



Our Mission

The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth, by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.

Where We Work

The Conservancy works in all 50 states and more than 30 countries around the globe, including Canada, Mexico, Australia and countries throughout the Asia Pacific region, the Caribbean and South America. The Maryland/DC Chapter owns and manages 31 preserves in Maryland, including the state's largest private nature preserve.

Our Origins

The Conservancy emerged from a professional association of ecologists seeking to turn their knowledge of nature into positive action for conservation. Incorporated as a non-profit in 1951, the Conservancy completed its first land acquisition with a modest 60-acre purchase in New York. Even before establishing the Maryland/DC Chapter in 1977, the Conservancy acquired some parks and preserves in Maryland, or had assisted government agencies to do so. Among them were Battle Creek Cypress Swamp in Calvert County, one of the northernmost cypress swamps in the country; Finzel Swamp in Allegany and Garrett counties, a bog reminiscent of more northerly latitudes; and the Choptank Wetlands Preserve in Caroline County. Today, we've protected more than 64,000 acres throughout the state.

Setting Local and Global Priorities

The Conservancy protects places where plant and animal species can survive for generations to come. We employ a scientific, systematic approach to identify places large enough in scale and rich enough in plant and animal species to ensure meaningful conservation results. Priorities are set within ecoregions—large areas that have similar geology, soils, climate and vegetation. There are four ecoregions that overlap with parts of Maryland and Washington, DC, the Chesapeake Bay Lowlands, Piedmont, Lower New England/Northern Piedmont and the Central Appalachian Forest.

The Nature Conservancy is committed to creating a future where Earth's natural systems are conserved and managed in a sustainable manner for people and nature. We take a global view of Earth's habitats and the major threats to those habitats, such as climate change, habitat fragmentation, and invasive species. Our global initiatives are prompting new science, action and funds to address critical conservation needs around the world.

How We Work

At each site, we employ a range of conservation methods, tailored to local needs. We buy land. We restore nature. We conduct scientific research. We collaborate with like-minded organizations. We achieve lasting conservation results through ecologically sound legislative action, working together with public agencies on conservation planning and using voluntary land preservation tools to encourage individual action. Employing these approaches and more, we are committed to preserving the diversity of life on Earth for future generations.

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Spanning more than 10,500 square miles, Maryland is sometimes referred to as an “America in miniature” because it is home to rivers, mountains, beaches, bogs, swamps, prairies and forests. From the Eastern Shore, where we are working to protect the health of the Chesapeake Bay, to western Maryland, where we are working to preserve rare plants and endangered mussels at Sideling Hill Creek, the Conservancy helps local communities ensure the long-term health and viability of our natural heritage.

Allegheny Forests

Although heavy logging in the late 19th century, road construction and the introduction of invasive exotic plants have wounded and weakened the natural ecosystem, more than 80 percent of this landscape is covered by forests.



The Allegheny Forests project area encompasses 262,000 acres that include parts of Washington and Allegheny counties in western Maryland and Bedford and Fulton counties in south central Pennsylvania. Eighty-eight rare or uncommon plants and animals are found here, including the federally endangered aquatic wildflower harperella and three species of state-rare freshwater mussels. The extensive forest cover provides habitat for forest interior dwelling birds, such as the cerulean warbler, which uses only older stands of forest to breed. And the forest is dotted with dozens of shale barrens, a globally rare natural community.

With roughly 50,000 acres of land in state ownership, management of these public lands is critical to our conservation goals. The Conservancy is working with public land partners on forest management, collaborating with localities to address road impacts and establishing relationships with private landowners to protect natural areas.

Nanjemoy Creek

The Conservancy began protecting Nanjemoy Creek in 1978 with a donation of 103 acres. Today, the Conservancy has protected more than 2,600 acres at this natural area preserve. Charles County, where the preserve is located, is just 15 miles from the Capital Beltway and is the gateway to southern Maryland. Though Charles County still is mostly undeveloped—with more than 60 percent of the land covered by forest—the threat of development looms as it is close to the booming suburban centers of La Plata and Waldorf. The size, age, structure, composition and species diversity of the forest stands in the greater Nanjemoy area make this an important area in which to try to conserve native species dependent on large, healthy and relatively unfragmented forested landscapes.

Nanjemoy Creek Preserve provides a nesting home to great blue herons, bald eagles, mink and river otter. The Creek also supports a large population of the globally rare dwarf wedge mussel. The dwarf wedge mussel requires very specific conditions, including silt-free stream beds and well-oxygenated water, which are found in this relatively pristine creek. The Conservancy is working with willing landowners and the community to buy land or protect it with voluntary land protection tools, such as conservation easements.

Nanticoke River

Flowing from southern Delaware southwest through Maryland's Eastern Shore, and containing one-third of all freshwater tidal wetlands in Maryland, the Nanticoke River is one of the Chesapeake Bay's most productive tributaries. The Nanticoke watershed is home to more than 260 rare plants and animals. Bald eagles and peregrine falcons soar above, and the rare Delmarva fox squirrel hides in its forests. Waterfowl concentrate in the abundant marshes and migratory songbirds rely on the watershed's forests during their annual migration.

