





Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends, Partners and Supporters,

As I reflect on the past year, I am deeply humbled by the legacy I've inherited. Since our chapter's founding in 1977, I am only the fourth person to serve as Executive Director. This is not a responsibility I take lightly. I stand on the shoulders of visionary leaders who laid the foundation for our conservation work in Maryland and the District of Columbia. Their dedication reminds me daily that our mission is not only to protect nature but to elevate our gaze—to envision and pursue even greater impact for the future at an even larger scale.

One such example of this impact is our recent success in acquiring almost 1,400 acres of land along the North Branch of the Potomac River in Garrett County, Maryland, now known as the Potomac

Highlands Preserve. I'm thrilled to share that The Nature Conservancy has purchased and permanently protected this storied property, which is a mix of former timber lands and strip mines that TNC will restore into a healthy, resilient ecosystem, advancing our goal of creating a connected corridor of Appalachian forests. This achievement is a testament to what's possible when we work together to preserve the natural heritage of our region. To learn more about this incredible place, scan the QR code below.

This year also marks a transition in our chapter's board leadership. I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to Elizabeth Lewis, who has served on our board for nine years, including the past three as Chair. Her expertise in sustainability and finance has been instrumental in guiding our work and strengthening our impact. We are deeply thankful for her service and leadership. As Elizabeth steps down, I am excited to welcome Alisha Griffey as our new Board Chair. Alisha brings a dynamic and innovative perspective to our conservation efforts, and I look forward to the energy and insight she will bring to our mission in Maryland, DC and beyond.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Together, we are shaping a future where people and nature thrive.

With gratitude,

Kahlil Kettering

Executive Director
The Nature Conservancy
Maryland/DC Chapter



THE NATURE CONSERVANCY IN MARYLAND AND D.C. 2025 at a Glance



This fall, in partnership with TravelStoryGPS, TNC produced and published a new audio tour with approximately 20 stories and points of interest along Billy Goat Trail – Section A. The stories include interesting factoids about ecology, natural history, geology, human history, wildlife and more. You can access the audio tour by scanning this QR code, or by scanning the QR code located on the trailhead sign.



TNC works directly with farmers and agribusinesses to promote the adoption of economically sustainable and innovative farming methods that reduce nutrient pollution. Thanks to a \$100K grant from the Giant Company and other supporters, TNC is helping to pilot new imaging and AI technology that can help farmers better utilize cover crops to manage nutrients and improve soil health.



This past spring, TNC purchased almost 1,400 acres of land along the North Branch of the Potomac River in Garrett County, Maryland, now known as the Potomac Highlands Preserve. The property is a mix of former timber lands and strip mines that TNC will restore into a healthy, resilient ecosystem. As the property is located adjacent to the 4,500-acre Jennings Randolph Lake recreation area, its restoration will take us one step closer to our goal of a resilient and connected Allegheny Front corridor.

Over the past year, and with the critical financial support of Forbrite Bank, the Maryland/DC chapter launched a Green Stormwater Infrastructure Mentorship Program to help startup Stormwater Retention Credit (SRC) aggregation companies learn how to better maneuver projects and the DC SRC marketplace. We currently have four companies under mentorship and look forward to scaling this critical work to reduce stormwater pollution to the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay.

This past summer, TNC and several of our partners completed the final planting of more than 25,000 oysters in the St. Mary's River to wrap up the SOAR (Supporting Oyster Aquaculture and Restoration) five-year program. The oysters were added to an existing sanctuary reef, which helps provide clean water and habitat in the Chesapeake Bay.

-  TNC Offices
-  TNC Preserves and Easements



Appalachian Forests

The Appalachian Mountains are one of the most climate-resilient, biologically diverse and carbon-rich landscapes in the world. For this reason, The Nature Conservancy has identified the Appalachians as a globally important geography for tackling climate change and conserving biodiversity. Western Maryland occupies a critical slice of the Appalachian range.

