

2024 Annual Impact Report





The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

With a little more than a year under my belt as the Executive Director of The Nature Conservancy’s Maryland/DC chapter, I appreciate this opportunity to pause and reflect.

My biggest source of inspiration is the passion and dedication of those involved in the environmental movement, including our local staff, and you—our greatest supporters. At the same time, I know that we have a lot more work to do, and that we have years—not decades—to address the interconnected climate and biodiversity crises.

In this moment, The Nature Conservancy has established the most ambitious set of global conservation goals in our organization’s more than 70-year history, which represent TNC’s greatest possible impact on the planet. And we are collectively counting our progress toward those goals across the global organization. Reaching these goals by 2030 will require focus and alignment, which is exactly what is happening across all TNC programs around the world, including here in Maryland and DC. Our chapter has structured our on-the-ground conservation, science and policy work so that we are delivering the maximum contributions to TNC’s global 2030 goals by doing good work in Maryland and the District, and by lifting our gaze and working across borders within the larger landscapes in which we sit: the Chesapeake Bay watershed and the Appalachians.

Thank you for your continued support on this journey.

Kahlil Kettering
Executive Director of the Maryland/DC chapter

THIS PAGE: Executive Director Kahlil Kettering delivers a speech at the “Change is Here” campaign celebration event. The event was attended by trustees, donors and staff who played a critical role in the successful completion of the chapter’s five-year comprehensive campaign. © Joy Asico-Smith; **ON THE COVER:** An egret takes flight near Smith Island, Maryland. © Matt Kane/TNC; **INSETS, LEFT TO RIGHT:** A waterman off the coast of Smith Island, Maryland at sunset. © Matt Kane/TNC; Brown pelicans on an island in the Chesapeake Bay. © Matt Kane/TNC; Bikers enjoying the Great Allegheny Passage in western Maryland. © Matt Kane/TNC; **OPPOSITE PAGE:** © Chris Bruce/TNC and Danielle Kulas/TNC

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY IN MARYLAND AND D.C.

2024 AT A GLANCE



TNC's Baltimore program used art and storytelling to support the implementation of the **Tree Solutions Now Act**, a statewide initiative to **plant 5 million trees by 2031**, including 500,000 trees that will be planted in urban and underserved areas. Check out the art-based campaign website by following the QR code:



Our government relations team submitted testimony for **44 bills** focused on **resilience, conservation, and climate mitigation** priorities that will provide foundational support for our efforts to address biodiversity loss and the climate crisis.



This fall, TNC was awarded a **\$200 million EPA Climate Pollution Reduction Grant** for natural climate solutions across four states: Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Our chapter received **\$42.5 million in funding for land protection and improved forest management in the Appalachians**, one of TNC's four global focus areas.



TNC's presence at **Billy Goat Trail – Section A**, located on **Bear Island**, is often unknown due to out-of-date signage. For more than 50 years, TNC has worked to protect this ecologically diverse area that harbors biodiversity and provides recreational opportunities for thousands of visitors each year. This fall, we installed two new kiosks at the Billy Goat trailheads that highlight our partnership with the National Park Service on Bear Island.



6 We used fire as an effective tool in forest management and restoration across the **Chesapeake Bay Watershed**—from the Appalachians to the Eastern Shore. Our team burned a **record 3,000 acres this past year**, supporting healthy forests that provide ecological benefits to people and nature.



TNC's **Chesapeake Bay agriculture program** was selected to receive four grants that will allow us and our partners to expand our regenerative agriculture work. One of these grants is a **\$21.7 million award from the USDA Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**, which will support TNC and our partners' work to implement sustainable nutrient management practices on 150,000 acres farmland across the Bay.

- TNC Offices
- TNC Preserves and Easements

Shape Climate Smart Policies



STEP 1

Laying the foundation pilot projects and science

Our conservation teams are leading science-based projects that often contribute important information about the state's conservation needs. For example, our work with the City of Crisfield leveraged social science to identify grassroots community goals for adaptation planning as the community struggles with the impacts of sea-level rise. Through our work in Crisfield, TNC is focused on creating policy mechanisms that will benefit other coastal towns—and their nearby coastal habitats—that face similar challenges.



