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**Memorandum of Support
House Bill 238**

Forest Conservation Act – Exempting hazards to air navigation

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), based in Frederick, MD, is the world's largest aviation organization, representing the general aviation interests of pilots and aircraft owners, including more than 6,000 of our members within the state of Maryland. Since 1939, AOPA has been committed to ensuring the safety, future viability, and development of general aviation as an integral part of our national transportation system. On behalf of AOPA and our members, we write to express support for House Bill 238.

AOPA considers the protection of natural resources both noble and necessary. However, there are circumstances when regulatory requirements become hazardous and present a detriment to safety for purposes of air navigation. Under section 5-1602(b) of the Forest Conservation Act, obstructions to navigable airspace deemed hazards by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) are exempt from the regulation. This is an important clause designed to protect the utility and viability of Maryland airports. However, it fails to provide the same authority to the Maryland Aviation Administration, equally charged with the overall safety and management of the state airport system.

According to FAA airport master records, Maryland utilizes 36 public use airports as part of the state's airport system. Only 15 of these airports are currently grant-obligated and therefore subject to FAA standards. Through the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR), the Maryland Aviation Administration provides a more comprehensive and safe standard for the protection of the entire system than those afforded by minimum FAA standards. Once an obstruction has been identified, the MAA is better equipped for dealing with potential hazards to air navigation and able to take swift action to resolve the threat.

Whether flying for business or recreation, aircraft present a rewarding and efficient tool; however, it is not without some risk. When flying into an unfamiliar airport, obstructions which may take many forms are an example of risk that can be mitigated with effective land use policies and planning. Granting the MAA equal latitude for efficiently resolving tree hazards by amending the Forest Conservation Act will help to minimize that risk. For these reasons and to ensure safety and future viability of Maryland's airports, we support House Bill 238. For any questions, please contact AOPA Regional Manager, Sean Collins via sean.collins@aopa.org or by calling (301)695-2090.