



Conservation
IS a priority.

CAMPAIGN TOOLKIT

to defend Maryland conservation funding

[#prioritizeplace](#)

[#conserveMD](#)



Eastern Shore
LAND CONSERVANCY



This Campaign Toolkit is made available to support nonprofits, businesses, towns, and counties as we collectively oppose DLS recommendations and urge the MD General Assembly not to cut conservation funding for the next four years as currently proposed.

CONTENTS

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	
POS Overview.....	3
Chesapeake and Coastal Bays Trust Fund Overview.....	4
Action Plan.....	5
Key Campaign Messages.....	6
Social Media Kit.....	7
Press Pitch Kit.....	8
One Pagers & Reference Materials..	9+

POS OVERVIEW



What is Program Open Space?

Maryland charges a 0.5 % transfer tax on almost all real estate transactions. That transfer tax money is then given to Program Open Space (POS) in order to fund land conservation and enhancement. This nationally recognized system has successfully conserved more than 600,000 acres of land and supported innumerable conservation and restoration projects.

What programs use this funding?

POS funds MALPF, Rural Legacy, and goes towards purchasing state parkland, protecting sensitive ecological areas, protecting large contiguous blocks of wildlife habitat and farmland, protecting and celebrating heritage areas, funding parks and recreational facilities in Baltimore City, and providing parkland to underserved areas.

How does this funding benefit the state of Maryland?

These programs enhance the quality of life for Maryland residents and visitors. They also provide a huge boost to our economy. Parks, outdoor recreation, agriculture, and natural resources conservation generate billions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of jobs every year.

Have these programs been cut before?

Maryland has a goal of protecting 40% of the state by the year 2040. To be successful these programs need consistent funding. But the POS funds have consistently been dipped into for other purposes. Millions of dollars are regularly diverted to DNR operations and administration with no plans for repayment.

Why is this funding at risk in 2025?

Maryland is dealing with a major budget deficit. POS is under dire threat of being completely zeroed out as part of a proposal by Maryland's Department of Legislative Services (DLS), which has recommended the General Assembly eliminate ALL funding for Program Open Space for the next four years.

What happens if this funding is cut?

This devastating decision would waylay parks, playgrounds, and restoration projects. And it would cripple popular land conservation efforts like Rural Legacy, Maryland Agriculture Land Preservation Foundation, and Program Open Space. These programs preserve large blocks of contiguous agricultural lands, protect forests, conserve ecologically sensitive areas, and secure park lands for public access and recreation. If the 2025 General Assembly also decides passes legislation further enabling solar developers, the state will experience a perfect storm of farmers who have every financial incentive to lease large parcels to solar developers and zero financial incentive to pursue conservation.

CHESAPEAKE AND ATLANTIC COASTAL BAYS TRUST FUND OVERVIEW



What is the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Trust Fund?

The Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Trust Fund (Trust Fund) is primarily funded by gasoline and rental car taxes. The Trust Fund allows Maryland to accelerate Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bay restoration by focusing limited financial resources on implementing the most efficient, cost-effective non-point source pollution control projects. State agencies work with local partners to administer the money in ways that leverage the funds to the greatest extent possible, target the funds geographically, engage the community at large, and hold everyone accountable. The fund has a singular focus on reducing nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment pollution – all of which are essential to meeting Maryland’s federally-required water quality mandates.

What programs use this funding?

The Fund supports important statewide projects like stormwater management improvements, agricultural best management practices, living shorelines and buffer plantings, green infrastructure and other climate resiliency projects. These projects provide important water-quality benefits that help reduce run-off, restore wildlife and aquatic habitats, sequester carbon and protect communities from extreme weather events.

How does this funding benefit the state of Maryland?

Non-point source nutrient and sediment pollution is the main factor affecting Chesapeake Bay and Coastal Bay water quality that in turn affects the quality of our state’s waters for fishing, swimming, recreation and wildlife. Restoration projects employ hundreds of workers every year while ensuring that the economies based on fisheries, tourism and recreation continue to thrive and do not degrade. Moreover, restoration projects funded by the Trust Fund help Maryland meet its pollution reduction obligations under the Bay Agreement.

Since 2013, Trust Fund projects have reduced non-point source pollution by 1.4 million pounds of nitrogen, 208,000 pounds of phosphorus and 185,000 tons of sediment that would otherwise pollute our state’s waters. Successfully completed projects have restored over 67 miles of streams, 3,200 acres of wetlands and 2,600 acres of forest cover across the state. In urban areas, the Trust Fund has funded the construction of over 1,600 stormwater management facilities that reduce flooding and pollution in some of our most underserved neighborhoods.

