

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB 942 Wetlands and Waterways Program – Authorizations for Stream Restoration Projects

Position: Support

Hearing Date: March 3, 2023

My name is Marion Edey and I am testifying on behalf of Friends of the Earth, in support of HB 942.

In our cities and suburbs, nearly all our remaining nature is in the stream valleys. We need these riparian forests to cool our cities, bring children close to nature, mitigate stormwater and support wildlife populations which are crashing. A 50% decline in beneficial insects. A similar decline in many songbirds. And 30% of amphibian species at risk of extinction.

There are many causes, but two of the biggest are habitat loss and invasive species. Both are greatly accelerated by stream restorations as they are often done now. All the big trees along the banks are removed, to make room for heavy construction equipment, which digs up the entire streambed to change its shape, killing all aquatic life there.

What rushes in to fill the void are invasive species – especially Japanese stilt grass, which grows thick and tall, blocking access to the stream. Native species can't eat the invasives and the whole food chain collapses. What was once a place for children to play becomes a biological dead zone, of no use to anyone.

And it's only a temporary fix, which treats the symptoms but not the cause – the firehosing of streams when too much is paved. HB 942 directs the Maryland Department of the Environment to shift its priorities toward prevention, to green infrastructure, rather than this destructive cure.

The industry would have you believe that prevention is too expensive – that stream restorations are cheaper. Even if this were true in the short run, it's not true in the long run. Green infrastructure requires little maintenance, while stream restorations must be done again and again. This makes them the gift which keeps on giving, for contractors, who will oppose this bill.

In calculating costs, we must consider too the loss of forest cover which we so desperately need to cool our cities in a time of climate change. Yes, contractors will plant seedlings before they leave, but most of them won't do well in soil devoid of micro-organisms and crushed by bulldozers. They are no substitute for the hundreds of mature trees that are removed.

This bill does not ban stream restorations. The MDE has the flexibility to authorize them when no good alternatives exist, and I know there are times when this is true. HB 942 is in many ways a soft bill; it does not define exactly how many credits must go to upland controls, or what it means to minimize tree damage. Biological uplift is only a goal. Claims that the bill would somehow prevent MDE from doing its job to control stormwater are therefore unfounded.

For all these reasons, we support HB 942

Marion Edey

Friends of the Earth

m.edey@comcast.net

10019 Menlo Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20910