



# PROTECT OUR FORESTS

Strengthen Maryland's Forest Conservation Act

Senate Bill 610 | House Bill 766



This Anne Arundel County development cleared 135 acres of forest and had to replant only 21 acres under the FCA – a net loss of 84%! Such destruction of forests is happening across the state.

**DID YOU KNOW?** Forests are a critical part of Maryland's ecosystem. They promote clean air and water, support the revitalization of the Chesapeake Bay, combat climate change, sustain wildlife, and enhance health and well-being.

Despite the passage of the 1991 Forest Conservation Act (FCA), thousands of acres of Maryland's trees are being lost to development each year without adequate replanting. The FCA was passed with a goal of minimizing the loss of forests to development and promoting the retention of forests – however, the law is not working as intended.

Some of Maryland's largest, most important forests are still being cleared and fragmented. Recent research shows that the FCA has little to no impact on deforestation of land tracts with 60% or more existing tree cover. Larger, contiguous forests provide the greatest ecological benefits.

**It is urgent that the General Assembly enact legislation in 2018 to update and strengthen the Forest Conservation Act**

## WHY DO WE NEED TO BETTER PROTECT OUR FORESTS?

Maryland's forests are particularly important for restoring the Chesapeake Bay. Forests along streams reduce pollution entering waterways by 50% to 90%.

Forests are key to our state's economy; the ecosystem value of Maryland's forests is tens of billions of dollars. Trees also reduce energy costs, increase property values, and create more livable communities.

## WHAT IS THE SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM?

According to the US Forest Inventory & Analysis, our state lost more than 24,000 acres of forest from 2008 to 2014 (more than 4,000 acres a year). The state Planning Department estimates that, as matters now stand, we will lose another 176,000 acres of forest from 2010 to 2035.

Currently, developers are required to plant only one tree for every four removed and, with an available credit, the tree replanting percentage can drop much lower. It is much more valuable to retain existing forests than cut down trees and replant new ones that won't have the same ecological benefits for decades.

## HOW CAN WE FIX THE FCA?

By reforming the FCA, we will:

- Provide significantly greater protection to priority forests, by strengthening the priority forest definition and the criteria limiting tree removal, and requiring developers to generally replant one tree for every tree cut down in a priority forest.
- Require forest conservation issues to be addressed early in the planning process when development proposals are most amenable to change.
- Improve the ability of local governments to implement tree replanting.

## WANT TO KNOW MORE?

For more information or to volunteer, contact us:

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