NATURE MARYLAND/DC
Fall 2022 • nature.org/marylanddc

Caitlin Kerr © Caitlin Kerr

Message from a Conservationist
Caitlin Kerr, Conservation and Climate Policy Analyst

The first time I testified in front of the Maryland General Assembly, I was in eighth grade. I traveled with my dad to Annapolis to support a bill that would require newborn screening to diagnose a rare genetic disorder that my brother and I both have. Despite my nerves, I came out of the hearing room feeling like my voice and my presence had the power to lift up this community.

Today, I feel that same sense of pride in my work as an advocate in the fight against climate change. While this issue impacts a vastly larger community than the one I represented as an eighth-grader, each of us has our own stories about how climate change is impacting our lives, which motivates us to action. Through this work, and with the support of our many dedicated partners, I can make changes that advance climate resilience to protect current and future generations.

SUPPORT OUR WORK
Make a donation with the enclosed envelope or online at nature.org/mddcgiving

From Baltimore down to the lower Eastern Shore of Maryland, low-lying communities are dealing with the impacts of sea-level rise on an almost daily basis. Elliott, Maryland, pictured here, is one of those communities. © Severn Smith/TNC

State of Maryland Establishes Office of Resilience

On July 30, 2016, Maryland's Ellicott City experienced one of the worst natural disasters in its history when flash floods brought on by an intense rainstorm poured down Main Street. The flood waters destroyed businesses, swept away vehicles and took the lives of two people. This tragedy was considered a "1,000-year flood," meaning a flood event so severe it has only a 0.1 percent chance of occurring in any given year. In 2018—just two years later—it happened again.

Preparing our communities for future climate impacts and natural disasters will require complex solutions, new funding streams, and an unprecedented level of coordination between state agencies, local governments, NGOs and community members. That's why the creation of a new Office of Resilience in the Maryland Department of Emergency Management is a critical step in the right direction.

Since 2019, The Nature Conservancy's Maryland/DC chapter has worked with the state legislature to develop and champion the legislation that led to the creation of this new office. Now that it has passed, we take a moment to celebrate with the understanding that the important work is yet to come. Once the new Chief Resilience Officer is in place, they will be tasked with creating a resilience plan that lays out priorities and strategies for the state moving forward.

We also know that the impacts of climate change are not distributed evenly across the landscape, and the communities first to experience them are often some of the most overburdened. Those burdens include infrastructure in desperate need of repair and upgrade or of lack of financial and other resources coming in.

(continued on next page)

Partners from the Preserving Coastal Parklands project gather in June, 2022 at the Colonial National Historical Park in Jamestown, VA to observe shoreline erosion issues and discuss NNBFs that can be used to help solve some of the problems. © Jackie Specht/TNC

Preserving Coastal Parklands

The Nature Conservancy's Maryland/DC chapter is partnering with the National Park Service, the University of Virginia and ETZ Strategies through a grant administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to research, develop and test Natural and Nature-Based Features (NNBFs) for three coastal national parks in the Chesapeake Bay region: Colonial National Historic Park, Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park and Assateague Island National Seashore.

The project aims to preserve the natural and cultural resources of the parks that are valued for their capacity to provide enjoyment, education and inspiration for current and future generations that are under threat from sea level rise. The team will work to develop NNBF designs that provide natural alternatives to protect these coastal parks and their associated communities from flood impacts. The design concepts will focus on increasing long-term coastal resilience for the parks, in coordination with the USACE's Engineering With Nature Initiative, which seeks to deliver economic, social and environmental benefits through natural infrastructure.

For TNC's Maryland/DC chapter, this collaboration represents an incredible opportunity to support the primary goal of our Resilient Coasts Program, which is to use the best available conservation science to set priorities, take action and measure results to help Maryland's critical coastal habitats and historic communities adapt to the effects of climate change. Our coastal National Parks around the Chesapeake Bay region are treasures that are critical for people and nature.

To learn more, visit: nature.org/MDCoastal

Flooding in Annapolis, Maryland
© Matt Rath/Chesapeake Bay Program

Office of Resilience, Continued

In Maryland, in particular, a history of racial injustice has pushed many communities of color to the literal margins of society, and often into places that were unsafe even before climate change made everything worse. There are already many Maryland communities where regular flooding cuts off access to vital resources like schools, businesses and hospitals. It is critical that the people that live in these places are actively engaged in the resilience building process so their voices are heard and they can access solutions proportionate to the challenges they face.

Resilience is not just something we exhibit in the face of challenge. It is something we can build, and something that we must build equitably. We can make our infrastructure stronger, we can help our communities adapt to change, and we can build a brighter future for Maryland. For everyone from the mountaintops of Garret County to the shorelines of Worchester County, we owe it to all Marylanders to do so.

The Nature Conservancy

The Nature Conservancy
425 Barlow Place, #100
Bethesda, MD 20814

Maryland/DC
maryland@tnc.org
nature.org/marylanddc

facebook/natureDCMDVA
twitter/nature_dcmdva
instagram/nature_dcmdva