

# VERNAL POOL WETLANDS PROTECTION ACT OF 2025 HB 878

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FEBRUARY 1, 2025

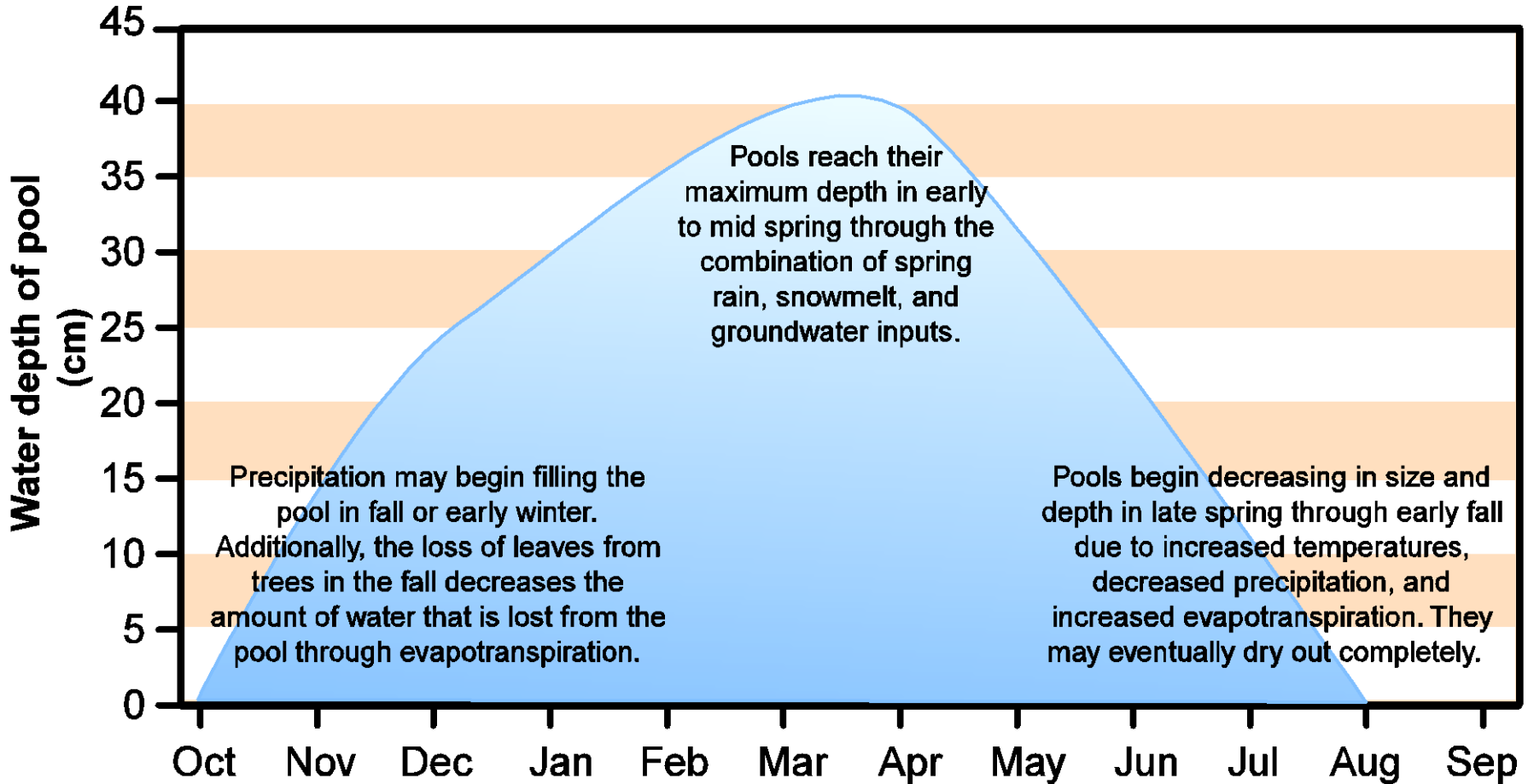
Mark Southerland PhD



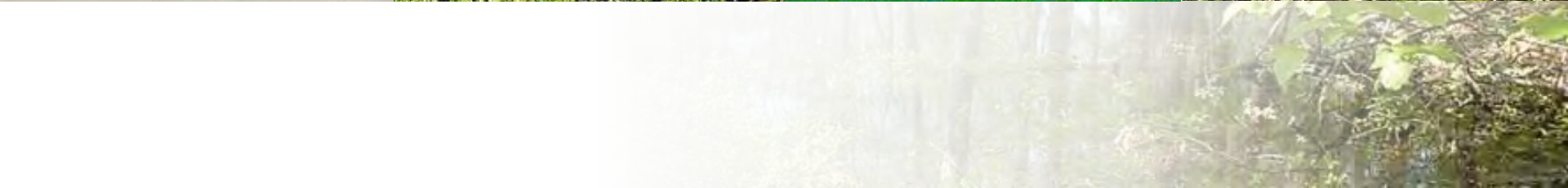
# DEFINITION

“Vernal pools are **dynamic habitats** with cycles of standing water and periodic dry downs that exclude permanent populations of predatory fish”





# BIODIVERSITY





# WHY SHOULD WE CARE?

## Ecological Services for Species

- Important breeding habitat for amphibians
- Support of aquatic and terrestrial food webs
- Stepping stones within the landscape

## Ecological Services for People

- Pollution removal
- Groundwater replenishment
- Natural mosquito control
- Connection to nature

