



Senate Bill 273

State Forest, State Park, and Wildlife Management Area Revenue Equity Program

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Budget and Taxation and Education, Health,
and Environmental Affairs Committees

Date: February 15, 2017

From: Leslie Knapp, Jr.

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 273. The bill would address a longstanding funding shortfall to counties for their acreage of State forests, parks, and wildlife management areas.

The bill would establish an Open Space Incentive Program which would provide counties an annual payment of \$250,000 for each unit of open space attributed to State forests, State parks, and wildlife management areas. One unit of open space is the equivalent of 10,000 acres. The payments that counties currently receive from a portion of revenues generated from State forests and parks are eliminated.

MACo believes SB 273 will serve as an appropriate incentive to counties to preserve their State forests, parks, and wildlife management areas. As State lands or designated wildlife areas, these properties are exempt from the local property tax, which is the counties' top revenue source. These revenues fund a large portion of county expenditures from which these lands benefit, including law enforcement, emergency management services, stormwater infrastructure, and roadways. Providing services to these areas without revenues for this specific purpose draws funds away from other parts of the county budget.

A program has existed to provide some level of payment to counties with State forest and park lands through revenues derived from these areas - including net revenues from concession operations - but these payments have been reduced significantly in recent years to balance the State's budget.

SB 273 would provide a consistent revenue stream to offset losses in property tax revenues and fund the public services provided in these areas. For this reason, MACo would urge a **FAVORABLE** report on SB 273.