



House Bill 1511

Forest Conservation Act – Modifications

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Committee

Date: March 26, 2024

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 1511. This bill extends certain implementation deadlines from the 2023 Forest Conservation Act update. The bill is necessary because certain early implementation elements from a legislative compromise during the 2023 session have not yet been completed, making other deadlines untenable.

Last year, the Maryland General Assembly passed a comprehensive and wide-ranging update to the state's Forest Conservation Act. This legislation was developed with consultation from a variety of stakeholders, including MACo, and established implementation timelines for state and local governments to update their forest conservation policies. HB 1511 provides an extension to certain provisions in last year's update, without which, the entirety of the update will be rendered unimplementable. Both the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and counties agree that neither will be able to have their required materials completed by the July 2024 full implementation date.

Additionally, counties request that provisions be added ensuring that the reauthorization of forest mitigation banking be allowed to continue this year as scheduled. Counties have already been working with developers in anticipation of this reauthorization, without which projects currently in the pipeline could experience detrimental effects. The Committee can expect amendment language from DNR very soon.

Without the passage of this legislation, there is likely to be a cascading effect which will chill development in Maryland – especially for affordable housing – and place current projects into a legal limbo until the General Assembly reconvenes in 2025. Accordingly, counties strongly urge the Committee to issue HB 1511 a **FAVORABLE** report.