



## Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 526 – Natural Resources – Forest Preservation and Retention

March 1, 2023

Dear Chairman Feldman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in **SUPPORT** of **SB 526** on behalf of ShoreRivers. ShoreRivers is a river protection group on Maryland's Eastern Shore with more than 2,000 members. Our mission is to protect and restore our Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, and education.

Maryland loses about 3,000 acres of forest every year. Forest clearing contributes to poor water quality, fragmentation and loss of wildlife habitat, reduced carbon sequestration, air pollution, increased temperatures, localized flooding, and lower property values. On the Eastern Shore of Maryland, where more than 60% of all land use is shaped by agricultural activities, the negative impacts of irresponsible forestry on an already under forested landscape are more acute, as are the impacts to local water quality.

**Forests and trees offer tangible benefits to the state's economy by contributing an estimated \$3.1 billion per year in flood prevention and stormwater mitigation, an estimated \$140 million per year in reducing air pollution and \$246 million per year in surface water protection (Campbell et al. 2019). These are costs that the state would need to pay if it were to develop and apply technologies to serve these functions.**

The outdoor recreation industry is significant to Maryland's economy, contributing \$14 billion per year (Outdoor Industry Association 2017). Currently, the 1.5 million acres of protected land in Maryland (much of which is forested) generates \$4 billion annually (Campbell et al. 2019). At the local individual property level, one large tree can eliminate up to 5,000 gallons of stormwater runoff per year and reduce building energy costs by 15-35% for homes and business owners (State of Maryland 2019).

Trees are one of the most positive long-term investments that can be made to improve water quality in the Chesapeake Bay, and many of our trees are threatened by the ongoing effects of climate change, as well as development activities within our watersheds. **This bill will update forest goals and definitions to provide clarity and reflect new data, protect and conserve more forest land and tree canopy, and give local governments flexibility to pursue solutions that meet local needs and advance equity goals.**

We support this bill for increased forestry education and resources, and urge the Committee to adopt a **FAVORABLE** report on **SB 526**.

Sincerely,

**Zack Kelleher**

Sassafras Riverkeeper, on behalf of ShoreRivers

Natural Resources – Forest Preservation and Retention (SB526)

Submitted On February 27, 2023

By: Georgeanne Pinkard

**ShoreRivers**

Isabel Hardesty, Executive Director

Annie Richards, Chester Riverkeeper | Matt Pluta, Choptank Riverkeeper | Zack Kelleher Sassafras Riverkeeper

[shorerivers.org](http://shorerivers.org) | 443.385.0511 | [info@shorerivers.org](mailto:info@shorerivers.org)

312 Quarter Creek Drive  
Queenstown, Md 21658

To Senators: Elfreth, Guzzone, Gile, Hester, Kramer, Lam, Hettleman, M. Washington, West, and Zucker.

My name is Georgeanne Pinkard I live in Queenstown, Md, I am a Master Naturalist; Arborist and I serve on the Watershed Advisory Board for Shore Rivers. I support SB526.

Maryland is approaching a goal of achieving “no net forest loss”. This is after losing almost 19,000 acres between 2013 and 2018. We are now at a pivotal point where private and governmental tree planting programs can tip the scale toward forest gain. I am personally looking forward to supporting “5 Million Maryland Trees for Climate Progress”.

Though there are many successful afforestation and reforestation programs in effect, I believe it takes a unified and consistent message from our legislators that deforestation on any level has a direct impact on both the environment and human health. On a local level I am witnessing developers seeking variances to develop land that is designated as critical area and wetlands. This is clearly not the intent of these zoning classifications. I am also seeing my neighbors, new to the area, removing dozens of trees within the floodplain, with or without permits. If only they could get to know the woodland residents before destroying their home – Barred Owl, Great Horned Owl, fox, songbirds and small mammals.

Though forestation and fragmentation of tree canopy fluctuates throughout the state, approximately 39-42% of land in Maryland remains in forest. Of that only 33.2% is considered state protected land. As interpreted by an ambitious speculator, protected land means a frivolous law meant to be broken. That is why supporting SB526 is important because it combines existing regulations under the Forest Conservation Act with new data from the Harry Hughes Center assessing the current health of Maryland’s forest.

As population and development continues to spread throughout Maryland, land use regulations will also continue to be challenged. SB526 will help our local officials define, create and preserve areas of forestation for both wildlife and residential communities to enjoy. Once cleared, a new forest takes decades to mature. Maryland already has one of the most impressive GHG emission reduction plans in the nation. I ask for your support of the Forest Preservation and Retention bill to keep Maryland in the forefront of creating a decarbonized future! Thank you!