

Testimony: HB 72, Natural Resources – Edible Forests and Foraging Program - Establishment
Committee: Environment and Transportation
Hearing Date: February 4, 2026
Position: OPPOSE

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and Honorable Members of the Committee:

On first glance House Bill 72 seems like a good idea, but I urge you to take a closer look and then oppose this bill, because most certainly the ‘devil is in the details’.

I support the creation of edible forests (aka permaculture orchards) on State lands that are not functioning as natural ecosystems. Abandoned farm land or land abused from previous uses would be an ideal place to plant NATIVE trees and shrubs that will produce nuts and fruits for local people to harvest. However, this bill does not clarify where on State land edible forests should be created, potentially allowing natural habitats to be destroyed. This bill also allows the use of non-natives which as history has taught us may ultimately become invasive. For example, garlic mustard (introduced as a cooking herb in New York in 1868) has now spread to 34 states, killing a globally rare butterfly and reducing forest regeneration and growth.¹ Many seemingly benign non-native species have in time become invasive, costing our country over \$120 billion annually in damage and control efforts, as well as harming our natural heritage.²

Even of more concern is establishing a foraging program in Maryland’s State Parks & Forests, when there is no practical way for DNR to prevent over-harvesting. Even if DNR were not already understaffed, they could not possibly monitor and regulate foraging in designated areas. Few DNR staff are trained botanists, a crucial skill for overseeing any foraging program. Every ecoregion of our State has many different species that would need to be covered in any course required by DNR for a foraging permit. As a retired environmental educator, I can assure you that this will not be an easy task.

In addition, if the roots and tubers of plants such as Indian Cucumber are targeted for foraging (as stated in this bill), those species would quickly be eliminated from easily accessible areas. The sad outcome is that visitors accustomed to walking on trails in Maryland’s Parks & Forests for a glimpse of unique fauna, flora, and fungi will only witness areas denuded of these natural treasures as a result of foraging activities.

If this bill simply allowed for the creation of ‘edible forests’ (aka permaculture orchards) on abused or abandoned State lands using NATIVE species that would be fine, but it does not do that. Instead it encourages the planting of non-native species on State lands, and establishes a foraging program on DNR lands (our Parks & Forests) that is neither sustainable nor enforceable.

As a Maryland park naturalist in the 80’s I was taught to emphasize the ‘Leave No Trace’ ethic. I explained to visitors that DNR Parks and Forests are natural treasures to be enjoyed by all. When visiting Maryland’s natural areas let’s continue to “take only photos; leave only footprints”. **Please vote NO on House Bill 72.**

Respectfully,

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¹ <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6727dc893768d62b217ee6fd/t/67330abfa966b65917a6297b/1731398342077/Garlic-Mustard-Fact-Sheet-Blue-Ridge-PRISM.pdf>

² <https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/maryland-dc/stories-in-maryland-dc/maryland-invasive-species-taking-on-the-invaders-of-maryland/>