STEP 2

Policy development

Building authentic relationships with community partners, other nonprofit organizations, agency staff and elected officials is key to successful policy development. For example, TNC developed a policy proposal for the Supporting Oyster Aquaculture and Restoration (SOAR) program to restore oyster reefs in the Chesapeake Bay while simultaneously supporting the sustainable oyster aquaculture industry. While peer-reviewed science formed the foundation of this policy, the success of the proposal hinged on building trusted partnerships with local businesses and elected leaders.



STEP 3

Advocacy

Engaging in advocacy is the tool our government relations team uses to pass new legislation. Through advocacy, we can create the enabling mechanisms for continuing our work in a way that maximizes benefits for ecosystems and communities. During the 2023/2024 MD General Assembly, our team submitted testimony for 44 bills focused on resilience, conservation, and climate mitigation priorities.



STEP 4

Policy implementation

Policy implementation requires the allocation of funding resources through state and federal budgets. For example, to implement equity-based climate resilience planning, we are participating in state-level working groups and sharing information with local governments and planners. Our team is also creating toolkits and resources for decision-makers highlighting the interconnected nature of climate, conservation, and resilience priorities to push the state to provide appropriate levels of funding that would be required to implement Maryland's vision for a climate-resilient state.



STAFF
HIGHLIGHT
**Mariana
Rosales,
Director
of Climate**

Mariana joined the Maryland/DC chapter's Government Relations team in November 2023. As Director of Climate, Mariana leads our climate mitigation work, which is advancing climate-forward policy and emissions reductions.

A Focus on Funding for Resilience

Almost 70% of Maryland's residents live in the coastal zone, where they are vulnerable to rising sea levels and extreme storms. Underserved communities face barriers to accessing critical sources of climate adaptation funding and are often left behind. Our government relations team has been supporting and advocating for legislation that will create more equitable funding systems and increase Maryland's resiliency to climate change.

This year, our climate adaptation policy staff completed two projects: Supporting Equitable Access to Funding for Adaptation Resources (SEAFARE), and Community Outreach and Engagement Forums (COEF). These reports and toolkits build on each other to provide policymakers with a set of recommendations for improving the flow of climate adaptation funding and resources. They were created in close partnership with frontline communities so that the recommendations put forth are rooted in equity, authentic relationships and community-led planning. These projects now lay the groundwork for the important climate adaptation work that TNC and the state of Maryland will be advancing in the years to come.



LEFT TO RIGHT: © Jay Fleming; Matt Kane/TNC; Matt Kane/TNC; Matt Kane/TNC; **THIS PAGE, TOP:** Courtesy of Mariana Rosales; **BOTTOM:** The Maryland/DC chapter's government relations team attends Maryland's 2024 General Assembly. © Photo courtesy of the MD/DC chapter's government relations team



Climate justice communities like Turner Station, Maryland often lack the capacity and expertise to apply for climate adaptation funding. Projects like SEAFARE and COEF are intended to provide policymakers with the necessary tools to better support these types of frontline communities. © Severn Smith/TNC

Restore the Chesapeake Bay

Partnering with Farmers for Sustainable Agriculture

This year, our regenerative agriculture program was awarded four public grants totaling over \$27 million. This funding will bolster our collaborative efforts to reduce nutrients leaving farmlands and entering the Chesapeake Bay—a contributor to poor water quality.

The largest grant, \$21.7 million from the USDA Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), will help TNC and our partners implement sustainable nutrient management practices on 150,000 acres of farmland



The adoption of new farming technology will play a critical role in the future of nutrient management, which is a major focus of the RCPP grant. © Matt Kane/TNC; **TOP:** Farmers learn about new technology at a field day cohosted by TNC and the Mid-Atlantic 4R Alliance. © Matt Kane/TNC; **BOTTOM:** Oysters on their way to be planted along reefs in the Chesapeake Bay. © Humna Sharif

across the Chesapeake Bay watershed. TNC was also selected to receive a \$2.2 million USDA Conservation Innovation Grant On-Farm Trial award that will allow us and our partners to scientifically test a program that would improve nitrogen efficiency across farms in Maryland and Pennsylvania.

