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Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB228 “Natural Resources - Maryland State Parks - Funds and Plan Alterations”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 22, 2024

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly supports HB228. The bill improves the implementation of the Great Maryland Outdoors Act by extending the deadline for expending the Park System Critical Maintenance Fund to 2029 and allowing the funds to be used for capital improvements for state projects on lands managed by the Department for public purposes. It helps support funding of infrastructure projects that mitigate the effects of climate change and historic projects. The bill targets transportation improvements to allow access to Maryland public lands for all and supports boat, kayak, picnic and swimming access to Maryland waterfront lands. Importantly, it ensures the land acquisition needed to decrease overcrowding and improve access to public lands. The bill also promotes outdoor environmental education to satisfy public desire for more understanding of the role of public lands for public health and climate change protection. Finally, it extends the deadline for developing and publishing a Comprehensive Long-Range Strategic Plan by one year.

These improvements to the implementation of several critically important aspects of the Great Maryland Outdoors Act of 2022, which passed 46-0 in the Senate and 131-1 in the House, are necessary for several reasons. First, public land acquisition is a difficult and time-consuming process. Sometimes there are delays in lands becoming available. Expanding the types of public lands eligible for funds will ensure that some of the most exciting green spaces in Maryland are more accessible. Including public lands beyond state parks is a key part to solving climate and biodiversity problems. Including Wildlife Management Areas, Natural Environment Areas, Natural Resource Areas and Historic Areas will help more Marylanders get access to the green spaces they have demonstrated a great desire for and decrease population pressure on existing state parks.

Because HB228 would help properly implement an important parks management bill, expand natural area access for the health of all Marylanders, and mitigate further climate change using natural solutions, the Sierra Club Maryland Chapter requests your favorable report.

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