



Maryland Native Plant Society

APPRECIATION CONSERVATION EDUCATION

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony for HB602: “Environment - State Wetlands - Shoreline Restoration”

Sponsor: Delegate Stein

Position: Support with Amendments

Hearing Date: February 22, 2023

The Maryland Native Plant Society (MNPS) supports House Bill 602 with amendments because of its importance to native plants, native animals, the environment, and Maryland’s human inhabitants.

MNPS is 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 for 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.

Scientific research shows that wetlands are superior to armored shorelines in protecting property from erosion. By improving the requirements for protecting shorelines, designating priority restoration zones, and providing for dedicated funding, HB602 has the potential to better protect property owners while simultaneously helping the environment. Furthermore, MNPS recommends an amendment to this excellent bill. In 16-201(c)(1)(ii)(2), we propose that the phrase “living features” be clarified by specifying Maryland native plants and animals.

Unlike riprap and static hardened bulkheads, living native shorelines can adapt to the rising water levels and more ferocious storms caused by climate change. Armored shorelands often transfer erosion stresses to other locations, are static in the face of changing conditions, and immediately begin to deteriorate upon installation.

As soon as new wetlands are created, they can start to improve the health of the Chesapeake Bay by filtering chemical contaminants and by reducing soil and stormwater plumes flowing into estuaries. Living and native shoreline restorations can serve as nurseries and adult habitat for both land and aquatic plants and animals. Increasing native wetlands can result in more sustainable and economically viable fisheries. Living native landscapes can increase populations of birds, fish and other animals, thereby enhancing recreational opportunities such as bird watching, hunting, and fishing.

Native species are particularly important because they evolved together over thousands of years to create resilient, self-sustaining and interdependent ecosystems. In contrast, non-natives – especially invasives – can cause harm by disrupting the environment without providing adequate food for land and aquatic animals. For example, over 90% of native pollinators are dependent on a single native plant species or genus to reproduce and survive, and non-native plants do not work as substitutes.

Our wetlands also play a significant role in conserving biodiversity, which is vital to human health and food supplies. According to a 2023 report by NatureServe’s scientists, one third of the U.S.’s plant species may go extinct. Healthy habitats require a lot of diversity to sustain themselves, but over 40% of U.S. ecosystems are at risk of collapse. By increasing living, resilient, native habitats along the Chesapeake Bay and its estuaries, we can help to sustain Maryland native plants and wildlife, along with the health of the State’s human population.

The Maryland Native Plant Society respectfully urges a favorable report on HB602.

Judy Fulton
Vice President
Maryland Native Plant Society
Jfulton5@gmail.com

References:

Gittman, R.K., S.B. Scyphers, C.S. Smith, I.P. Neylan, J.H. Grabowski. Aug. 2016. Ecological Consequences of Shoreline Hardening: A Meta-Analysis. *BioScience*, Vol. 66, Issue 9. 763-773. <https://doi.org/10.1093/biosci/biw091>

Kornis, M.S., Breitbart, D., Balouskus, R. et al. Feb. 2017. Linking the Abundance of Estuarine Fish and Crustaceans in Nearshore Waters to Shoreline Hardening and Land Cover. *Estuaries and Coasts* 40, 1464–1486. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12237-017-0213-6>

NatureServe. Jan. 2023. Biodiversity in Focus: United States Edition. NatureServe, Arlington, VA. www.natureserve.org

Tallamy, D.W. Jan. 2019. Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard Douglas. pp 256.