The Nature Conservancy

Maryland and DC

2026 Annual Report



Letter from the executive director









Dear Friends, Partners and Supporters,

As I reflect on the progress we've made together over the past year, I am filled with gratitude and optimism. Your support is helping us protect the natural systems that sustain communities, economies, and wildlife across Maryland and Washington, D.C.

At The Nature Conservancy, we are increasingly focused on conservation at the scale that nature demands. For our chapter, that means concentrating our efforts in two extraordinary and interconnected landscapes: the Chesapeake Bay watershed and the Appalachian forests. These ecosystems define our region. They provide clean water, healthy forests, resilient communities, rich biodiversity, and opportunities for people to connect with nature.

Across the Chesapeake Bay watershed, we are working with farmers, businesses, agencies, and community partners to improve water quality, restore wetlands and streams, and support regenerative food systems. In the Appalachian forests, we are protecting thousands of acres of critical habitats, advancing sustainable forest management, and helping create connected landscapes that support both wildlife and local communities.

What makes this work especially powerful is that it contributes to something even larger. Our efforts here at home are fully aligned with TNC's global priorities and transformational 2030 Goals. The achievements highlighted in this report are possible because of partners and supporters like you. Together, we are demonstrating that local conservation can drive global impact, and that meaningful progress is possible when we work at the scale of the challenges we face.

Thank you for standing with us in this important work.

Kahlil Kettering

Executive Director
The Nature Conservancy's
Maryland/DC Chapter

Cover: A hiker enjoys the frosty scenery at TNC's Finzel Swamp Preserve, located just outside Frostburg, Maryland. © Matt Kane/TNC; This page: Kahlil Kettering © Joy Asico-Smith; Right, top to bottom: TNC staff from Maryland and West Virginia after installing a new visitor kiosk at the trailhead of the Cranesville Swamp Preserve. © Erica Byrd/TNC; A red bellied woodpecker at TNC's Nassawango Creek Preserve. © Matt Kane/TNC; Cover crops blanket a farm field in Rock Hall, MD, which is a testing site for one of TNC's new innovative farmer incentive programs. © Matt Kane/TNC

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY
IN MARYLAND AND D.C.

2026 at a Glance



In 2026, TNC's D.C. Stormwater Mentorship Program supported three startup companies with training and other technical assistance to accelerate stormwater retention projects in D.C. All three mentees finished the year with landowner contracts and working project designs for implementation in 2027.



In the spring of 2026, TNC partnered with renowned Chesapeake Bay photographer Jay Fleming on an awareness and education campaign focused on the threat of invasive blue catfish.



Last year, worked with farmers, agribusinesses and other partners across the Chesapeake Bay watershed to to implement over 3,500 acres of conservation practices on farmland.



In May 2026, TNC acquired approximately 1,100 acres of healthy, productive forestland in Garrett County, just outside Bloomington, Maryland. This strategic protection project is helping expand the mosaic of conservation lands in the Allegheny Front, a critical north/south migration corridor in the Appalachian Mountains.



In April 2026, TNC staff and dozens of volunteers planted more than 5,000 red spruce seedlings at TNC's Glades Preserve as part of the 30th annual volunteer planting event. Over 30 years, this annual Earth Day event has added up to more than 100,000 red spruce trees planted by volunteers in Maryland.

Featured preserves

Last year, TNC underwent a nationwide effort to evaluate and categorize our preserves, easements and other land holdings to identify places where we want to drive visitation. In Maryland, we elevated five featured preserves across the state where we are making new investments in visitor experience. Scan the QR code at left for more information.







Appalachian forests

The Appalachian Mountains are among the most climate-resilient, biologically diverse and carbon-rich landscapes in the world. Western Maryland represents a critical portion of this landscape, and TNC is accelerating forest protection and improved management across the region at an unprecedented scale. Supported by a historic federal funding award that provides $35 million for conservation investments in Maryland over the next five years, TNC will protect 29,000 acres of western Maryland forest to enhance carbon storage, habitat connectivity and biodiversity. To achieve this goal, TNC is deploying a range of conservation tools, including strategic land acquisition for long-term ownership and stewardship, conservation easements that permanently protect privately owned forests, and landowner contracts to support improved forest management on private lands.

