



SCENIC RIVERS LAND TRUST  
PROTECTING ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY'S LAND AND WATER

February 20, 2023

The Honorable Kumar Barve  
Chair, Environment and Transportation  
Maryland House of Delegates  
251 Taylor House Office Building  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Dana Stein  
Vice Chair, Environment and Transportation  
Maryland House of Delegates  
251 Taylor House Office Building  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

On behalf of Scenic Rivers Land Trust, I write to urge your support for the Maryland the Beautiful Act (HB 631) to advance this bill favorably from committee.

HB 631 would set a goal for Maryland to have 30% of its lands conserved by 2030 and 40% by 2040. Keeping a significant portion of our land wild and open allows nature and our communities to be resilient towards severe weather, helps our food systems to survive, and gives Maryland residents places of beauty, solace, and recreation.

Not only does it set a goal to measure our progress by, but it also increases the pace at which land trusts can save vulnerable parcels. A \$10,000,000 revolving loan program will allow land trusts to access funds in the nick of time to save an imperiled and important property. This is critical to these nonprofits (Scenic Rivers Land Trust being one of them) that witness precious properties slip through their fingers because they couldn't get grant funding fast enough. Often grant funding takes two to four years to obtain, which far too long when a property is already on the open market.

For example, in 2020 a 45-acre property became available for sale that was on our "Top 100" list of most important properties to conserve in Anne Arundel County. The landowners were only willing to wait a year for us to raise funds and purchase the property. Unfortunately, \$2.7 million is difficult for a small nonprofit to raise in that short amount of time. The landowners now have a contract with a developer, and they have recently submitted a subdivision application to build 40 homes.

As another example, one of our "Top 10" most important properties to conserve in Anne Arundel county was listed for sale in 2019 – 132 acres for \$3,000,000. Thankfully, the landowners were willing to work with us to purchase a conservation easement through Program Open Space before they sell it, since they are conservation minded. In 2023, we are close to finalizing the easement. If a landowner in a similar situation was not able or willing to wait almost 4 years to sell a conservation easement, Scenic Rivers would need millions of dollars in funding readily available to quickly purchase the property and continue the conservation process.

I am delighted to see that in light of setting goals to increase the pace of conservation, this bill also provides annual funding to land trusts for stewardship, which is vital funding in ensuring that the land we protect stays protected in perpetuity. Our portfolios of conserved land are ever growing, and therefore we need ever increasing funding to keep a watchful eye and provide a helpful hand on the 93,000+ acres of land protected by local land trusts.



By passing the Maryland the Beautiful Act, we can help ensure that nature and people will continue to thrive in Maryland today and long into the future. Thank you for considering my testimony, and I ask for your support for HB 631.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Sarah Knebel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the beginning.

Sarah Knebel  
Executive Director  
Scenic Rivers Land Trust