Increasing development pressure continues to threaten the watershed. The Conservancy uses a variety of tools, including conservation easements, working with local communities to promote good land use planning, and partnering with government agencies and other conservation organizations to leverage state, federal and private donations to protect the area's lands and waters.

Nassawango Creek

The Conservancy has protected more than 9,300 acres around Nassawango Creek, making it the state's largest private nature preserve. Nassawango Creek begins five miles from the Delaware state line and runs through Worcester and Wicomico counties before draining into the Pocomoke River, a main tributary of the Chesapeake Bay. This 18-mile creek, which meanders through the northern-most bald cypress swamp in the United States, is one of Maryland's most pristine waterways. Nassawango is home to an abundant diversity of life, including many species of orchids, warblers, and other plants and animals.

This site has a locally based volunteer stewardship committee that helps the Conservancy in its monitoring and protection efforts at Nassawango. An onsite visitor center, which is jointly operated with the Furnace Town Foundation, houses permanent exhibits about Nassawango Creek and The Nature Conservancy. The Conservancy continues to pursue additional land protection opportunities in the Nassawango Creek conservation area, with particular focus on the upland and bottomland forests.



Potomac Gorge

Despite being located in a suburban landscape of some four million people, the Potomac Gorge is one of the most biologically rich natural areas in the Eastern United States, with more than 240 recorded rare species and natural communities. The Potomac Gorge conservation area is the 15-mile section of the Potomac River from above Great Falls to Key Bridge. It includes parts of two national parks: the C&O Canal National Historic Park and the George Washington Memorial Parkway.

After big storms or snowmelts, the Potomac river's floodwaters rage through the narrow, constricted Gorge. This creates a dynamic, highly disturbed environment where rare species and natural communities are adapted to the harsh conditions created by intense flood scouring. The extraordinary diversity of the Potomac Gorge led the Conservancy to engage the National Park Service in a comprehensive conservation planning effort for the area. Our conservation work in the Gorge centers around ecological management and restoration to abate threats such as invasive species and insensitive recreational use; public education and outreach; and land and resource protection.

The Chesapeake Bay

Ninety-four percent of the state drains to the Chesapeake Bay, making it Maryland's most dominant natural feature. Since colonial times the Chesapeake Bay, which is the largest estuary in the United States, has lost half of its forested shorelines, more than half of its wetlands, and a vast majority of its underwater grasses and oysters. More than 14 acres of open land are developed each hour throughout the watershed—equivalent to an area more than three times the size of Washington, DC each year.

The states of Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania, along with the District of Columbia, the Chesapeake Bay Commission, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, have signed an agreement to protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay's ecosystem. The Nature Conservancy is doing its part to help reach the goals set out in this agreement, including the preservation of 20 percent of the Chesapeake Bay watershed by 2010. We are working to protect and restore the Bay across the other five states that have streams and rivers flowing into this national treasure.



Our mission is to protect Maryland's rich diversity of plants, animals and natural communities. To achieve our conservation goals, we often need to conduct habitat restoration. Restoration may involve planting trees, cutting trees, pulling weeds or filling in ditches. And along the way, we monitor our progress to see how well we are doing in restoring the health of a habitat.

Here are some of the current restoration projects we're conducting across the state.

Jackson Lane

In the spring of 2003, we began a wetlands restoration project on the northern 180 acres of our Jackson Lane preserve's fields. This is one of the largest wetland restoration projects ever attempted on the Delmarva Peninsula, and the largest, most expensive, most complex and well-studied ecological restoration project ever undertaken by the Maryland/DC Chapter.

Earthen dams were constructed to plug ditches that had drained the farmland, creating almost two dozen seasonal ponds in areas that likely were forested wetlands before the land was cleared 30 years earlier. We removed invasive red maple and sweet gum trees from a pond that had been ditched, drained and used for pasture. We also planted hundreds of wetland shrubs and trees, and 80,000 native tree seedlings in the uplands, to begin restoring the site's forests. Major funding has been provided by the Maryland Department of the Environment and the USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service through a Wetland Reserve Program grant. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Wildlife Program and the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service provide project design and oversight services.

Plum Creek

Our Plum Creek preserve contains a xeric sand ridge, a rare habitat remaining from sand dunes formed during the ice age. Resembling a tiny southwestern desert in Maryland, right down to the prickly pear cacti, the ridge at Plum Creek had been converted into a pine plantation. To restore this natural community to its original state, the Conservancy removed the pines and worked to control Japanese knotweed, an invasive plant that flourishes in disturbed areas. Today, native pines, oaks and grasses are growing in the area and the cacti now receive sunlight.

Potomac Gorge

The Conservancy mobilizes volunteers in the Potomac Gorge to help us with priority habitat restoration needs. The Conservancy, in partnership with the National Park Service, created Weed Warriors, a pilot program that trains volunteers to identify invasive plant species, so they can remove invasives without direct supervision. The Conservancy continues to use volunteers to identify new invasive species infestations through its Weed Watcher program and holds numerous volunteer invasive species control days throughout the Potomac Gorge.

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