Protecting land

In May 2026, The Nature Conservancy purchased approximately 1,100 acres of forest land just outside Bloomington, Maryland in Garrett County. Known initially as Savage North, this property includes significant frontage on the North Branch Potomac River and public fishing access to the Savage River. The nearby town of Bloomington has seen much of the surrounding landscape lost to mining and unsustainable timber harvesting over the past century. TNC is working with the community to ensure that they continue to have access to Savage North for hunting, fishing and other recreational activities that have been central to the local culture for past, present and future generations.

This property is the second large acquisition closed by TNC in Maryland in a little more than a year. Both protection projects were acquired through a $421 million federal grant through the Atlantic Conservation Coalition (ACC), a four-state partnership of state agencies and nonprofits working together to protect and restore vital coastal habitats, peatlands and forests across the eastern United States.

Funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the ACC includes five coalition members and 18 partner organizations committed to advancing nature-based solutions through on-the-ground action.

Together, these two acquisitions expand a growing network of conservation lands across western Maryland's Allegheny Front, complementing state forests, parks, wildlife management areas, natural areas and TNC preserves. In a region where a legacy of natural resource extraction has left both lasting damage to nature and people, these projects offer a new path forward.

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Top to bottom: Recently acquired land in Garrett County, Maryland © Sev Smith/TNC; Controlled burns are a priority forest management strategy. © Matt Kane/TNC; Katie Shallows, Appalachian Forest Director Katie Shallows and her son participate in the 30th annual red spruce planting event in western Maryland. © Matt Kane/TNC

Restoring forest health

Protecting forests is only part of the equation. Ensuring that forests remain healthy, resilient and capable of supporting wildlife and storing carbon requires active stewardship and restoration.

In 2026, TNC and its partners treated 1,861 acres with prescribed fire across Maryland, including 561 acres in western Maryland. These carefully planned burns help restore natural ecological processes, reduce fuel loads and create habitat conditions that many native plants and wildlife depend on. An additional 80 acres on TNC preserves received improved forest management treatments, including invasive species control, non-commercial thinning and native tree planting.

These efforts support a broader vision for western Maryland's forests. While Appalachian forests are recovering from the widespread logging of the past century, they remain vulnerable to modern stresses like climate change and invasive species.TNC is working with public agencies, private landowners and conservation partners to foster a more coordinated approach to forest management that strengthens forest health across entire landscapes rather than individual properties.

2026 By the Numbers

1,861 acres
treated with prescribed fire statewide

561 acres
treated with prescribed fire in western Maryland

80 acres
improved through forest management activities

100,000+ red spruce seedlings
planted since 1996

90,000 acres
included in a new landscape-scale forest management collaborative

30 years of red spruce restoration

This year marked the 30th anniversary of one of Maryland's most enduring forest restoration efforts: red spruce restoration.

Since 1996, TNC, volunteers and partners have planted more than 100,000 red spruce seedlings across Garrett and Allegany counties, helping restore a forest type that was once greatly diminished by historic logging and industrial-era air pollution. Today, many of those trees have matured into thriving forests that provide habitat for wildlife, improve watershed health and strengthen the resilience of Appalachian landscapes. The anniversary serves as a powerful reminder that conservation outcomes often take decades to realize, and that lasting change is made possible through sustained partnerships, dedicated volunteers and long-term investment.

Building the future of forest management

TNC is also helping demonstrate how forest restoration can be achieved at a much larger scale. In 2026, TNC joined a new collaborative effort spanning approximately 90,000 acres in western Maryland to test innovative approaches to landscape-scale forest management. Supported by funding from the U.S. Forest Service, the partnership brings together the Maryland Forest Service, University of Maryland Extension, American Bird Conservancy and TNC to coordinate forest stewardship across ownership boundaries.

Scan here to see the recent Appalachian Impact Report.

Jeff and Kristyn Eckel © Kristyn Eckel

Jeff and Kristyn Eckel



For Jeff and Kristyn Eckel, conservation is both a personal commitment and a way to invest in the future of Maryland. Jeff brings decades of leadership in climate-focused investment and serves on the Board of Trustees of The Nature Conservancy in Maryland and D.C. Kristyn is a lifelong environmentalist whose career has included more than 20 years leading communications and marketing at Severn School and, most recently, work with the Maryland League of Conservation Voters. Together, they share a deep connection to Maryland's natural places and an enduring commitment to protecting them for generations to come.

That commitment is reflected in their support for TNC's Essential Forest Fund, which is helping accelerate the protection and restoration of western Maryland's Appalachian forests.

