



Press Release

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CHESAPEAKE BAY PROGRAM ANNOUNCES FOREST CONSERVATION GOALS FOR WATERSHED

Importance of forest conservation recognized by partners

ANNAPOLIS, Md. – The Chesapeake Executive Council (EC) has announced the development of a collective goal and implementation plans for conserving forest lands in the Bay watershed. “It is our intent to maximize the area of forest by discouraging conversion of the most valuable forests and giving priority to forests in land conservation programs,” states the 2007 Forestry Conservation Initiative, “*Protecting the Forests of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.*”

The Forestry Conservation Initiative was signed by the Governors of Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and representatives of Delaware and West Virginia, the Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Undersecretary of Agriculture for USDA, Mayor of the District of Columbia and the Chair of the Chesapeake Bay Commission during today’s EC meeting, held at the State House in Annapolis, Maryland.

There are four overarching goals to the Initiative:

- **By 2020**, permanently protect an additional *695,000 acres* of forest from conversion to other land uses such as development, targeting forests in areas of highest water quality value. As part of this goal, *266,400 acres* of forest land under threat of conversion will be protected by 2012.
- **By 2020**, accelerate reforestation and conservation in:
 - Urban and suburban areas*, by increasing the number of communities with commitments to tree canopy expansion goals to 120.
 - Riparian forest buffers*, by reaching a restoration rate of 900 miles/year until 70 percent of all stream miles in watersheds are buffered over the long term.
- **By 2010**, work with local governments, legislative delegations, land trusts, or other stakeholders to create or augment dedicated sources of local funding, such as through ballot initiatives, for the conservation of forests important to water quality. Where possible, we will support these through incentive programs (e.g., matching grants).
- **By 2009**, establish and implement a mechanism to track and assess forest land cover change every five years at the county and township scale, and to deliver this capacity to local governments, watershed groups, and other partners.

“The Chesapeake Bay Watershed has lost 100 acres of forest a day since the mid-1980s. Without our community trees, our local waterways will never be restored. Consideration of our forests needs to be a mainstream part of national, state, and local government environmental and economic planning,” stated Maryland Governor Martin O’Malley, chair of the Executive Council.

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The development of the goals and strategies was a state-led process, coordinated by the Chesapeake Bay Program. Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, New York, the District of Columbia, and the federal agencies announced their draft goals in July. “The compliment of all state plan actions will take us a long way if in fact they are all implemented, thus making forest conservation a mainstream issue in the wastershed for the first time,” said Jeff Lape, director of the Chesapeake Bay Program Office.

The 64,000 square mile watershed is currently 58 percent forested and contains some of the most extensive hardwood forests in the world’s temperate latitudes. “There is no land cover more beneficial to the Chesapeake’s rivers and streams than forests,” said Mark E. Rey, Undersecretary for Natural Resources & Environment, USDA. “Forests act as 'sponges' by capturing rainfall, stabilizing soils, reducing runoff, maintaining the flow of streams and filtering nutrients and sediment.” Riparian forests that buffer streams significantly reduce the amount of excess nutrients that enter the water, sometimes by as much as 30 to 90 percent. On average, forests deliver 1.7 lb/acre of nitrogen to the Bay, while developed lands deliver 14.8 lbs/acre.

Forests in the Chesapeake region also have a beneficial impact on human health. As they grow, tree canopies absorb and store air pollutants that can induce asthma, cancer and other health problems. Forests also provide many benefits that improve the physical health and quality of life of Bay watershed residents, including recreational opportunities, enhanced community desirability and reduced stress.

“Despite our efforts to protect the most valuable forests, significant acreages of forest will continue to be lost,” concluded O’Malley. “Some of the goals in the *2007 Forest Conservation Initiative* will help slow the loss of all forests, and some will address accelerated restoration, but the most strategic, accountable goals for slowing forest loss should be specific to each signatory’s Implementation Plan.”

| State* | Total Forest in Watershed | Forest Already Protected | 2012 Protection Goal | 2020 Protection Goal |
|--------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | <i>acres</i> | | | |
| Delaware | 175,900 | 48,400 (28%) | 5,000 | 15,000 |
| Maryland | 2,400,000 | 724,000 (30%) | 96,000 | 250,000 |
| New York | 2,400,000 | 295,000 (12%) | 5,800 | 15,000 |
| Pennsylvania | 8,700,000 | 2,896,000 (33%) | 38,500 | 100,000 |
| Virginia | 8,300,000 | 2,093,000 (25%) | 135,000 | 315,000 |

* The District of Columbia will focus on a goal to increase urban tree canopy coverage, in lieu of forest protection. The urban tree canopy goal is in addition to implementing goals to facilitate retaining existing trees in priority areas.

The Chesapeake Bay Program is a unique regional partnership that has directed the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay since 1983.

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