Thanks to your support, The Nature Conservancy is making meaningful progress in protecting and restoring this globally significant landscape right here in Maryland.

Aerial shot of the Potomac Highlands property.
© Andrea Campbell; Opposite page: A winding stretch
of the Potomac River near the newly protected
Potomac Highlands. © Severn Smith/TNC; Sign and
trail maintenance at Finzel Swamp Preserve © TNC



A Landmark Acquisition in the Potomac Highlands

This year, we protected 1,397 acres of land in Garrett County, Maryland. This property, dubbed “Potomac Highlands,” is part of the Allegheny Front, a high-priority conservation corridor within the Appalachians. The Potomac Highlands property borders the 4,500-acre Jennings Randolph Lake recreation area and is adjacent to the North Branch of the Potomac River, a vital source of drinking water for millions of people in the region.

Historically impacted by resource extraction, the land includes former strip mines and degraded forest stands. With your help, we’re implementing science-based restoration strategies in these ecosystems to increase carbon storage and ensure that they thrive for generations to come.

We’re also planning for the future of this land with the people who know it best. In September, we held two public meetings in Kitzmiller, MD to kick off a series of listening sessions with nearby communities. These conversations are helping us understand what the area means to local residents, how it affects their livelihoods, and what they envision for its future. Their input will help shape a public access plan that may include recreation, permitted hunting, research and other community-informed uses.

This project has been funded wholly or in part by the United States Environmental Protection Agency under assistance agreement 3D25824 to the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Environmental Protection Agency, nor does the Environmental Protection Agency endorse trade names or recommend the use of commercial products mentioned in this document, as well as any images, video, text, or other content created by generative artificial intelligence tools, nor does any such content necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Environmental Protection Agency.



Community Stewardship at Finzel Swamp

This year, our western Maryland stewardship team launched the Finzel Swamp Volunteer Stewards program to support land management at one of Maryland’s most unique ecosystems, Finzel Swamp Preserve in Allegany and Garrett Counties. Our 10 dedicated volunteers have been hard at work maintaining trails, collecting seeds and cleaning up trash. We deeply appreciate these individuals for helping us care for this special place while deepening their connection to nature.

Interested in joining the Finzel Swamp Volunteer Stewards? Send us an email at mddcvolunteers@tnc.org for more information and to get involved!

Chesapeake Bay



James "Bubba" Parker harvests oysters from floating baskets off a pier in Cambridge, Maryland. Parker works for the Choptank Oyster Company, which is known for its sustainable aquaculture practices, producing high-quality oysters for the region while supporting the health of the Chesapeake Bay. © Greg Kahn

The Chesapeake Bay is the largest estuary in North America. Although the Bay only borders two states, Maryland and Virginia, its 64,000-square mile watershed extends across six states and the District of Columbia. The Bay watershed is a major economic driver for food production, shipping and tourism and is a patchwork of farms, forests, cities and wetlands, all of which have a major impact on the many communities and over 3,600 species of plants and animals that rely on a healthy Chesapeake Bay.

This is why the Bay The Nature Conservancy has recently designated the Bay as a priority in our **Global Regenerative Foodscape** strategy, which will provide the more than 50 staff who work on the Chesapeake Bay program with greater access to coalition building, coordinated planning, market development, supply chain actions and public policy support. TNC is ready to accelerate the critical work of securing cleaner water and healthy habitats for the benefit of all within the Bay watershed.

Collaborating for cleaner water

The key to restoring the Chesapeake Bay is providing clean water. Nutrients that are critical to growing food on the land can be carried by runoff into our waterways, which eventually results in oxygen-depleted “dead zones” where species can’t survive. That’s why addressing water pollution at the source before it can be carried downstream is key to the Bay’s recovery.

