



Formerly called the Humane Society of the United States and Humane Society International

February 18, 2026

**Environment and Transportation Committee
 HB578- Endangered and Threatened Species and Migratory Birds - Regulations, Lists, Petitions, Essential Habitats, and Takings
 FAVORABLE**

Chair Korman, Vice-Chair Guyton, and Members of the Committee,

Humane World for Animals, formerly called the Humane Society of the United States, on behalf of our supporters across the state, strongly supports HB 578. This legislation would strengthen our state’s Endangered Species Act, prioritizing the protection of wildlife and ensuring healthy ecosystems for generations to come.

Across demographics and political ideologies, the American people overwhelmingly support protections for endangered species.¹ The federal Endangered Species Act is even more successful than it is popular, saving 99% of listed species from extinction.² This record of success is underpinned by strong, protective regulations for imperiled species—both threatened and endangered—and our shared recognition of what is at stake: a truly wonderful, wild world. Unfortunately, as efforts to weaken the federal Endangered Species Act increase, it’s more important than ever for Maryland to reinforce protections for endangered species at the state level.

HB 578 would provide actionable definitions for key terms in listing decisions including “harm” as impacts to habitat and “foreseeable future” to include environmental variability and specific life history of a species. It would allow the Secretary to designate essential habitats for threatened and endangered species, and crucially, it would exclude economic impact as a consideration in listing criteria. These changes will help ensure that listing and delisting decisions for threatened and endangered species are based on sound biological and ecological criteria, not political interests, and that the state can take decisive action to recover the species that need our help.

Protecting species, particularly vulnerable species that are not hunted, is also beneficial to Maryland’s economy. Wildlife watchers are a huge and growing constituency in terms of number of people and dollars spent in the economy, according to data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau and put into reports by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. So-called nonconsumptive users are a rapidly growing stakeholder group who provide immense economic contributions to the communities in which they visit.³ The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s 2022 wildlife-recreation report indicates that wildlife watchers nationwide now number 148 million – a 72% increase from 2016 (and twice as many as in 2011); wildlife watchers outnumber the total number of hunters by tenfold – and spent \$250.2 billion.⁴ Altogether, hunters spent \$45.2 billion in 2022, about one-fifth that spent by wildlife watchers.⁵ The biggest increase between 2016 and 2022 was the amount wildlife watchers spent – wildlife watchers realized a 230% increase over 2016 expenditures. See Fig. 1.

Fig. 1. USFWS National Wildlife Recreation Data (Comparison 2011, 2016 & 2022 data)⁶

Wildlife recreation participants and expenditures	2011	2016	2022	Percent increase (2016 and 2023 data)
No. wildlife watchers	71.8M	86.0M	145.3M	68.95%
No. hunters	13.7M	11.5M	14.4M	25.22%
Wildlife watcher expenditures	\$59.1B	\$75.9B	\$250.2B	229.64%
Hunter expenditures	\$36.3B	\$25.6B	\$45.2B	76.56%

And in Maryland, the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reports that hunting and trapping accounted for only 1% of the nearly \$9.5 billion spent on outdoor recreation in the state in 2023 (the most recent year available).⁷

Marylanders want to see our wildlife thriving, our endangered and threatened species protected and recovered, and our ecosystems whole, healthy, and resilient for future generations. HB 578 provides essential safeguards for threatened and endangered species and will allow the state to take the necessary steps to protect and recover species and their habitats. I urge support for this legislation.

Respectfully,

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¹ John A. Vucetich et al., *Support for the US Endangered Species Act Is High and Steady Over the Past Three Decades*, CONSERVATION LETTERS, May 2025, at 1, 2.

² Celebrating 50 Years of Success in Wildlife Conservation, U.S. DEP'T OF INTERIOR, <https://www.doi.gov/blog/endangered-species-act-celebrating-50-years-success-wildlife-conservation#:~:text=In%20its%20first%2050%20years,conservation%20organizations%20and%20private%20citizens> (last visited Dec. 18, 2025).

³ M. L. Elbroch et al., "Contrasting Bobcat Values," *Biodiversity and Conservation* (2017); U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, "2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation: National Overview," ed. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (2017).

⁴ U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Sep. 2023), *2022 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation*. "2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation," ed. U.S. Department of the Interior (2016); "2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation," ed. U.S. Department of the Interior (2011).

⁵ U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Sep. 2023), *2022 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation*.

⁶ U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Sep. 2023), *2022 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation*.

⁷ U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, "[SAOACTVA Outdoor recreation satellite account activities - value added](#)"¹" (accessed Thursday, February 12, 2026).