



P.O. Box 278
Riverdale, MD 20738

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB602 “Environment – State Wetlands – Shoreline Restoration”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 22, 2023

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly supports HB602, which would promote use of living shoreline design by owners of property along navigable water when they take actions to prevent shoreline erosion. This will be accomplished by the coordination of the Department of the Environment and the Department of Natural Resources in designating priority shoreline restoration zones and a coastal resilience and living shorelines restoration account within the Tidal Wetlands Compensation Fund.

The Sierra Club strongly encourages the use of a living habitat over structural methods. Incorporating living grasses and plants creates habitat for insects, fish, birds, and other animals that live in their ecosystem. This is particularly important in estuarine areas, which play key roles in our fisheries. Living shoreline features can grow and adjust to changes in waterlines and tides, while the use of armored shorelines using rip rap and bulkheads will eventually wear and erode with the changing water levels and destructive storms. Living shorelines have the additional benefit of performing services such as water purification, flood buffering and storing carbon. They also cost less to install and maintain than structural features.¹

HB602 as drafted states that “[i]mprovements to protect a person’s property against erosion” in the designated areas shall “[i]ncorporate the use of living features, including marsh grasses, submerged aquatic vegetation, and native oysters.” We commend the bill’s recognition of the importance of using native species and recommend that the cited phrase be amended to promote use of native marsh grasses and submerged vegetation in addition to the native oysters already specified. Native plants are a better food source for native insects, birds, and other animals in the ecosystem. They are also generally more resilient when they are planted in their native environment and will tend to multiply and last longer even when there are environmental challenges. Additionally, native plants tend to have more extensive root systems and do a better job of holding the soil and protecting the shoreline from erosion.² Finally, nonnative aquatic and marshland plants can be invasive and difficult to eradicate.

In sum, a shoreline made up of native living features, including plants and oysters, will improve both resilience and wildlife habitat. We recommend a favorable report and consideration of our suggested amendment.

Carolyn Parsa
Chair, Natural Places Legislative Workgroup
Carolyn.Parsa@MDSierra.org

Josh Tulkin
Chapter Director
Josh.Tulkin@MDSierra.org

¹ [NOAA Fisheries/National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, “Understanding Living Shorelines.”](#)

² [Chesapeake Bay Foundation, “Living Shorelines for the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.”](#)