TNC works directly with farmers and agribusinesses to co-develop programs that help farmers adopt economically sustainable and innovative farming methods that reduce nutrient pollution. Thanks to a \$100K grant from the Giant Company and other supporters, TNC is helping to pilot new imaging and AI technology that can help farmers better utilize cover crops to manage nutrients and improve soil health. We’ve also recently launched a Conservation Innovation

Grant that will test performance-based incentives for farmers to implement practices of their choosing. As our region’s population continues to increase, so does the amount of impervious surface and stormwater pollution. TNC continues to support DC’s stormwater credit trading market through on-the-ground projects. In addition, we recently created a new mentorship program aimed at getting more small businesses active in the market and ultimately more green infrastructure projects built across the city.

Protecting natural habitats

The wetlands, forests, oyster reefs and other unique habitats of the Chesapeake Bay watershed support incredible biodiversity while also helping to clean our water and provide protection against climate impacts, but they also face growing threats. TNC is working to protect and restore these natural habitats, as well as make them more resilient to a changing climate.

With the help of many diverse partners, TNC is working to accelerate the pace and scale of wetland restoration in areas like Maryland’s Eastern Shore, working with aquaculture growers to get more oysters planted on reef sanctuaries, and developing new easements that will protect space for marshes to migrate inland as sea levels continue to rise. We are also integrating critical social science research into our work to ensure that these approaches work better for landowners and are subsequently more successful and longer lasting.



Apps to Bay connection

- More than half (57%) of the Chesapeake Bay’s watershed also lies within the TNC program boundary for the Appalachians, which TNC has designated as one of its four global focal areas.
- Many of the major waterways that empty into the Bay originate in the Appalachians, making forest protection and management around these headwater streams essential for water quality downstream.





Supporting Resilient Communities

At The Nature Conservancy, we believe that nature-based solutions must be rooted in community. With your support, we're helping communities across Maryland become more resilient to climate change, and development pressures while also creating healthier, greener places to live.

Turner Station: A Model for Community-Led Resilience

In Baltimore's historic Turner Station neighborhood, we've wrapped up a multi-year initiative focused on community engagement and climate resilience. Through the Witness Trees Project, we engaged local residents in design workshops, oral history documentation, native tree plantings and the installation of multiple public art pieces. The 185 planted trees will improve air quality and serve as a model for future projects that combine canopy expansion, art and community storytelling. With the final phase complete, we are sharing this approach with other Baltimore organizations.

Scaling Up Across Baltimore

We're partnering with local Baltimore organizations to bring tree planting and design workshops to new neighborhoods, as well as resources such as funding and tree partners. So far, 10 communities have expressed interest in bringing shade, cleaner air and climate resiliency to their residents. This fall, we'll help them develop planting plans to pursue implementation funding through Maryland's 5 Million Trees Initiative, ultimately increasing the engagement of urban and underserved communities via a community-centered design approach.



Top to bottom: A quote from a local Turner Station resident displayed in a public art piece next to some planted native trees. © Matt Kane/TNC; Two young Turner Station residents attending a landscape design workshop © Severn Smith/TNC; Opposite page: A crab boat in Crisfield heading back to the dock © Jay Fleming; Weather-related flooding has affected infrastructure like roadways in Pocomoke City. © Ayanna Healy/George Mason University; TNC has been working with farmers to explore nature-based solutions that positively benefit local food systems. © Dan Sweeney/TNC

Nature-Based Solutions for Flooding on the Eastern Shore

We're also supporting resilience in coastal communities like Crisfield and Pocomoke City, where flooding and water quality are ongoing challenges and where nature-based solutions are making a real difference.

Ongoing Work in Crisfield

We're proud to support Crisfield's progress in flood mitigation. The City received a \$777,490 grant from Maryland DNR to design and partially build wetland features in southern Crisfield. The Nature Conservancy is contributing a \$135,000 match to help construct a wetland around Gerald's Ditch—an important addition to the city's stormwater system.

To share Crisfield's story and its challenges with flooding, we produced *On Water's Edge*, a short documentary that aired on Maryland Public Television and won Best Documentary Short Film at the Ocean City Film Festival this year.

