

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:

In a time of budgetary shortfalls, requiring DNR to design, establish, monitor, and enforce a new program is too much to ask. In addition, there are other ecological and litigious concerns with this bill. As such I ask that you oppose HB 72.

The suggestion of using non-native plants to create “edible forests” has proven disastrous in the past. Think - bamboo and wineberry. Edible forests created on State lands should only contain species that are native to Maryland.

Establishing a foraging program on DNR lands, such as State Forests and Parks, has many potential problems. Removing the tubers and roots of a plant destroys it. Harvesting fruits and nuts has an impact, since it slows regenerative processes and removes potentially helpful genetic material. Identifying Rare, Threatened or Endangered plants in a region is critical so that they are not foraged. Nature has had a balanced system in place for millions of years that works and deserves to be preserved in our protected public lands.

Lastly, there is a litigious concern. According to the NIH, there have been 133,700 cases of mushroom exposure from 1999-2016 resulting in 52 deaths and 704 cases of major harm.¹ These numbers reflect an increasing number of children and more importantly in regards to this bill, an increasing number of foragers. Should the State promote and sanction an activity that potentially opens the door for increased litigation?

In summary, I ask that you vote NO on House Bill 72 for all the reasons stated above.

Respectfully,

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¹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30062915/>