



## **HOUSE BILL 1155 - Department of the Environment - Ecological Restoration**

**POSITION: FAVORABLE**

**February 24, 2025**

Dear Honorable Members of this Committee,

I am writing to express my strong **SUPPORT** for **House Bill 1155** - Department of the Environment - Ecological Restoration, which seeks to define the term "ecological restoration" in the context of Maryland's regulatory framework. **This bill is a vital step toward addressing the urgent threats to Maryland's landscapes and habitats, and I urge you to consider its swift passage.**

Assateague Coastal Trust serves more than 800 square miles of Maryland's Lower Eastern Shore, including Worcester and portions of Wicomico and Somerset Counties, in its mission to safeguard clean water rights for residents and visitors to the region. We speak on behalf of our membership, residents and visitors alike, who share a common interest in the health of the Coastal Bays located behind Assateague Island, and the southern tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay.

**Ecological restoration efforts are crucial to the long-term health and resilience of Maryland's coastal ecosystems, particularly in light of the increasing pressures from climate change, rapid sea-level rise, and habitat degradation.** Without official definition there is room for confusion and miscommunication, impeding effective decision-making and project permitting processes.

The lack of clarity has serious consequences for the protection of our natural resources. Maryland's critical marsh and wetland restoration efforts are not able to keep pace with the immediate and mounting threats to our ecosystems. This is especially concerning as we confront the loss of key species and the degradation of habitats like our tidal salt marshes, which are essential for biodiversity and serve as a buffer against climate impacts.

**By establishing an official state definition for "ecological restoration," we can:**

- Support the State of Maryland Climate Implementation Plans, which include natural climate solutions such as marsh restoration, increased tidal wetland coverage, and tree

canopy expansion. These solutions are vital for Maryland's response to and preparedness for climate change.

- Help address the alarming habitat and species loss, including the protection of the threatened Saltmarsh Sparrow, which depends on Maryland's tidal salt marshes.
- Ensure that ecological restoration projects along Maryland's coasts can respond rapidly to the challenges posed by sea-level rise, enabling us to protect these valuable ecosystems.
- Expand restoration efforts across the Lower Eastern Shore to protect vital ecosystems and cultural landscapes along Maryland's iconic coastlines.
- Foster a unified understanding of ecological restoration, increasing collaboration between state and federal partners, and enabling Maryland to leverage additional federal resources for restoration projects.
- Strengthen the role of ecological restoration in supporting Maryland's agricultural, tourism, and fisheries industries, boosting local economies and ensuring the sustainability of these critical sectors.

**In summary, House Bill 1155 is a necessary and timely piece of legislation that will allow Maryland to better manage its environmental restoration efforts, ensuring they align with the state's climate goals, protect critical habitats, and promote collaboration among stakeholders.** A clear definition of "ecological restoration" will provide consistency across agencies, making it easier to streamline funding and implement effective, science-based restoration projects.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. I urge you to support House Bill 1155 to safeguard Maryland's natural resources and ensure a healthy, resilient environment for future generations.

Sincerely,

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