



SB 722 and HB 1155 Ecological Restoration Definition

TESTIMONY of DR. MARK SOUTHERLAND for VERNAL POOL PARTNERS -- Favorable

I received a Ph.D. and Smithsonian Fellowship in freshwater ecology and have consulted for federal, state, and local agencies on water resource issues for 30 years. I am the founder of **Vernal Pool Partners** and have served with the Maryland Academy of Sciences' Science Council, Maryland Water Monitoring Council, Howard County Environmental Sustainability Board, Howard County Conservancy, Patapsco Heritage Greenway, and Safe Skies Maryland.

Summary. In 2024, as a result of HB 869 of 2022 becoming law, The Maryland Department of the Environment released an Ecological Restoration Study Report recommending the General Assembly adopt the following definition for Ecological Restoration:

“Activities undertaken with the goal of recovering, re-establishing, or enhancing a degraded, damaged, or destroyed ecosystem through:

1. improvements to physical, chemical, or biological characteristics or processes.
2. returning natural or historic functions or services; or
3. protecting or improving resiliency.”

Under this bill, State Agencies will incorporate the statutory definition of ecological restoration in regulation to **eliminate confusion and ensure that appropriate projects are being included in a streamlined ecological restoration permitting process.**

Benefits. Having an official state definition of Ecological Restoration will allow ecological restoration projects throughout Maryland to keep pace with accelerating threats to our ecosystems and public health. This bill will create a unified understanding of ecological restoration, increasing collaboration between state and federal partners and leveraging more federal resources for projects in Maryland. Lastly, it will increase the role of Ecological Restoration as tool for investing in Maryland’s agricultural, tourism, fisheries industries and local economies.

The Time is Now. Millions of dollars of restoration is continuing in Maryland, so this definition must be applied to ensure the benefits to our citizens are maximized and cost-effective.