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## Testimony in Support of HB 1560, House Environment and Transportation Committee

March 11, 2026

### Ecological Benefits of the Forest Stewardship Act

Madam Chair, Mr. Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the Ecological Benefits of the Forest Stewardship Act.

Maryland's forests are one of the State's most valuable natural assets. Our 2.4 million acres of forest provide essential ecological services that benefit every resident — including clean drinking water, reduced stormwater runoff, flood mitigation, carbon sequestration, and wildlife habitat. These benefits are especially important for the health of the Chesapeake Bay and for strengthening Maryland's resilience to climate change.

What is often overlooked, however, is that roughly three-quarters of Maryland's forests are privately owned. **Private landowners provide these ecological benefits to the public every day, yet the value of those services is rarely recognized in the economic framework that guides land conservation and management policy.**

This legislation addresses that gap in three important ways.

**First**, it directs the Department of Natural Resources to develop a scientifically grounded methodology for measuring the value of forest ecosystem services. Establishing a clear and consistent framework will help inform future conservation programs and policy decisions.

**Second**, the bill establishes an Ecosystem Service Investment Fund designed to support voluntary conservation and forest stewardship by private landowners. This fund would create a mechanism to recognize and support the ecological services forests provide, while leveraging public and private investment.

**Third**, the bill launches a pilot program encouraging the adoption of ecosystem service-oriented forest management plans in high-priority ecological areas. These plans build upon existing forest stewardship practices and promote long-term forest health, biodiversity, and climate resilience.

Importantly, participation in these programs is voluntary, and the legislation is designed to partner with landowners rather than impose new mandates.

By recognizing and supporting the ecological services that forests provide, as PUBLIC BENEFITS, Maryland can strengthen its conservation efforts, support responsible land stewardship, and protect the environmental benefits that forests deliver to communities across the State.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB1560.

Thank you for your consideration.

Gary G Allen,

President