"Western Maryland means a great deal to us. We love the communities, the landscape, and the opportunity to spend time in some truly remarkable outdoor places. TNC's Migrations in Motion helps identify the places in the Central Appalachians where conservation can make the greatest difference. Protecting those lands is the first step. The Essential Forest Fund helps ensure they are cared for and restored for the long term, for wildlife, for the climate, and for future generations."

— Jeff Eckel







Chesapeake Bay

The Chesapeake Bay is the largest estuary in the United States, spanning six states and Washington, D.C., and home to more than 18 million people. It is both an ecological treasure and an economic engine. But decades of pollution, habitat loss and climate pressures have degraded its health—largely due to industrial scale food production taking place across the watershed. Today there is a coalition of public, nonprofit and private partners working to restore the Chesapeake. The Nature Conservancy's unique role is using applied science to connect on-the-ground conservation to influence policy and market pathways toward widespread and persistent change. Our ability to combine deep conservation expertise, ecological and social science, strong landowner relationships, robust evaluation systems, state and federal policy experts and relationships with global companies positions us to influence the systems that shape conservation outcomes in a way that few organizations can match.

Improving water quality

Last year, TNC launched an innovative incentive program designed to reduce nutrient loss by giving farmers flexibility to implement and test conservation practices that fit their operations. Incentive payments are tied to measured nutrient reductions, as determined through soil testing, rather than the adoption of specific practices. This outcomes-based approach differs from many existing state and federal conservation programs and may help inform more effective models for achieving nutrient reduction goals. Working with the trusted advisors of farmers, TNC provides the science, technical assistance and program coordination needed to evaluate results and support participating farmers. Early findings are helping demonstrate how different types of incentives and technology can improve water quality while creating a scalable model for conservation across the Chesapeake Bay watershed and beyond.

Scan here to learn more about our oyster work.

Restoring habitat

Last year, TNC helped advance wetland restoration efforts across the Chesapeake Bay watershed through a major social science research initiative. For many years, conservation organizations relied largely on anecdotal experience to gauge landowner interest in restoration. While some landowners were known to be interested, the prevailing assumption was that demand remained relatively limited. A recent TNC survey project provided a more rigorous assessment and challenged that assumption.

Using social science, TNC found that interest in wetland restoration is substantially stronger and more widespread than many conservation practitioners previously believed.

Across all surveyed states, 72 percent of respondents had never been approached about wetland restoration despite owning land that TNC's analysis identified as containing potentially restorable wetlands. Even so, at least half of respondents in every state requested