Why is this funding at risk?

Maryland is dealing with a major budget deficit. The Bay Trust Fund is under dire threat of being completely zeroed out as part of a [proposal by Maryland’s Department of Legislative Services \(DLS\)](#), which has recommended the General Assembly eliminate ALL funding for this and three other funds for the next four years.

What happens if this funding is cut?

Local and large-scale restoration and improvements to our State’s streams, wetlands, shorelines and habitats will slow considerably. Improvements to the water quality in the Chesapeake Bay and Coastal Bays will likely slow, stop or even backslide as the most critical non-point sources of pollution will not be addressed.

WHAT WE CAN DO



1

Directly reach out to key budget committee members

2

Directly reach out to key legislators in additional committees:

- Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
- House Appropriations Committee
- Senate Environment Subcommittee (Education, Energy, Environment)
- House Natural Resources, Agriculture, & Open Space Subcommittee (Environment & Transportation)

3

Collective social media blitz

Create urgency around this issue by streamlining our imagery and messaging

4

Submit op-eds to larger publications

KEY CAMPAIGN MESSAGES



These are the key campaign messages we should be sharing in our direct conversations with legislators and through our public networks, newsletters, and social media.

- 1. The DLS recommendation is the largest cut to conservation in a generation.**
- 2. This funding loss will negatively impact our landscape, wildlife, and our people.**
- 3. These programs benefit all Maryland residents and visitors across every county and municipality.**
- 4. Cuts will devastate public-private partnerships, which are hard to rebuild.**
- 5. We support Governor Moore’s proposed budget.**



“When we think about Program Open Space and Atlantic Coastal Bays Trust Fund, these are our two most important funds at the Department when it comes to meeting our Bay Agreement.”

Sec. Josh Kurtz, DNR
PST Committee Session
3/3/25

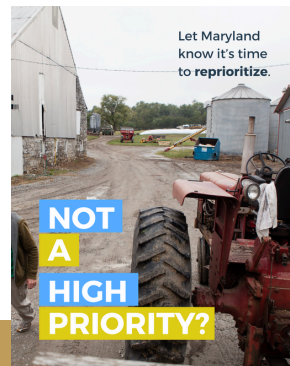
SOCIAL MEDIA KIT

We can create urgency by streamlining our imagery and messaging. We need our legislators, the budget committee, and our larger audience to see exactly what people, landscapes, natural resources, wildlife, farms, restoration projects, jobs, programs, and initiatives are going to be negatively impacted by this funding cut.

Use one of our ready-to-go social posts here: <https://tinyurl.com/3597pvvx>

***^if you use one of these ready-to-go posts, please email CBP (requests@chesapeakebay.net) to request photo permissions**

Or insert your own photo into a template: <https://tinyurl.com/579seruc>



TIPS

- Use photos that illustrate your group's work at its most successful or most needed—a brand new POS playground finished and filled with children, a completed living shoreline, a food bank gleaning produce from a conserved family farm etc.
- When possible choose photos that have people in them
- Choose photos that show POS or Trust Fund supported projects that affect the community in big and obvious ways
- It is helpful to choose a photo that has some empty space for text
- Text on images should be high contrast and easy to read.
- Caption text can be edited to be more specific to your organization.
- Hashtags: #prioritizeplace #conservemd

SAMPLE CAPTION



DLS recommended the MD General Assembly eliminate funding for Program Open Space (POS) and the Chesapeake and Coastal Bays Trust Fund for the next 4 years, labeling conservation "discretionary" and "maybe not the highest priority." But this funding preserves large blocks of contiguous agricultural lands, conserves ecologically sensitive areas, secures park lands for public access and recreation, and accelerates Bay restoration by reducing non-point pollution. This cut negatively impacts the quality of life for ALL Marylanders in every county.

We need your help to advocate for the full funding of POS and the trust fund. Contact your delegates and senators and urge them to reject this short-sighted recommendation from DLS. Full instructions for contacting your legislator can be found here: <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Members/District> #prioritizeplace #conservemd

PRESS PITCH KIT

Accelerate press coverage of this issue by contacting journalists who have already reported on POS and the Trust Fund projects in the past.

The Conservation Fund has helpfully shared pitch tips and media round-up files of recent press mentions including reporter contact information (please use these email addresses respectfully).

