



Maryland Chapter

7338 Baltimore Avenue, Suite 102
College Park, MD 20740-3211

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB 854 – “Nontidal Wetlands - Study of Vernal Pools”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 26, 2020

The Maryland Sierra Club urges a favorable report on HB854, which would require a study to inventory vernal pools, and identify and recommend measures to protect and manage them.

Vernal pools are isolated seasonal ponds that are hotspots of biodiversity in woodland communities that provide important ecosystem services or benefits from nature. As isolated seasonal wetlands, they are critical breeding habitat for important species of frogs and salamanders. They also support both aquatic and terrestrial food webs. Benefits for people include water filtration which removes pollutants, and groundwater replenishment, as well as providing a connection to nature in or near places we live.

Because of their unique characteristics, they do not all meet the criteria for protection under the Nontidal Wetlands Protection Act. However, because of their ephemeral nature, they are at risk of losing protection under the Clean Water Act, which only covers waters classified as Waters of the US (WOTUS). The definition of WOTUS was recently narrowed to exclude small, seasonal, ephemeral or rain-dependent streams, wetlands, and tributaries. Yet, these isolated areas can play a significant role in the hydrology or water cycle, and are part of our critical and irreplaceable natural infrastructure.

Because of these characteristics, there is also limited knowledge as to where they are still found but we know that they are being rapidly lost as development reaches further into natural areas. By enabling an inventory of vernal pools in the State of Maryland, this bill will increase awareness of their existence, which is also the first step toward their protection.

HB854 would enable this critical inventory of vernal pools in Maryland. Therefore, the Maryland Sierra Club urges a favorable report on this bill.

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