

Southern Maryland Conservation Alliance

Protecting habitats, heritage, and livelihoods



March 10, 2023

The Honorable Angela Alsobrooks
Prince George's County Executive
1301 McCormick Drive
Suite 4000
Largo, MD 20774

Dear County Executive Alsobrooks,

As members of the Southern Maryland Conservation Alliance (SMCA), we are writing in regards to land owned by Prince George's County near Bowie State University and within the acquisition boundary of Patuxent Research Refuge. This property was the subject of an article published on February 2, 2023 by the *Bay Journal* ([Wildlife refuge in Maryland pushing back against development pressure | Growth & Conservation | bayjournal.com](https://www.bayjournal.com/story/news/local/2023/02/02/wildlife-refuge-in-maryland-pushing-back-against-development-pressure-growth-conservation-bayjournal-com/)).

The SMCA was formed in 2021 when land trusts, historical societies and multiple conservation organizations and agencies joined together on the banks of the Patuxent River to announce its formation. SMCA's mission is to conserve and restore Southern Maryland's landscapes, waterways and shorelines, which are needed to maintain species diversity and wildlife corridors in a changing climate.

First, it is important to recognize Bowie State University as the oldest historically black university in Maryland. We further recognize that Bowie State must have room to grow, provide student amenities and take advantage of the proximity to the Bowie State MARC Station. However, we disagree that the best or only way to achieve those goals is by sacrificing a large block of mature forest, which provides ecological, educational and health benefits to Bowie State students and faculty, Prince George's County and the entire Washington D.C./Baltimore region.

NASA scientists estimate the 219-acre County-owned property contains nearly 6,000 trees that store approximately 3,500 tons of carbon. The County's Climate Action Plan calls for reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 50% below 2005 levels by 2030, and achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. The plan also recommends maintaining and expanding existing tree cover. Much of the 219-acres consists of mature trees whose carbon-sequestering properties are not easily replaced. If the County expects to achieve its laudable climate goals, it must be proactive in protecting as much mature forest as possible. Protecting forest on land that the County already owns would appear to be the most immediately effective way to achieve its climate resilience goals.

The Bay Journal reports that the County has been discussing development of the site for more than a decade, and reached out to developers in 2021 and 2022, but apparently never informed the Refuge, a valuable neighbor and potential buyer of the property. The refuge acquisition boundary was established long before these discussions were held and its proximity should have been a factor early in the planning process. Refuge acquisition boundaries are established with public input and define areas where the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has authority to work with willing sellers to conserve land. The Refuge has made clear that, pending appraisals and

availability of funds, the U.S. government is a potentially willing buyer if the county becomes a willing seller.

The Refuge Manager, Jennifer Greiner, has publicly indicated her willingness to discuss outcomes that could meet the needs of Bowie State University and the County, while protecting mature forest and the many ecological and societal benefits that accrue with land conservation. Now that the County is aware of the significance of the forest, the Refuge's interest in conserving it, and their willingness to seek an amenable solution, the undersigned SMCA members request that the County pause the development plans and overtures to developers while a balanced solution is developed with the benefit of a comprehensive, inclusive and transparent public involvement process.

Thank you for considering our input and request. Please let us know if we can be helpful in forging solutions to this and other issues that have the potential to increase land conservation in Prince George's County.

Sincerely,



Executive Director, American Chestnut Land Trust



Regional Conservation Partnership Coordinator, Southern Maryland Conservation Alliance



President, Forever Maryland



Business Manager, Cove Point Natural Heritage Trust

Franklin A. Robinson, Jr.

Board Chairman, Farm Heritage Conservancy

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Executive Director, Southern Maryland RC&D

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Board Chairman, Friends of Patuxent Research Refuge

Frank Allen

President, Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust

Joel Dunn

Chesapeake Fellow, Chesapeake Conservancy

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Member, Friends of Hunting Creek

Elisabeth Curtis

Member, Friends of St. Clement's Bay