



Maryland Native Plant Society

APPRECIATION CONSERVATION EDUCATION

Testimony: HB167, Gasoline-Powered Leaf Blowers-Purchase and Use-Prohibitions
Committee: Government, Labor, and Elections
Hearing Date: February 17, 2026
Position: FAVORABLE

Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and honorable members of the Committee:

The Maryland Native Plant Society urges a favorable report on House Bill 167, which prohibits state purchases of gasoline-powered leaf blowers after July 1, 2026, and a phase-out of the state's and state contractors' use of gasoline-powered leaf blowers by January 1, 2031.

Gasoline-powered leaf blowers produce air and noise pollution that is damaging to the health of our native plants and wildlife, as well as our own health. Native plants, animals, and beneficial microbes all work together to provide important ecosystem services, such as pollination, oxygen generation, erosion control during storms, pollution control, cooling, and CO₂ absorption. Healthy natural ecosystems help to maintain biodiversity and limit climate change. With Maryland's wild habitats under duress from many stressors, we would like to see the state take a leadership role in phasing out the use of gasoline-powered leaf blowers and so alleviating the air and noise pollution these devices cause.

Gasoline-powered leaf blowers produce a stunning amount of air pollution. Most models use inefficient two-stroke engines that spew out large, unfiltered quantities of toxic chemicals including dangerous particulate matter (PM2.5 and PM10), hydrocarbons, nitrogen oxides, benzene, butadiene, and formaldehyde. This alphabet soup of poisons contributes to climate change, creates ground-level ozone, and causes many human and wildlife health problems.

Ground-level ozone is extremely harmful to plants. It decreases the production of flowers and fruits, reduces tree height and canopy size, and can contribute to lower crop yields. Ground-level ozone can impair water-use efficiency in plants, thus leaving them weaker and more susceptible to destructive insects, diseases, and our frequent droughts.

Plant populations are also reduced when gasoline-powered leaf blowers harm beneficial insects. Research has shown that air pollution, even at low levels, makes it more difficult for pollinators to find flowers and pollinate them. In severe situations, air pollutants and particulate matter can kill insects outright.¹ Insects find flowers by their scent, but air pollution alters that scent. One study found a reduction in insect pollinator counts of up to 70% and a reduction in flower visits of up to 90% in flowers exposed to ozone and diesel exhaust.² These reductions occurred in various pollinator groups, including bees, flies, moths, and butterflies.³

According to the Xerces Society, air pollution exposure can weaken bees' immune systems and make breathing more difficult by damaging the insects' circulatory systems. Polluted air can disorient pollinators and cause memory issues, thereby lengthening the time for pollinators to learn to smell and find specific plants. PM2.5 sticking to bees can also make flight and other movements more difficult.

The Maryland Native Plant Society promotes awareness, appreciation, and conservation of Maryland's native plants and their habitats. Our engaged, active members represent all 24 state jurisdictions, from the coastal plain beaches to the western mountains. We reach 20,000 followers on social media. MNPS is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization incorporated in Maryland.

Gasoline-powered leaf blowers produce sound levels that range from 90 to 112 decibels(dB) and produce predominantly low frequency sound, which can travel long distances and have greater adverse health effects. The World Health Organization recommends an outdoor daytime standard noise level no greater than 55 dB.⁴ Human hearing damage can occur after 15 minutes at 100 dB, according to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communications Disorders.

Birds, which are important for maintaining healthy native plant populations because they spread seeds, are also negatively affected by noise pollution. Studies show that high noise levels can make it more difficult to find a mate, delay nesting, lead parents to abandon their nestlings, and interfere with listening for predators. High noise levels mean that young birds are less healthy and so less able to survive, as indicated by smaller chicks with reduced feather growth.⁵ Many birds avoid nesting in areas with frequent or chronic loud noise, thereby degrading entire ecosystems. In a New Mexico study area, there were far fewer tree seedlings after 15 years because loud noise caused a dozen key avian species to avoid the location.⁶

We depend on native plants, beneficial insects, and birds for a healthy ecosystem in which to live. Air pollution and excessive noise produced by gasoline-powered leaf blowers harm the complex web of relationships we depend on to survive. It is our responsibility to do our best to ensure the health of our native plants and animals. Not only do they deserve our support, but the citizens of Maryland need the services that healthy natural habitats provide.

The Maryland Native Plant Society urges a favorable report on HB167.

Respectfully,

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REFERENCES

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⁴ Walker E., Banks J.L. 2017. Characteristics of Lawn and Garden Equipment Sound: A Community Pilot Study. J Environ Toxicol Stud. 1(1):10.16966/2576-6430.106. <https://doi.org/10.16966/2576-6430.106>

⁵ Marshall, L. Noise Pollution Causes Chronic Stress in Birds, Hindering Reproduction. University of Colorado Boulder. Accessed 2/11/2026. <https://www.colorado.edu/today/2018/01/09/noise-pollution-causes-chronic-stress-birds-hindering-reproduction>

⁶ Francis, C.D., C.P. Ortega, and A. Cruz. 2009. Noise pollution changes avian communities and species interactions. Current Biology. 19:16. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2009.06.052>