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Testimony in Support of
House Bill 578 - Fish and Wildlife - Endangered and Threatened Species and Migratory Birds -
Regulations, Lists, Petitions, Essential Habitats, and Takings
Environment and Transportation Committee
February 18, 2026

The Rural Maryland Council **supports House Bill 578 - Fish and Wildlife - Endangered and Threatened Species and Migratory Birds - Regulations, Lists, Petitions, Essential Habitats, and Takings**. House Bill 578 updates Maryland's endangered and threatened species law by establishing a clear, science-based framework for reviewing species listings, regulations, and essential habitat designations. The bill authorizes the Department of Natural Resources to periodically evaluate existing regulations, consider updated scientific data, and ensure that protections remain appropriate, effective, and transparent.

Maryland's current statute provides important protection for endangered and threatened species, but many of its regulatory components have not been systematically reviewed in decades. HB 578 creates a predictable process for reassessing those protections, including the criteria used for listing and delisting species and the information required when petitions are submitted. This approach strengthens conservation by ensuring decisions are based on the best available science and current conditions on the ground.

The bill also benefits landowners, businesses, and local governments by improving clarity and consistency. When regulations are clearly defined and regularly reviewed, regulated communities are better able to plan projects, manage land responsibly, and comply with the law. HB 578 helps avoid outdated or duplicative requirements that may no longer serve conservation goals, while preserving strong safeguards for species that truly need them.

Land use decisions and wildlife conservation are closely linked in Maryland. Forests, farms, and working lands provide critical habitat for many species, but they also support thousands of jobs and contribute billions of dollars to the state's economy. By encouraging cooperation between the Department of Natural Resources and stakeholders, HB 578 promotes conservation strategies that protect wildlife while recognizing the practical realities of land management.

Healthy ecosystems depend not only on protection, but on active, informed management. Regulations that reflect current science and local conditions are more likely to result in meaningful conservation outcomes. HB 578 advances this goal by modernizing Maryland's endangered species framework and ensuring it remains effective, credible, and balanced.

The Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable support of HB 578.