These grants, made possible by TNC's network of partnerships, are advancing our goal of supporting a thriving agricultural industry that supports the farmers who grow our food while keeping our environment healthy.



Learn more about some of the great farmers we support by watching our video, "Farmers at the Forefront."

Restoring Oyster Sanctuaries

TNC has been involved in oyster restoration in the Chesapeake Bay for more than a decade. Most recently, our focus has been on supporting oyster farmers and sanctuary restoration through the Supporting Oyster Aquaculture and Restoration (SOAR) Program—a program in which TNC purchases surplus oysters from local growers that we then use to build and expand sanctuary reefs. This year, TNC purchased and



deployed more than 70,000 farmed oysters that are now living on sanctuary reefs in the Bay.

Thanks to the SOAR program, TNC and our partners are supporting oyster growers and their families, the economy, healthy habitats, and coastal protection in the Chesapeake Bay area.

Supporting Crisfield, Maryland— A Community on the Water’s Edge

The coastal town of Crisfield, Maryland, home to almost 2,500 residents, is known for its rich history in the seafood industry. Crisfield is one of many coastal Maryland towns grappling with increased flooding that threatens infrastructure and disrupts daily life. In Crisfield, flooding often occurs even on sunny days and can force students to miss school and businesses to close their doors.

Maryland’s lower Eastern Shore is one of the most vulnerable areas to sea-level rise, with underserved communities like Crisfield now sitting on the front lines of climate change. While funding exists to help underserved communities increase their resilience to climate change, many of them face barriers to accessing available resources.

Since 2022, TNC has partnered with the Crisfield community to provide technical support and grassroots resilience planning for several flood adaptation projects. Thanks to these efforts, Crisfield was recently awarded a \$36 million grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) called the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant, which will be used to fix broken infrastructure and begin to move new infrastructure to higher ground. TNC and other NGOs and government agencies are now using Crisfield as a model for community-led resilience planning in other low-lying Maryland communities.



Learn more about our work in Crisfield by exploring this StoryMap.

STAFF HIGHLIGHT

Andrew Wells, Wetland Restoration Specialist



Andrew is a member of the Chesapeake Agriculture Team, where he engages landowners in wetland restoration programs across the Delmarva Peninsula. He works in a collaborative partnership with other organizations where we aim to accelerate the pace of wetland restoration to help meet water quality goals

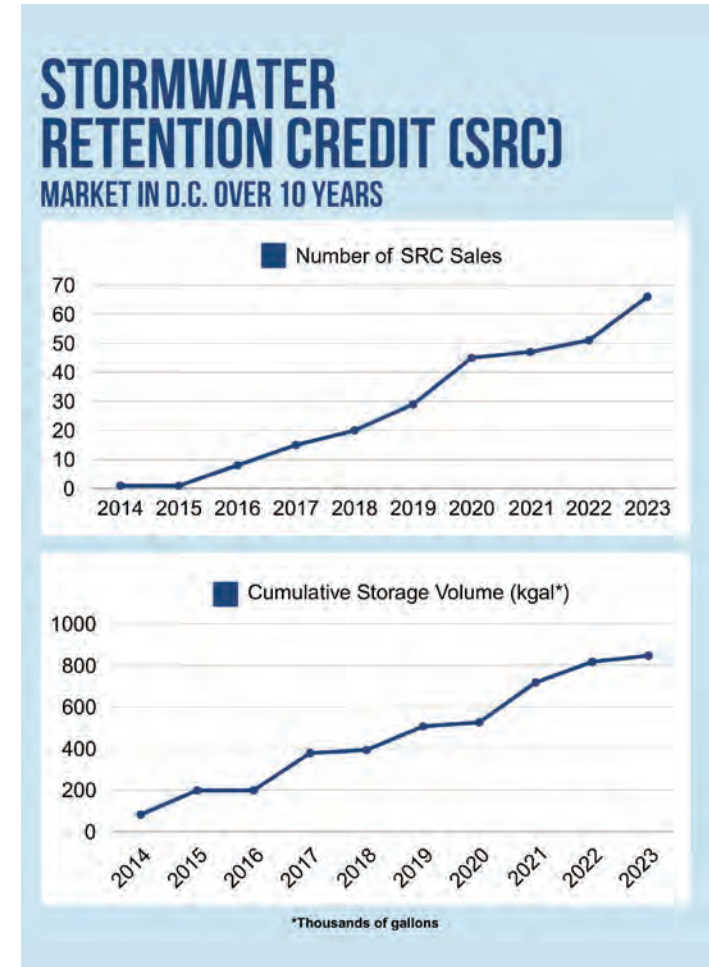


TOP: Courtesy of Andrew Wells; BOTTOM: Sunny day flooding has become a regular occurrence for communities like Crisfield, MD. © Jay Fleming

