



Montgomery County

Office of Intergovernmental Relations

ROCKVILLE: 240-777-6550

ANNAPOLIS: 240-777-8270

HB 1560

DATE: March 11, 2026

SPONSOR: Delegate Behler

ASSIGNED TO: Environment and Transportation

CONTACT PERSON: Garrett Fitzgerald (garrett.fitzgerald@montgomerycountymd.gov)

POSITION: Information (Department of Environmental Protection)

Forest Conservation - Incentives - Pilot Program and Fund

House Bill 1560 would require the Department of Natural Resources to establish a pilot program to assist private landowners in developing and implementing sustainable forest management plans prioritizing long-term ecosystem services. The bill seeks an appropriation of \$10 million in fiscal year 2028 to support the pilot program.

The retention and sustainable management of privately owned forest land provides critical ecological services and public benefits to the people of Maryland. Privately owned healthy forests provide cost-effective contributions toward many State and local goals for mitigating climate change, improving air quality, protecting drinking water, providing flooding mitigation and stormwater management, increasing diversity, and maintaining a robust forest management industry.

Forest lands across the State are facing degradation due to parcelization and fragmentation, and much of the forest land, particularly upland forests, faces significant development pressure. A program that provides financial incentives to retain privately owned forest land and carry out long-term forest management would greatly contribute to the State reaching forest management goals.

While full implementation of the envisioned pilot program may be optimal, there would also be value in taking a phased approach starting with a design stage. For example, without delineation of the “areas covered by an ecosystem value-oriented forest management plan,” it is difficult to discern how this program would align with local ordinances and regulations (page 8 Line 24). It is also unclear if projects receiving support through the proposed fund may also request support through the Forest Conservation Fund.

The Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection stands ready to provide input as this important concept is developed further.