



Maryland Native Plant Society

APPRECIATION CONSERVATION EDUCATION

Committee: Economic Matters Committee

Testimony for HB62: “Land Use – Public Service Companies – Pollinator–Friendly Vegetation Management”

Sponsor: Delegate Charkoudian

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 9, 2023

The Maryland Native Plant Society (MNPS) supports House Bill 62 because of its importance to native plants, native pollinators, other native wildlife, and the environment.

We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit with over two thousand very active members, making a difference in Maryland for 30 years. We hold annual meetings throughout the State, from Talbot and Cecil Counties to Alleghany and Prince George’s Counties. Our mission is to promote awareness, appreciation, and conservation of Maryland’s native plants and their habitats. We pursue our mission through education, research, advocacy, and service activities. I am Vice President of MNPS, a Board Director on the Mid-Atlantic Invasive Plant Council, and the founder of EcoPlant Consulting, which specializes in native plants, invasive plants, and ecology. I co-authored *Plant-Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas, Field Guide*, printed in October 2022 with over 20,000 pre-orders.

Frequent mowing creates spaces hostile to native plants. Instead, non-native invasive plant populations can increase until they take over under powerlines, creating an environment that looks green, but is a biological desert for native pollinators, birds, and other wildlife. Not only do the invasive plants damage the environment, but they have been shown to harm human health, and they cost over 34.5 billion dollars annually in the U.S.

Frequent mowing destroys native flowers before they mature enough to produce fruits and seeds. Without seeds, genetically diverse plant populations cannot grow and survive. Without this diversity, plant species can have trouble fighting diseases and dealing with the hardships of climate change, including storms and droughts.

Healthy habitats require a lot of diversity to sustain themselves. In just a quarter of a mile under a rarely mown portion of the powerline through the Sligo Creek area, botanists have counted more than 125 native plant species.

Two out of five of the world’s plant species are at risk of extinction. By creating powerline corridors for native plants, we can make progress with preserving unique ecosystems that support our planet’s biodiversity, and also help Maryland’s most endangered plants. Our gorgeous blue sundial lupines are at high risk for extinction, along with the globally rare frosted elfin butterfly, whose young can only survive on lupines. In 2020, I saw these beautiful lupines blooming when I visited rights-of-way where BGE and PEPCO agreed to stop mowing.

Serpentine barrens are globally rare ecosystems with unique and difficult growing conditions, and we have a handful of these habitats in Maryland. Because PEPCO has agreed to careful vegetation management in Montgomery County's Travilah Serpentine, there is some hope for other plants critically endangered in Maryland, including striped gentian and featherbells, which are found in five or fewer locations in the State.

Not only is HB62 important for our native plants, but also for our native pollinators, birds, and other wildlife. Native ecosystems provide crucial and irreplaceable habitat for the native plants and animals that co-evolved in Maryland over tens of thousands of years. All these species are dependent on each other for survival, for food, shelter and propagation.

Shouldn't we do our part here in Maryland, helping to preserve our natural heritage and creating a better future for all of us? The Maryland Native Plant Society respectfully urges a favorable report on HB62.

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Sundial Lupines in Powerline Right-of-Way (Judy Fulton 6/1/2020)



Frosted Elfin Butterfly (Tom Whelan 5/24/2006)

References:

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Michael Wilpers. Fall 2019. A Meadow Grassland in Sligo Creek's Powerline Corridor.. *Marilandica*, Vol. 10, Issue 2. Page 6:

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John Parrish 1/30/2023 email about Travilah and other rare MD habitats