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HB 701 and SB 523

Department of the Environment – Nontidal Wetlands – Protection of Vernal Pools

(Vernal Pool Wetlands Protection Act of 2026)

TESTIMONY OF Diana Devers (Roman), Director of Environmental Programs & Engagement for Patapsco Heritage Greenway on behalf of Patapsco Heritage Greenway-- Favorable

I received a Master's of Science degree in environmental science from University of Maryland and have worked in the environmental and educational fields for close to 20 years. I am the Director of Environmental Programs & Engagement for Patapsco Heritage Greenway (PHG) and am a Maryland Master Naturalist. As the non-profit managing organization for the Patapsco Valley Heritage Area (PVHA), Patapsco Heritage Greenway (PHG) is dedicated to preserving, protecting, interpreting, and restoring the environment, history, and culture of Maryland's most dramatic river valley for all.

At PHG we have robust water quality program that includes physical, chemical, & biological data collection from the non-tidal Patapsco River. PHG also created a Vernal Pool Survey which is a community science project within our water quality program to find vernal pools within the Patapsco River Valley and educate the public about the importance of vernal pools.

Vernal pools are a type of freshwater wetland that are typically water-filled from early winter through mid-summer; have no fish populations; and provide habitat for species that cannot reproduce anywhere else, including fairy shrimp, wood frogs, and mole salamanders. Vernal pools provide disproportionately large amounts of ecosystem services, owing to their widespread occurrence throughout the landscape and ability to replenish groundwater and filter stormwater flows. They even occur in underserved communities, where these "backyard ecosystems" offer convenient connections to nature.



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Two events brought PHG to advocating for this bill:

1. Our Natural Waters are in Crisis. Under Maryland wetland regulations, many vernal pools are not protected because they do not possess the hydric soils or hydrophytic vegetation of other wetlands (even those thus protected are at risk with the federal assault on wetlands definitions). The science is clear that all waters are connected and that ephemeral wetlands, such as vernal pools, are critical to the health and utility of permanent waters. While the education of vernal pools is low, the general public understands the importance of water and that the earth is in a healthy water crisis. Thus, it is necessary for Maryland to take this small step of protecting vernal pools so that we are good stewards of all our waters.
2. Vernal Pools are Little Understood in Maryland: In Maryland, as elsewhere, there is little understanding of what vernal pools are and how they contribute to biodiversity and quality of life. PHG sees this during our vernal pool education hikes and our water quality environmental education lesson where participant ages range from 4 to 90+. However, nearby states such as Pennsylvania and New Jersey have enacted protection or certification programs, while others have conducted inventories to better understand the abundance and distribution of vernal pools. In Maryland and elsewhere, vernal pools are being lost at a rapid rate because of the limited knowledge of their existence because they only hold water for a small part of the year and the gap in wetlands protections. Therefore, Maryland should take this crucial of developing a list of qualified vernal pools (those supporting obligate species) that MDE will review when considering development permits. This qualified list also creates an incredible community opportunity so that more members can participant and understand the importance of being knowledge about the environment around you starting with vernal pools.

Patapsco Heritage Greenway continues to preserve, protect, interpret, and restore all parts of the natural world within the Patapsco Valley which includes the critical habitat of vernal pools.

