

Pollinator-Friendly Powerlines Bill (HB62/SB62)

This bill addresses loss of pollinator habitats in Maryland. It would prohibit counties and municipalities from enforcing their “weed” height ordinances in powerline corridors. The bill allows electric utilities to create pollinator-friendly meadows underneath their powerlines.

Background:

“Pollinators are inextricably linked to human well-being through the maintenance of ecosystem health, wild plant reproduction, crop production, and food security. Bees are the most important pollinators, visiting 90 percent of global crops.” (Potts et al., *Nature*, 2016)

“The Maryland Park Service [is] increasingly aware of threats to pollinator habitat prompted by a **noticeable decline in the numbers of common pollinator species**, like monarch butterflies.” (MD *Pollinator Habitat Plan*, 2017)

“Mounting evidence suggests declines in wild bees. Increasing habitat could boost struggling populations, particularly in urban, suburban, and agricultural landscapes. Millions of acres beneath electric transmission lines (in the U.S.) have the potential to provide suitable habitat for many native species.” (Russel et al., *Biodiversity Conservation*, 2018)

“Transmission line corridors play an important role in biodiversity conservation. Many studies document the importance of powerline rights-of-way for wildlife and an array of rare and endangered species.” (Wagner et al., *Forest Ecology and Management*, 2014)

Precedents in Maryland

- MD’s Pollinator Habitat Plan Act (2016) already mandates creation of pollinator habitat in state parks and along state roads.
- Maryland DNR already cooperates with utilities to provide pollinator habitat where powerlines cross state parks, forests, and wildlife areas.
- BGE already manages sections of its powerlines as meadows on federal, state, and county parkland, where they support 146 species of native bees and 40 species of butterflies.
- In Prince Georges Co., a quarter-mile segment of Pepco powerline is managed as meadow and supports 97 species of native bees.

However, County and municipal “weed” height ordinances (typically 12 inches) require utilities to mow power lines frequently. As a result, less than five percent of Maryland’s 2,000 miles of power lines are managed for pollinators.

Solution:

Maryland should prohibit counties and municipalities from enforcing their “weed” height ordinances under powerlines so electric utilities can reduce mowing in these areas. This would remove a barrier for utilities to manage their powerline corridors as meadow habitats that will provide pollen and nectar to bees and butterflies. The bill does not apply to farmlands or trails that cross transmission corridors.

For more information please contact:

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