Wild Ones Chesapeake Bay
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*Deeply rooted in native plants, promoting native landscapes through education, advocacy and collaborative action.*

**Testimony:** HB0701, Department of the Environment - Water Resources - Protection of Vernal Pools (Vernal Pool Wetlands Protection Act of 2026)
**Committee:** Environment and Transportation
**Hearing Date:** February 18, 2026
**Position:** FAVORABLE

Chair - Marc Korman; Vice Chair, Michele Guyton, and honorable members of the Committee:

Located in Southern Maryland, Wild Ones Chesapeake Bay[1], a 71-member chapter of the national organization Wild Ones[2], strives to preserve biodiversity through the preservation, restoration, and establishment of native plant communities across Southern Maryland. We **strongly urge you to support this bill** for the benefits it will bring to our local ecosystems, including the native plants and creatures (biodiversity) that call Maryland home**.** We must take every step we can to save our treasured Chesapeake Bay and its watershed for future generations.

**Threats to Vernal Pools:** The existence of vernal pools is threatened because they are often filled, drained, paved over, and bulldozed. Without protection, these easy-to-miss seasonal pools are being destroyed by development and agriculture. If these valuable habitats disappear, biodiversity will suffer.

**Critical, Unique Habitat for Rare Species**: Vernal pools seasonally alternate between wet and dry conditions, and these isolated systems do not harbor fish, which devour invertebrates and amphibian eggs. Consequently, these shallow ephemeral ponds and their surroundings are fragile, remarkable habitats that host rare plants and animals not typically found elsewhere.

According to a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency assessment of Mid-Atlantic seasonal pools, a quarter of all state-listed threatened and endangered amphibians depend on vernal pools[3]. Examples include the resident buttercup, Yellow Water Crowfoot wildflower (Ranunculus flabellaris),[4] and the attractively colored Eastern Tiger Salamander (Ambystoma tigrinum)5. Besides these highly rare state residents, many other animals, such as reptiles, birds, and mammals, depend on vernal pools for food[6].

**Crucial Services to the Environment and Humans**: Vernal pool depressions can 1) stop or slow floodwaters, 2) prevent erosion, 3) filter out pollutants that could harm the Chesapeake Bay, and 4) allow water to infiltrate down into our vital aquifers. And the resident ambystomatid salamanders can provide mosquito-control services. According to one research study, mosquito larvae were 98% less dense in wetlands when these salamanders were present[7].

Following a 2023 U.S. Supreme Court decision, many vernal pools lost federal Clean Water Act protections, making state-level regulation necessary to prevent their rapid loss from development. Supporting this legislation would align Maryland with neighboring states that already have vernal pool protection programs.

Wildly appreciative of your support for this bill,

Marlene Smith , President, Wild Ones Chesapeake Bay

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References:

[1]Wild Ones Chesapeake Bay Chapter, https://chesapeakebay.wildones.org/

[2]Wild Ones Natural Landscapers, LTD, a nationwide nonprofit organization with local chapters throughout the country, ncluding 5 chapters in Maryland, https://wildones.org/

[3]Brown, L.J. and R. Jung. 2005. An Introduction to Mid-Atlantic Seasonal Pools (EPA/903/B-05/001). U.S. Environmental rotection Agency.

[4]Maryland Natural Heritage Program. 2021. Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Plants of Maryland, C. Frye Ed., Maryland Department of Natural Resources, 580 Taylor Avenue, Annapolis, MD 21401. DNR 03-030321-270.

[5]Maryland Natural Heritage Program. 2023. List of Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Animals of Maryland. Maryland Department of Natural Resources, 580 Taylor Avenue, Annapolis, MD 21401.

[6]Williams, D.D. 1987. The Ecology of Temporary Waters. Timber Press, Portland, Oregon.

[7]Brodman, R., J. Ogger, M. Kolaczyk, R.A. Pulver. 2003. Mosquito control by pond-breeding salamander larvae. Herpetological Review 34: 116-119.