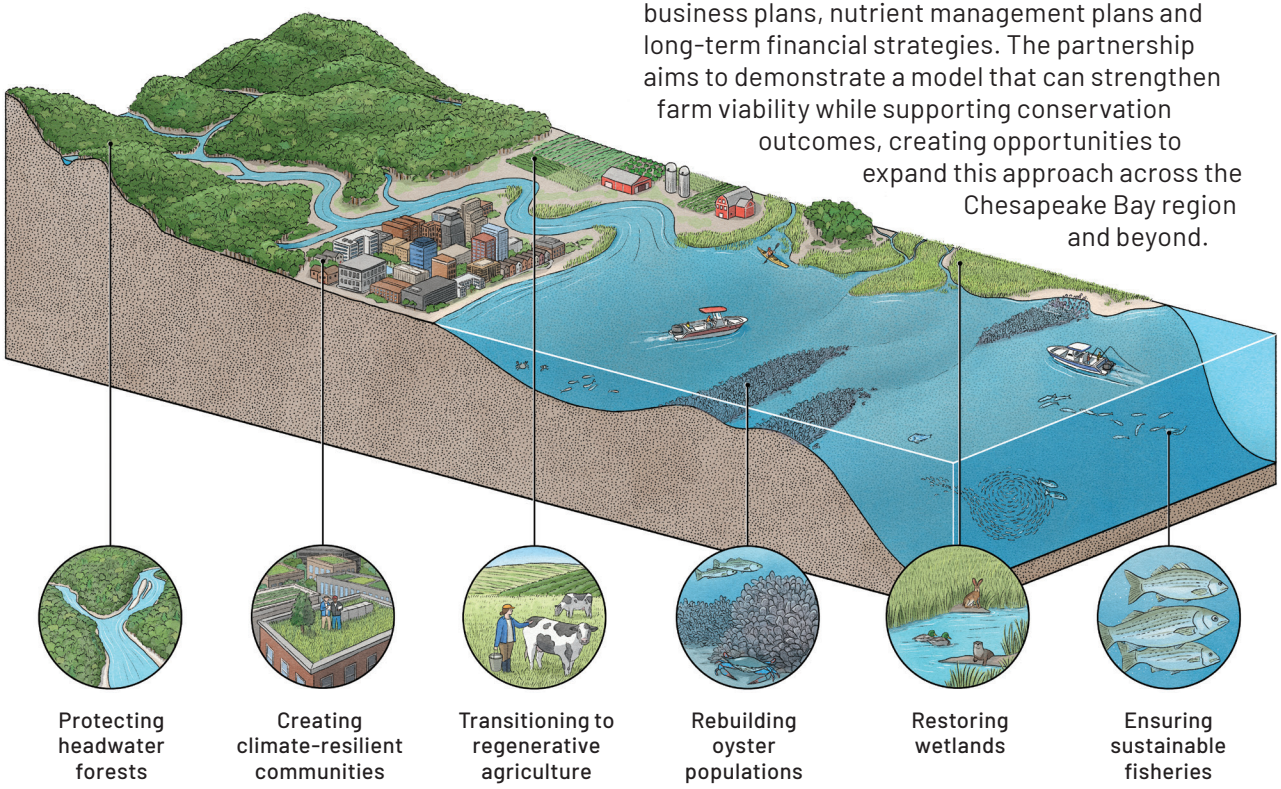
Top to bottom: Cover crops are one of many regenerative agriculture practices in the Chesapeake Bay watershed that TNC is helping to advance. © Matt Kane/TNC; Large-scale wetland restoration being led by TNC and partners helps create habitat while reducing nutrient runoff before it enters the Bay. © Sev Smith/TNC; TNC recently launched a new program to support the finances and operations of small table crop farms in the Chesapeake region. © Sev Smith/TNC

follow-up information about restoration opportunities. These results generated more than 500 prospective landowner contacts representing at least 3,000 acres of potential wetland restoration. The findings are helping conservation partners better target outreach, strengthen funding proposals and identify opportunities to accelerate restoration across the Chesapeake Bay watershed. As with many of TNC's conservation initiatives, science serves as a catalyst for broader project implementation and long-term impact.

Scan here to see how we use social science in the Bay.

Supporting regenerative food systems

Small-scale specialty crop farmers play an important role in building a resilient and diverse food system. These operations often grow a wide range of crops, supply local communities with fresh food and contribute to agricultural diversity across the landscape. TNC is working to help these growers overcome long-standing barriers to financial sustainability and business growth. Supported by a federal grant and partners including Blackbird Business Advisors, LLC, and the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, the program enrolled 10 Chesapeake Bay region farmers last year. Participants are receiving support to develop business plans, nutrient management plans and long-term financial strategies. The partnership aims to demonstrate a model that can strengthen farm viability while supporting conservation outcomes, creating opportunities to expand this approach across the Chesapeake Bay region and beyond.



TNC takes a watershed-wide approach to our conservation strategies and programs to restore a healthy Chesapeake Bay.

Susan and Larry Taylor



Photo © Susan and Larry Taylor

Susan and Larry Taylor became donors to The Nature Conservancy in the mid-1970s because of their commitment to conserving the environment. Larry's ownership of a Baltimore-based fertilizer industry company gave them a platform to share how the goals of farming and the environment could be aligned, and the couple continues to do that today in retirement.

"Having the good fortune of growing up on the Pamlico River in Eastern North Carolina and spending much of our adult life on the Chesapeake Bay, we are lovers of the water and the ecosystems it supports. Spending my career in agriculture and free time in the outdoors, it has been obvious to us that food production teamed with conservation is not only possible but essential for our planet.

My wife, Susan, and I have supported TNC for many years and believe TNC's journey tracks closely with our hopes for ensuring protection of our natural world for today and future generations.

In recent years, we have had the opportunity to see TNC's work up close in the Chesapeake Bay and around the world. The dedication and implementation of pragmatic, workable, science-based solutions are remarkable. Witnessing TNC's soil scientists, marine biologists, naturalists, watermen, and staff engage in the field with farmers and local communities has been inspirational!"

