



## TESTIMONY on FOREST CONSERVATION BILL 25-22

Presented to the Montgomery County Council

October 4, 2022

Hedrick Belin, President

*This spring, when over 3 inches of rain fell in Montgomery County in just a few hours, streams turned into overflowing rivers. Roads, homes and businesses flooded, causing millions of dollars in property damage.*

*This destruction was much worse than it should have been. We have stripped away our community's natural defenses against extreme storms and flooding. The clear-cutting of this county's forests over the last several decades is harming our economy, our public health, and our livelihoods.*

*While our neighboring counties are prioritizing their forests, a recent study showed our County lost over 500 acres of forest and broke up an additional 1,800 forested acres in just four years.*

*I'm Hedrick Belin, President of Potomac Conservancy. We represent more than 5,000 supporters in this county. As your constituents, we want action and leadership from the County Council on forest protection.*

*We support the updated Forest Conservation Law, Bill 25-22, with some strengthening amendments. We want to move from a goal of no net loss of forests to a net gain of forests; a goal that rises to the challenges of our time.*

*We must not just aim to replace individual trees. We must prioritize protecting our existing forest ecosystems. And in special circumstances when those protections cannot be honored, we must require the creation of two acres of functioning forest for every one acre removed.*

*As we saw this spring, we frankly cannot afford anything less.*

*Forests play a critical role in our community. They clean and cool the air we breathe. They keep pollution out of our rivers and out of the water we drink. Forests reduce flooding from extreme storms which are becoming increasingly more severe due to the climate crisis.*

*We must protect our remaining forests by putting an end to irresponsible development and embracing common sense planning.*

*You must strengthen the Forest Conservation Law. Please enact legislation that saves existing forests first and then replace and restore additional forest acres.*

*Thank you!*