

August 21, 2024

The Hart-Miller Island Community Benefit Steering Committee
Via email to HMI@baltimorecountymd.gov

The purpose of this document is to outline the community benefits that the Baltimore Bird Club (BBC), a chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society, believes **imperative** for inclusion in the Community Benefit Agreement (CBA) with Baltimore County and Tradepoint Atlantic (TPA). It is based upon the BBC's long history of involvement, since 1983, especially related to birds and wildlife, in the development of Hart-Miller Island (HMI) as a State Park. This includes research, wildlife documentation (birds, reptiles, insects, amphibians, mammals) and bird expertise, the leading of community tours to both the 300 acre South Cell open to the public and **particularly the 800 acre North Cell** that is open to the public for guided tours only and serves as managed habitat for a variety of birds (migratory and breeding) and other wildlife.

The Maryland General Assembly HB343 requires an approved CBA to directly support Hart-Miller Island and its surrounding communities as a threshold component of efforts to accelerate a major port infrastructure project at TPA in Sparrows Point. Under this legislation, the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) could consider placement of dredged material at the Hart-Miller Island Dredged Material Containment Facility contingent on the approval of the CBA as well as pending state regulatory compliance and approval by the Baltimore County Council prior to applying for dredging approval from MDE. The CBA agreement must be approved by December 31, 2024.

This document addresses our request for the preservation of existing, and the creation of new, bird habitat and passive public observation activities.

Importance of Hart-Miller Island to the Environment, Birds, Wildlife, Biodiversity and the Community

- Hart-Miller Island is designated as an **Audubon Important Bird Area (IBA.)** As the U.S. partner for BirdLife International, Audubon spearheads the ambitious effort to identify, monitor, and protect the most important places for birds. To date, Audubon has identified 2,758 IBAs covering 417 million acres of public and private lands in the United States **of which HMI is one.**
- **It is by far the #1 Hotspot in Baltimore County** on eBird* with 301 total historically recorded bird species in the County and **#3 in the State**, for total birds, trailing by only 5 species from #1 position. **It was #1 in 2023 and in the state** for year records.
- In 2023, MPA sponsored 46 trips to the island including 780 guests, with over half including birders to observe and report birds on the island. Birders also visit the island for the scientifically important Audubon Christmas Bird Count, a national survey

conducted for over 100 years. Not only are these trips an excellent educational and recreational experience for birders and the public, but it provides important citizen science used by researchers throughout the world through the eBird siting information. The public must sign up to be included in the trips and are selected by a lottery. Currently, **the list of citizens signed up to be included in notifications of the trips is approximately 1,000 people, and growing fast.**

- **HMI hosts approximately 56 species of breeding birds, with many more possible.** The most notable of these is the Trumpeter Swan which had declined to near extinction in the early 20th century due in the US due to hunting and habitat loss. There are currently two pairs of Trumpeter Swans, one confirmed successfully breeding, and a second pair just recently discovered that could likely breed on HMI. They are sensitive to human disturbance and pollution.
- **HMI hosts a number of rarities** (birds that are not usually in the area) due to its location and habitat.
- HMI hosts **large flocks of migrating shorebirds** and is frequented by **large flocks of gulls and terns**. It is also a perfect overwintering spot for **waterfowl** with 33 species reported with over 10,000 ducks reported on the recent Audubon Counts.
- **HMI provides a strategic stopover point for migratory birds.** Migrants to their breeding areas in Canada and the Arctic Circle, and their wintering areas as far south as southern South America, strongly depend on reliable feeding locations along their routes, and Hart-Miller has been and can even be much more of a prime feeding location.

** eBird is among the world's largest biodiversity-related science projects, with more than 100 million bird sightings contributed annually by eBirders around the world and an average participation growth rate of approximately 20% year over year. A collaborative enterprise with hundreds of partner organizations, thousands of regional experts, and hundreds of thousands of users, eBird is managed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.*

Requested Priorities for Inclusion in the HMI Community Benefit Agreement

Prepared in consultation with members of the Maryland Ornithologic Society, Baltimore Bird Club and Audubon Mid-Atlantic -

- Preservation of existing and creation of additional shorebird and nesting bird habitat.
- Maintenance endowment/funds specifically reserved to benefit HMI
- Engagement of a qualified habitat design consultant commensurate with the need to preserve and create shorebird, nesting tern and heron rookery habitats.
- Plan work to coincide with shorebird migration that would be mostly impacted by dredge activities.
- Plan work to protect and limit disturbance to breeding birds (e.g. Trumpeter Swan).
- Removal of invasive species and development of a maintenance plan to control – phragmites.

- Monitoring activities during dredging activities and construction, including BBC representative.
- State of the Art nature center in South Cell.
- Observation platforms, trails and boardwalks as recommended by design consultant for bird observation during and after dredge and construction work.
- Boat dock for private access to HMI.
- Additional transportation opportunities for the public (for those without boats) to visit HMI. (e.g. possible ferry service one day during the week and on weekends.)
- Bus or other environmentally friendly transportation while visiting.
- Permanent land management staff positions with relevant experience to monitor, protect and recommend maintenance once the habitat is created.
- Sponsored kayak trips.
- Sponsored camping trips.
- Allowance for bird research capabilities.