— Larry Taylor

Shaping policy







Step 1: Policy development

As a science-based organization, science informs TNC's conservation and policy priorities and helps make the case for policy change. Just as important, however, are the relationships we build with local governments, other NGOs, agency staff, and elected officials. To address the impact of growing climate threats on our local communities, TNC and Maryland's Montgomery County Green Bank recently launched a new program modeled after work TNC has done in Massachusetts and Rhode Island to get more resilience projects built. Our goal is to demonstrate a pathway for how resilience projects can move from planning to implementation and overcome financial and technical challenges.

Step 2: Advocacy

In addition to developing policy that supports conservation goals, it's also TNC's job to stand up and speak for it. Through meetings, broad communication, and in-person testimony, our staff 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. In the 2026 legislative session, TNC testified on behalf of HB 200, a new bill that requires property sellers to disclose the flood risk or history attached to a property to both potential buyers and Maryland's Department of the Environment. This potentially life-saving information can help keep homeowners safer from weather-related disasters and help the state better support flood-prone communities.

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. For example, Maryland's Tree Solutions Now act allocated funding toward the planting of 5 million native trees in the state by 2031. In support of the act, TNC and partners led a series of community-design workshops in Baltimore to provide technical assistance to community groups working to get more trees planted in their neighborhoods.

Defending funding for conservation and resilience programs



The 2026 Maryland legislative session saw TNC once again using our platform to help protect funding for conservation and resilience programs, as well as funding for the state agencies that administer them. This included the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Trust Fund, Program Open Space, and the Rural Legacy Program, among others. Investing in nature- and climate-centered programs protects the health of Chesapeake Bay and Appalachian ecosystems, makes our state more resilient in the face of climate change, and brings measurable benefits for communities and businesses.

With the state deficit expected to be nearly twice as large next year, TNC is preparing to defend these programs again in 2027.



Trustees lend their voices

TNC trustees have an important role to play in TNC's advocacy work, often providing expert and influential voices in legislative hearings or events like the annual Volunteer Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C., or legislator receptions in Annapolis.

Opposite page, left to right: TNC staff are intentional about showing up in communities across the state where local support is critical to lasting conservation outcomes. © Dan Mills; Flooding in Somerset County, MD © Jay Fleming Photography; TNC Landscape Designer Jaline McPherson leads an urban tree design workshop with local youth. © Matt Kane/TNC; This page, top to bottom: © Greg Kahn; © Morgan Johnson

Celebrating the legacy of esteemed Chesapeake Bay ecologist Dr. Walter Boynton



Dear Friends and Supporters,

It is with great sadness that we share news of the passing of Walter Boynton, professor emeritus for the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science, and trustee emeritus for The Nature Conservancy's Maryland/DC Chapter.

Walter was a dedicated, passionate, and kind champion for the Chesapeake Bay. Whenever he spoke about the science behind restoration and the opportunities still ahead of us, there was a sparkle in his eye. His optimism and enthusiasm were contagious, inspiring everyone around him to believe that meaningful progress was not only possible but within reach.

Walter was one of the most generous people I have ever known with both his time and knowledge. He was always willing to talk about the Bay and patiently explain the complexities of its ecosystems, helping others understand both the challenges and the promise of restoration. No matter the obstacle, he remained steadfastly positive. He often reminded us to stay focused on improving water quality and believed that if we could reach a tipping point, the Bay would respond in remarkable ways.

Walter never stopped listening and learning. Despite being one of the field's most respected experts, he remained endlessly curious. He attended webinars and presentations to learn about new work, asked thoughtful questions, and challenged us to think bigger and aim higher. Until just a few months ago, he was still sending me nutrient reduction data for wetlands and encouraging us to continue protecting and restoring these vital systems.

I am immensely grateful for having Walter in my life for his friendship, his guidance, and his unwavering belief that together we could restore the Chesapeake Bay for future generations. I encourage you to read Walter's Clean Water Story written by Chesapeake Bay Program writer, Jake Solyst.

Amy Jacobs
Chesapeake Bay Program Director
The Nature Conservancy







All photos are of Walter Boynton participating in various events and field trips as a member of TNC's Maryland/DC chapter board of trustees. © TNC Staff



"His optimism and enthusiasm were contagious, inspiring everyone around him to believe that meaningful progress was not only possible but within reach."



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Thank you for your support.

Our mission is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. Your support makes our work possible. To make a donation, please contact us at **contactmddc@tnc.org**.

Luna moth © Matt Kane/TNC