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Testimony in support of House Bill 1560: Forest Conservation - Incentives - Pilot Program and Fund

Mr chairman and members of the committee,

Delegate Dylan Behler, District 30A, Environment & Transportation Committee

Delegate Dana Stein, District 11B, Environment & Transportation Committee

Subject: House Bill 1560: Forest Conservation - Incentives - Pilot Program and Fund:

Gentlemen, I am unable to come to Annapolis on Wednesday, March 11, and testify on this piece of legislation, but am forwarding you the below comments in support of this legislation.

Ecological Benefits of the Forest Stewardship Act

For the purpose of declaring the importance of ecological services in the State's efforts to mitigate climate change, promote biodiversity, improve water quality, provide flood mitigation and other public benefits generated by healthy forests; integrating into Maryland's land conservation decision-making process the value of ecological services; expressing the benefits of ecological services when effecting outreach by certain entities to forest landowners for management planning purposes; establishing a certain Fund; and generally relating to forest land management with special consideration of the attendant ecological service benefits.

Recognize that this bill is unlikely to pass, given the expected fiscal note; however, believe its merits make it an ideal opportunity to prioritize a legislative conversation on forest stewardship in an election year. Recall that forests account for over 40% of the state's land cover. Submit the following as strong points of this bill.

- Ecological services of forest lands: first time codification in law
- Landowner focus
- New forest conservation plan design
- A Natural Resources Dept designed pilot phase
- A generational commitment (20 years) to preservation
- Specific incentives
- A fund to support the cost
- Authorization for an ecological services assessment fee for significant land changes (like data centers and the power lines to serve them)
- 25-year impact assessment

I own a certified tree farm and was the Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year in Prince George's County in 2025, Tree Farm Number MD-2771, and was a finalist for the State Tree Farm in 2025. I serve on the Prince George's County Forestry Board, the State Tree Farm Committee, the Prince George's County Farm Bureau, and the Prince George's County Agricultural Resources Advisory Committee. I was a finalist in 2023 and 2024 for the Leopold Conservation Award, and I raise beef cattle in Accokeek, where I grew up. I am a veteran.

Ask if you can please enter my comments in the record.

Thank you for your consideration.

Daniel Donohue

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