Build Greener, More Equitable Cities

10 Years of Success in DC's Stormwater Retention Credit Market

This year marked TNC's 10-year anniversary of successful participation and partnership in the DC City Government's Stormwater Retention Credit (SRC) market. The SRC market offers real estate developers an alternative way to offset their stormwater management requirements by purchasing credits that are generated by the construction of offsite green infrastructure projects—projects like the ones TNC has been building across the city. Over the past 10 years, the SRC market has seen more than 1.7 million credit transactions, capturing and cleaning the equivalent of 40 million gallons of water annually. The green infrastructure projects being built through this program, including by TNC, provide a suite of nature-based, community benefits such as water quality improvements, reduced flooding, reduced summer heat, and expanded access to green space.



LEFT: Mt. Olivet rain gardens absorb stormwater runoff and provide habitat for a variety of pollinators. © Cameron Davidson; ABOVE: SRC market credit sales have steadily increased over the last ten years. © TNC



Baltimore: More Trees on the Way



The Tree Solutions Now Act is a historic initiative by the state of Maryland to plant 5 million trees across the state by 2031, with

500,000 of those trees going in urban and under-served areas. Fewer than 50,000 trees have been planted so far, and TNC's Baltimore conservation team is working to increase the rate of these plantings through a new community outreach campaign.

In collaboration with Baltimore-based artist Kondwani Fidel, and with support from the U.S. Forest Service, TNC launched "To The Jungles That Be," a call-and-response form of poetry that's intended to initiate a dialogue of diverse voices around urban forestry. We're bringing this art-based conservation tool to new communities in Baltimore with the hope that highlighting new

perspectives will inform equitable policy changes. As we share the "To The Jungles That Be" message across Baltimore, we aim to inspire community-supported tree plantings that will provide benefits to both city residents and wildlife.

Turner Station: A Case Study in Community Engagement

Established in the 1880s, Turner Station boasts a rich history and remains one of the largest African American communities in Baltimore. Today, residents are working to implement projects that address climate change, which disproportionately impacts the community of Turner Station because of its long history of environmental injustices.

Two years ago, TNC partnered with Turner Station on an initiative called "Witness Trees," a project that elevates Turner Station's cultural heritage through art and tree plantings. This past year, the Baltimore team commenced a series of



STAFF HIGHLIGHT Jaline McPherson, Landscape Designer



Jaline McPherson leads the Maryland/DC chapter's work around the Healthy Trees, Healthy Cities program, which touches down primarily in Baltimore. Jaline is working to engage local communities and neighborhoods to support local tree plantings and urban forestry.

tree planting design workshops with youth from the Turner Station community. In collaboration with artist Saba Hamidi and partner EnviroCollab, TNC worked with Boy and Girl Scout troops to design a public art installation, paired with a tree planting, to capture the youth's collective vision for their neighborhood.

Thanks to our investment in community engagement and urban forestry, TNC has supported the successful planting of 140 trees in Turner Station—with more to come. This type of community engagement work is highlighting the importance of equitable access to nature and supports our goal of helping 500,000 Maryland and DC residents on the front lines of climate impacts by 2030.

