



What's new with . . .

# FORESTS

## IN THE CHESAPEAKE BAY REGION IN 1999

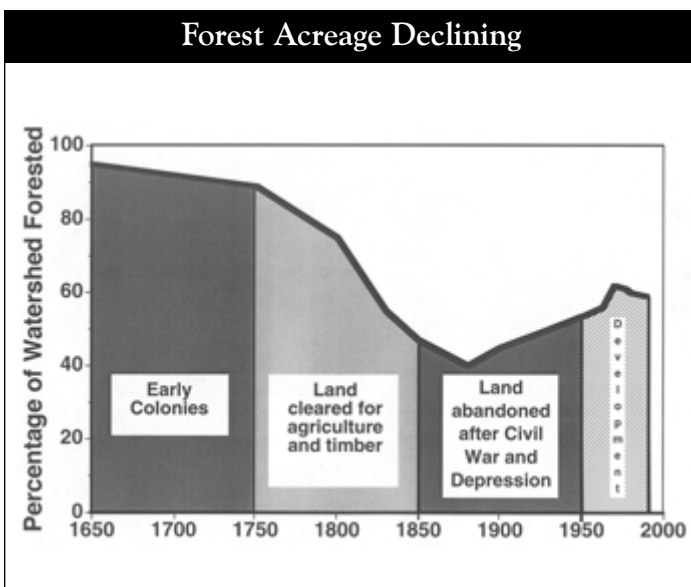
### Forests: A Key to the Bay's Health

The health of streams and rivers and the resilience of the Chesapeake Bay watershed is linked to trees. Forests perform important environmental functions that we sometimes take for granted. Forests protect our streams and soil; clean our air and water; provide opportunities for outdoor recreation; supply habitat and food important to the survival of many Bay species; and supply raw materials for the fuel, lumber and paper that we use every day. Scientific findings clearly show that, as living filters, forests are the most beneficial land use for clean water.

### Losses Offset Gains

Forests make up nearly 60% of the land in the Bay watershed or approximately 24 million acres. The U.S. Forest Service estimates that more than 100 acres of forest are lost every day, with the most rapid declines in areas closest to the Bay. Reforestation has generated some gains in the headwater regions of the watershed, though other areas have seen more than 85% of forest cover converted to agriculture or urban development.

A major cause of forest loss today is the way we develop land. Forests are cleared to make room for new homes, shopping malls, roads and other types of development. We now develop land at a rate much faster than our population is growing, sprawling across the landscape and requiring more forests and farms to be cleared. By 2020, new homes could consume more than 600,000 acres of forests and farmland. Planning to retain forests as we grow will be one of the big challenges of the next millennium.



### Defining Impacts of Forest Fragmentation

When large tracts of forest are carved up into smaller and more isolated patches, *forest fragmentation* is the result. Fragmentation is most serious when forests are converted to urban development or agriculture because those types of land use affect water quality and quantity, fish and wildlife populations, and the biological health and diversity of the forest itself.

Fragmentation can disrupt animal travel corridors, increase flooding, increase the invasion of non-native vegetation, expose forest interiors and create conflicts between people and wildlife. Experts have found that even small habitat losses occurring over time have a combined effect and may prove as dramatic as one large loss. The Chesapeake Bay Program highlighted forest fragmentation as an important issue in 1999. The following are highlights from some of the programs and projects recently completed:

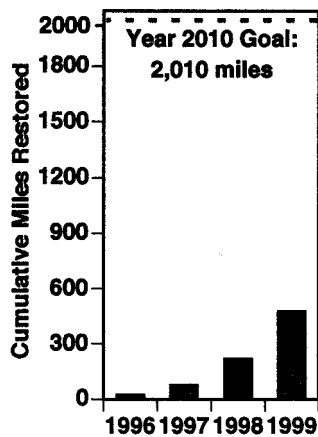
- In 1999, the Bay Program's Forestry Workgroup, the U.S. Forest Service and the Society of American Foresters conducted a professional roundtable series. Its primary objective was to hear from scientists and experts in the field about how forest fragmentation and land ownership parcelization may be affecting our forests ecologically and economically. The results of the series are available by calling 1-800-YOUR BAY (ext. 706).
- The Bay Program Geographic Information System team completed a spatial assessment of forest fragmentation in the Chesapeake watershed. The analysis quantifies fragmentation in the Bay states on a watershed basis and helps to define and characterize the extent and location of fragmentation in the entire basin. For more information, call 1-800-YOUR BAY (ext. 706).
- In November 1999, the Bay Program and the U.S. Forest Service sponsored a regional conference designed to share the latest science and information on the ecological, economic, and policy and law impacts and issues related to fragmentation. The conference, *Balancing the Landscape: Retaining Forests in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed*, helped initiate the development of a strategy to address the issues. For more information, call 1-800-YOUR BAY (ext. 706).

### Buffer Miles Adding Up

As more people in the Bay region are discovering the importance of trees and forests, citizens have made significant strides in focusing on forest issues in their efforts to protect and restore the Bay system. Much of this effort was sparked by the 1996



## Restored Forest Buffer Miles



brought the cumulative total to 476 miles since 1996. To highlight the effort, each jurisdiction increased awareness and outreach, expanded incentives to landowners and worked to permanently protect riparian forests.

## OF NOTE:

► **New Report:** The Bay Program released a new forest buffer report in 1999: *Riparian Forest Buffers Linking Land and Water*. This publication explains the crafting of the initiative, including policy goals recommendations. It's available on the Bay Program website at [www.chesapeakebay.net](http://www.chesapeakebay.net) or by calling 1-800-YOUR BAY.

► The Bay Program partners distributed more than 8,000 copies of the *Chesapeake Bay Forests Matter* poster in 1999. For a free copy, call 1-800-YOUR BAY.

Bay Program goal that called for the restoration of 2,010 miles of streamside, or riparian, forest buffers by the year 2010. This initiative, known as the *Chesapeake Bay Riparian Forest Buffer Initiative*, is in full swing. From January through September 1999, nearly 203 miles of forest buffers had been planted. That

## Partner Highlights from the Forest Buffer Initiative:

### MARYLAND

- Completed a pilot project to monitor forest buffer survival and success
- Conducted field work for a water quality model being developed by the University of Maryland
- Conducted a study examining the effectiveness of incentive and regulatory programs
- Completed outreach programs and marketing materials to expand participation in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, a national effort that offers incentives to protect and restore riparian and wetland areas

### PENNSYLVANIA

- Co-sponsored two workshops for riparian forest restoration and trained 110 people
- Provided \$64,000 to the Stewardship Incentive Program for cost-share of riparian forest buffer restoration

### VIRGINIA

- Applied to the U.S. Forest Service Legacy Program to secure conservation easements and purchases of unique and valuable forest habitat
- Approved, through the Virginia legislature, \$1.75 million for the Land Conservation Foundation

## Partnership Project Kicks Off

The U.S. Forest Service and the private, nonprofit organization Ducks Unlimited teamed up in 1999 with forestry agencies in Maryland and Virginia to focus on the restoration of riparian areas and wetlands in several tributaries to the Potomac River. The project, one of 12 chosen from a nationwide pool of 48, will focus on Maryland's portion of the Monocacy and Antietam River watersheds and on the north and south forks of Virginia's Shenandoah River. The project will result in the restoration of more than 150 acres of wetlands and more than 200 miles of riparian forest buffers.

To learn more about Chesapeake Bay forests, go to  
[www.chesapeakebay.net/forest.htm](http://www.chesapeakebay.net/forest.htm)  
on the Bay Program website.



Chesapeake Bay Program