollinators, and native species, while preserving floodplain capacity and carbon-sequestering forests that mitigate climate impacts.

Similarly, the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center spans nearly 7,000 acres and is one of the largest and most important agricultural research complexes in the world. Operated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, it plays a vital role in food security research, climate-resilient crop development, and soil science.² By establishing clear zoning protections now, HB1267 provides long-term certainty that these longstanding public research lands remain safeguarded, regardless of future changes in land ownership or policy priorities.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

We respectfully urge a favorable report.

Shantanu Ghosh

Hanover, Maryland 21076

Sources Cited:

1. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Serv., *Patuxent Research Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan § Mission and History* (2022),
https://www.fws.gov/sites/default/files/documents/PWR_2022_RevisedCCP.pdf
2. Beltsville Agricultural Research Center Superfund Site Profile, Maryland Dept. of the Environment (2025),
https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/LAND/MarylandBrownfieldVCP/Documents/www.mde.state.md.us/assets/document/brownfields/Ag_Resrch_Fac.pdf

HB1267 Humane World for Animals FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Stacey Volodin

Position: FAV



Formerly called the Humane
Society of the United States and
Humane Society International

March 31, 2026

**Education, Energy, and Environment Committee
HB 1267, Patuxent Research Refuge and Beltsville Agricultural Research Center - Zoning
Classification (Protecting Patuxent Research Refuge Act)
FAVORABLE**

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee:

On behalf of our Maryland members and supporters, Humane World for Animals offers its support for HB 1267 to maintain zoning classifications that restrict the use of lands on the Patuxent Research Refuge to open space, reserved open space or other resource conservation uses and does not permit commercial, industrial or residential uses; and restricts the use of lands on the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center to open space and reserved open space.

These protected land areas provide vital resources for Maryland's human inhabitants, as well as essential habitat for a magnificent array of wildlife.

Habitat loss and fragmentation pose an immediate and long-term threat to countless wildlife species. The U.S. human population is expected to grow to nearly 400 million by 2050, meaning more development, more deforestation and habitat degradation. A new long-term study finds that 3 billion birds, even common birds, have vanished in the U.S. and Canada.¹

In response, wildlife management professionals and scientists across the U.S. stress the importance of conserving and enhancing crucial habitats to ensure the continued health and wellbeing of wildlife. Ensuring ongoing protections from potentially damaging uses on these Maryland properties is an important part of this process.

Because of this, Humane World for Animals reiterates support for HB 1267 to maintain zoning classifications for the use of lands on the Patuxent Research Refuge and the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center.

Sincerely,

Stacey Volodin

Maryland State Director
svolodin@humaneworld.org

¹ Rosenberg KV, Dokter AM, Blancher PJ, Sauer JR, Smith AC, Smith PA, Stanton JC, Panjabi A, Helft L, Parr M, Marra PP. Decline of the North American avifauna. *Science*. 2019 Oct 4;366(6461):120-124. doi: 10.1126/science.aaw1313. Epub 2019 Sep 19. PMID: 31604313.

Anne Arundel County _FAV_HB1267 Senate Crossover.p

Uploaded by: Tom Ni

Position: FAV



March 31, 2026

House Bill 1267

**Patuxent Research Refuge and Beltsville Agricultural Research Center -
Zoning Classification (Protecting Patuxent Research Refuge Act)**

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

Anne Arundel County **SUPPORTS** House Bill 1267 – Patuxent Research Refuge and Beltsville Agricultural Research Center - Zoning Classification. This Bill, with the adopted amendments, will preserve the natural habitats in both the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center and the Patuxent Research Refuge, which are currently federally owned.

The Beltsville Agricultural Research Center and the Patuxent Research Refuge contain thousands of acres of high quality forests, wetlands, streams, and plant communities. Many of these environmentally valuable communities are not just highly rare or unique in Maryland, but also globally. Some specific expressions of pitch pine - scarlet oak - black huckleberry mixed woodland communities, once more common in the greater Anacostia watershed region, are now only preserved in the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center and the Patuxent Research Refuge. It is our duty to protect and preserve these undeveloped natural areas, which provide significant ecological benefits to Marylanders and the State, for generations to come.

The portion of the Patuxent Research Refuge located in Anne Arundel County is currently zoned OS- Open Space, as part of the County's adopted comprehensive land use plan and adopted Green Infrastructure Master Plan for the purpose of conservation. If the federal government divests itself of ownership, new entities could assume ownership of the land and seek rezoning, through either the comprehensive zoning process or administrative rezoning, for some other use. This Bill prohibits the conversion of these undeveloped natural areas for uses other than preservation, ensuring the protection of these key natural areas and habitats. For those reasons, Anne Arundel County respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE** report on House Bill 1267.