Pocomoke City: Community-Driven Flood Solutions

Our work in Pocomoke City builds on a legacy of conservation. In 2012, we partnered with Maryland DNR to restore the Pocomoke River floodplain—Maryland's largest ecological restoration project to date—improving water quality and biodiversity.

Today, we're collaborating directly with residents to address flooding through a NOAA-funded initiative. Hydrodynamic engineers from George Mason University and economists from Resources for the Future are working with a 20-member community advisory council. Through workshops, residents are identifying priority assets and shaping solutions tailored to their needs—aligning conservation with community resilience.

Around the Bay Farmers' Alliance

Resilience also means supporting the people who steward our lands. Through the Around the Bay Farmers' Alliance, we're working with a growing network of farmers to explore conservation planning and nature-based solutions that benefit both agriculture and the environment. With strong interest and active participation, we're learning alongside these farmers to shape the future of this work and ensure that it fits the needs of each community.



Shaping Policy



Step 1: Policy Development

As we're a science-based organization, science informs TNC's conservation and policy priorities, and helps make the case for policy change. We're also known for the relationships we build with community partners, other NGOs, agency staff, and elected officials. Our analysis of the proximity of shipping channels to important sites for marsh restoration led to the creation of our **Sediment Strategies** report, and now we're working with the state of Maryland and other partners to develop policies supporting more efficient conservation uses for the mud collected via dredging required to keep shipping channels open. The end results will be cost savings for the state and more resilient marsh habitat.



Step 2: Advocacy

In addition to developing policy that supports conservation goals, we also stand up and speak for it. Through meetings, broad communication, and in-person testimony, our team works to make sure lawmakers understand the benefits provided by nature-positive legislation so that it is passed into law and protected once it's established. Executive Director Kahlil Kettering stood up for nature this past year when he testified before the **DC City Council** in support of the **Stormwater Retention Credit** program, which was threatened with a total loss of funding in the mayor's proposed budget.



Step 3: Policy Implementation

It's not enough for new policy and programs to be signed into law; they also need to be funded and implemented. TNC advocates for resource allocation for conservation programs through state and federal budgets, as well as new funding streams. The Maryland **Whole Watershed Act**, for example, aggregates a variety of funding sources for collaborative, watershed-scale restoration efforts. As part of the **South Baltimore Gateway Partnership**, TNC helped secure funding through the Act for new wetland and shoreline construction, as well as new waterfront access for local communities along the Patapsco River.

Defending Funding for Conservation and Resilience



The 2025 legislative session was a nail-biter. Maryland was running on a nearly \$3-billion deficit, which put conservation and resilience programs, as well as agency budgets, in the crosshairs for cuts. **Program Open Space, Rural Legacy, Tree Solutions Now Act**, and the **Chesapeake Bay Trust** were all targeted for funding cuts. These programs support a lot of the conservation work that we and our partners do.

This became a rallying moment. TNC and our partners showed up in strong numbers to testify in support of conservation funding. Maryland cannot afford to reverse decades of environmental progress to solve the current budget deficit.

TNC and our partners will continue to show up and advocate for these programs in the coming years.

Staff Highlight

Having started with TNC back in 2014, **Michelle Dietz** now leads our policy and advocacy in Maryland and the District of Columbia as the chapter's director of government relations. She also leads the Northeast Government Relations network and helps to define policy goals and outcomes across states from here to Maine.



Opposite page, left to right: © Cameron Davidson, © Morgan Johnson, © Matt Kane; This page, top to bottom: Paddleboarders on the Potomac River © Greg Kahn; © Matt Kane



The Nature Conservancy in Maryland/DC
4245 N. Fairfax Drive
Suite 100
Arlington, VA 22203-1606
nature.org/marylanddc

NON-PROFIT
ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 2216

-  Like us at facebook.com/natureDCMD
 -  Follow us at linkedin.com/showcase/nature-dcmd
 -  Check out our photos at instagram.com/nature_dccmd
- Support us at nature.org/mddcgiving