ILLUSTRATION: To The Jungles That Be is an art-based community engagement campaign supporting urban forestry. © Saba Hamidi; **LEFT:** Turner Station Scout Troops participate in environmental education and landscape design activities. © Matt Kane/TNC; **ABOVE:** Courtesy of Jaline McPherson

Connect Appalachian Forests



Protecting the Allegheny Front Critical Landscape

As one of TNC’s global focal areas, the Appalachian landscape plays a critical role in tackling the dual threat of climate change and biodiversity loss. Centuries of unsustainable natural resource management have degraded the health and resiliency of this landscape that is home to both treasured wildlife and communities. Our goal for the Appalachians is to keep forests connected through protection and management activities that conserve biodiversity, increase carbon sequestration, and support resilient communities with sustainable livelihoods. In Maryland, we are working to connect the Allegheny Front—a key portion of the Appalachians that connects West Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania.

This fall, the Maryland/DC chapter purchased a 97-acre property in western Maryland that marks our first land purchase in that part of the state in 15 years. We anticipate this 97-acre purchase to be the first of many in western Maryland, our local slice of the Appalachians. Our chapter’s recent award of \$42.5 million in federal funding (see page 3) is enabling us to build a pipeline of future land acquisitions in the region. With your continued support, we will continue to build the necessary team of land protection specialists and land managers needed to meet all of the goals established in the \$42.5 million grant.

MAP: The Appalachian Mountains span 2,000 miles from Canada to Alabama. The icon on the map indicates where we are working to protect the Allegheny Front critical landscape. © TNC’s Appalachian Program; **TOP:** TNC forest scientists and land managers pay an initial visit to the newly protected 97-acre property located in Garrett County, Maryland to begin brainstorming a long-term forest restoration and management plan. © Deborah Barber/TNC; **OPPOSITE PAGE:** A burn crew monitors a prescribed fire at Sideling Hill Creek. © Matt Kane/TNC; Courtesy of Caitly Embley

Building Communities for Conservation

Sixty percent of Appalachian forests are privately owned, supporting generations of families and vibrant communities. While conserving this global focus area, it's critical that we build partnerships and solutions that are true to our mission—to create a world where both people and nature thrive.

The Maryland/DC chapter partners with the Allegheny College of Maryland, Garret College, and Frostburg State University to support education and training for aspiring conservation professionals in western Maryland. These partnerships are mutually advantageous for the community and our conservation work: students gain real-world projects and practical experience while TNC benefits from extra on-the-ground support. Each year, TNC works with 12 to 15 students on projects such as invasive species removal, controlled burns, and vegetation monitoring, often supporting their future development into conservation leaders.



We can't reach our 2030 goals for the Appalachian region alone. With these partnerships, we're building a community with the commitment, strategic thinking, and expertise that's needed to create resilient, healthy forests.

Fueling Restoration: Creating Resilient Forests with Fire

Fire is nature's way of "weeding the garden" in fire-adapted landscapes like the central Appalachians. For decades, the natural process of fire has been suppressed in most Appalachian forests. The cumulative effects of fire suppression, climate change and deforestation have led to degraded forest ecosystems. Bringing the natural process of fire back to these forests is one way that TNC is having an outsized influence in the management of Appalachian forests for long-term resilience.

This year, TNC and our partners led or assisted controlled burns on 540 acres in Maryland's Potomac Headwaters, contributing to more than 3,000 acres burned in the region. With this focus on fire, we're developing collaborative partnerships and best practices to strengthen the role of fire as a restoration tool in the region.

Prescribed fire is a scalable, effective forest management strategy—and it's not the only tool in our belt. This past year, we improved forest management through invasive species control on 60 acres of TNC lands. Together, these protection, restoration, and partnership efforts are creating landscape-scale solutions that will create resilient, connected Appalachian forests for generations to come.

With this focus on fire, we're developing collaborative partnerships and best practices to strengthen the role of fire as a restoration tool in the region.



STAFF HIGHLIGHT Caity Embly, Western Maryland Stewardship Field Assistant

Caity joined the Maryland/DC chapter in November 2023 and helps maintain thousands of acres of land and visitor infrastructure across TNC's Appalachian preserves.



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LEFT TO RIGHT: Volunteers prepare to plant red spruce trees in an effort to restore native forests at Cranesville Swamp preserve. © Matt Kane/TNC; Staff represent TNC at the 2024 Appalachian Festival hosted by Frostburg State University. © Morgan Johnson/TNC; A volunteer carefully places a red spruce seedling in the ground during our Cranesville Swamp volunteer event. © Matt Kane/TNC