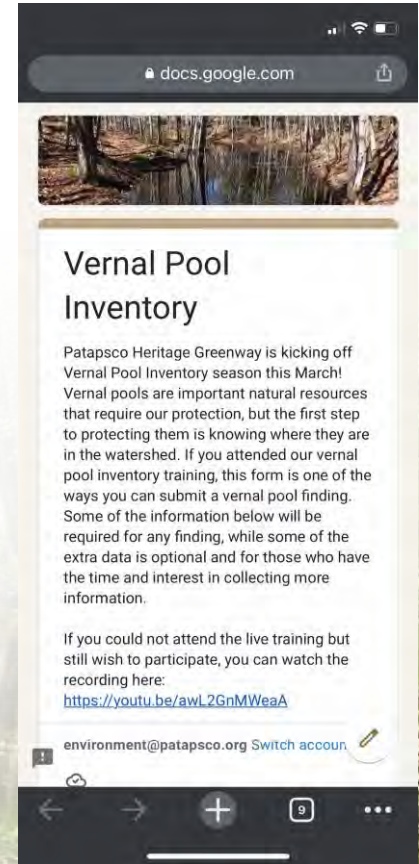


# LEARN MORE ABOUT VERNAL POOLS

- **Lesley Brown and Robin Jung, *An Introduction to Mid-Atlantic vernal Pools*, EPA, 2005**
- Elizabeth Colburn, *Vernal Pools: Natural History and Conservation*, 2004
- *Maine's Citizen's Guide to Locating and Documenting Vernal Pools*, 2003
- Thomas Biebighauser, *A Guide to Creating Vernal Ponds*, 2003
- Henry Wilbur, Complex life cycles, *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 11:67-93, 1980
- Parmelee, J. R., M. G. Knutson, and J. E. Lyon. 2002. A field guide to amphibian larvae and eggs of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa. U.S. Geological Survey, Biological Resources Division, Information and Technology Report USGS/BRD/ITR-2002-0004, Washington, D.C. iv + 38 pp.

# HELP FIND VERNAL POOLS

- PHG pilot year began in March 2021
- What do we ask of Community Scientists?
  1. Go out on your own time to walk the watershed
  2. Look for vernal pools
  3. Collect required (and optional) data
  4. Submit data directly on your smartphone into PHG Google Form or take notes and submit when you get home





# VERNAL POOL PARTNERS TESTIFY BEFORE HOUSE ENT IN 2024



## IN 2024, HB729 FAILED TO PASS

- MDE objected to bill through amendment cycles, although supporting the concept of protecting vernal pools
- MDE agreed to step one of developing a consensus definition
- Joint Chairman's Report asked MDE to prepare a consistent definition of vernal pools for use in regulations



# JOINT CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

"The committees are interested in how the state defines vernal pool. The committees are aware that the Maryland Department of the Environment has a definition in its regulations (26.23.01.01.B.87) but that other agencies may define vernal pools differently. Therefore, the committees request that the **Maryland Department of the Environment confer with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and other stakeholders** to submit a report with a **definition of vernal pool that could be used across state government to clarify the criteria for seasonal pools that should have protective status.** The report is requested by December 1, 2024."



# MDE DEFINITION OF VERNAL POOL

“Vernal pool” means a confined depression that:

- a) Has surface water for at least two consecutive months between November and May in a typical year (average of 30-year record of rainfall);
- b) Experiences a drawdown to 6 inches or less of water within the depression between June and September in a typical year;
- c) Provides persistent or breeding habitat for certain species, particularly native amphibians, and invertebrates that are:

- i) Obligate animal species requiring vernal pools as an essential part of their life cycle; or
- ii) Facultative animal species that at least occasionally use vernal pools;
- d) Contains less than 30% aerial cover of emergent vegetation within the basin when full;
- e) Is predominantly or partially shaded by woody vegetation;
- f) Is less than 5 acres in size; and
- g) May have intermittent, non-permanent connections to other water bodies.

# VERNAL POOL WETLANDS PROTECTION ACT OF 2025 – HB 878

- Act would designate vernal pools as named wetlands in MDE regulations using the new definition developed in December 2024
- Act would protect vernal pools supporting breeding of obligate and facultative species, including buffers needed to support full life cycle
- Develop a plan for identifying vernal pools in Maryland, to the extent practicable and economically feasible

# ADVOCATE FOR HB 878 VERNAL POOL WETLANDS PROTECTION ACT OF 2025

Please send an email or letter or phone call to MDE asking for their support of the bill:

- MDE Secretary Serena McIlwain [mde.secretary@maryland.gov](mailto:mde.secretary@maryland.gov)
- MDE Deputy Director of Water and Science Les Knapp [les.knapp@maryland.gov](mailto:les.knapp@maryland.gov)
- MDE Director of Government Relations Jeremy Baker [jeremy.baker@maryland.gov](mailto:jeremy.baker@maryland.gov)

Visit [vernalpoolpartners.org](http://vernalpoolpartners.org) or contact:  
[mark@vernalpoolpartners.org](mailto:mark@vernalpoolpartners.org)



# TESTIFY IN SUPPORT OF HB 878 VERNAL POOL WETLANDS PROTECTION ACT OF 2025

**February 19** is hearing date before

House Environment and Transportation Committee

- Submit written testimony two days before on MyMGA
- Send message of support to your delegate and committee  
Chair – [Marc.Korman@house.state.md.us](mailto:Marc.Korman@house.state.md.us) – and  
Vice Chair – [Regina.Boyce@house.state.md.us](mailto:Regina.Boyce@house.state.md.us)