POS Round-Up file can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/3ek67svz>

Ches. & Atlantic Coastal Bays Trust Fund Round-Up File: <https://tinyurl.com/mh3m9yp>

TIPS

- Keep it short and sweet. Reporters generally only get a few sentences to pitch their editors.
- Use bolded text to highlight the most important messages. Make it super scannable for the busy reporter.
- Once you get the reporter on the phone, be ready with the “one minute version” of what’s happening so you can interest them without overwhelming them. Let the reporter then ask clarifying questions and go from there. Also, be ready to conclude the call with an offer to send the reporter more info via email. It both affirms what was discussed and helps ensure accuracy.

SAMPLE EMAIL



Dear Chris,

Remember that article **you wrote last year about [park or land name] in [location]**? You mentioned how funds from Program Open Space were used to get that project done.

I have an update for you: **Program Open Space is now on the chopping block as lawmakers in Annapolis try to balance the state budget.** If funding for Program Open Space goes away, that would cripple [org name]’s ability to do more projects like [park or land name].

Can we hop on the phone this week to discuss? You – and your readers – should know more about what’s at stake.

Thanks for your time,
Michael

KEEP CONSERVING MARYLAND.

OPPOSE DLS CONSERVATION CUTS

- The DLS recommendation to cut POS and the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Trust Fund is **the largest cut to MD conservation in a generation.**
- This funding loss will **negatively impact** our landscape, wildlife, economy, and our people.
- POS and Trust Fund programs **benefit all Maryland residents and visitors** across every county and municipality.
- Cuts will **devastate public-private partnerships**, which are hard to rebuild.
- We **SUPPORT** Governor Moore's proposed budget (which already reduces conservation funding) and we **OPPOSE** DLS's dramatic recommendation to completely zero out all programs.



POS has preserved more than

**1 MILLION
ACRES**

The Trust Fund has restored or enhanced more than

**3,271 ACRES
of wetland**



**90% of
MD voters
support POS**

“ POS and the Bays Trust Fund are our **two most important funds** at the Department when it comes to meeting our Bay Agreement. ”

SEC. JOSH KURTZ
DNR PST COMMITTEE SESSION
MARCH 3, 2025



ESLC



PARTNERS FOR OPEN SPACE



An enduring legacy to enhance and protect quality of life in Maryland

www.partnersforopenspace.org

WHAT IS PROGRAM OPEN SPACE?

Established by the Maryland General Assembly in 1969, Program Open Space (POS) is a suite of conservation programs that support state and local parks, preserve agricultural and natural lands, support historic preservation and heritage tourism, and help communities provide playgrounds, ball fields, trails, and other recreational opportunities.

HOW IS POS FUNDED?

Funding for Program Open Space is generated by a 0.5% tax on real property transfers in Maryland. This innovative tax policy balances the growth of real estate and development with the protection of open space and recreation opportunities.

WHY IS POS IMPORTANT?

1. Protecting Nature

Statewide, POS has helped to protect more than 394,000 acres of land from development (source: Maryland Department of Natural Resources). and an additional 700,000 acres have been protected through the Rural Legacy Program. These protected areas provide wildlife habitat, protect rivers and streams, provide clean air, and enhance the state's resilience against climate change.

2. Preserving parks and agricultural land

POS directly supports state and local parks by protecting land to expand public access to parks and funding park development. The Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) has helped conserve 300,916 acres as farmland (source: Maryland Department of Agriculture).

3. Preserving MD history and heritage

The Maryland Heritage Areas program supports local heritage tourism in 73 Heritage Areas. Maryland Heritage Areas attract more than 20 million visitors each year, resulting in a \$2.4 billion annual economic value statewide.

4. Economic Resilience

Parks, natural areas, and open space increase property values and provide opportunities for outdoor recreation, a significant and growing sector of Maryland's economy. Farms and forests are an important part of Maryland's rural economies. Heritage Areas support local tourism in every county.

5. Public Health

Parks and open space have been particularly important and highly demanded as a venue for safe recreation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Protected forested areas ensures water quality and air quality are protected.

6. Quality of Life

Program Open Space contributes to a healthy environment, creates places for recreation, preserves farms (a local source for food), and strengthens communities by helping to celebrate history and heritage. Program Open Space improves quality of life in Maryland.

SUITE OF PROGRAMS INCLUDES:

- Program Open Space
- Rural Legacy
- Maryland Agriculture Land Preservation Foundation
- Maryland Heritage Areas Program

Together, these programs enhance and protect the quality of life for all Marylanders.

PARTNERS

American Farmland Trust -- *Jennifer Perkins*

Baltimore County Land Trust Alliance -- *Ann Jones*

Chesapeake Bay Commission -- *Mark Hoffman*

Chesapeake Conservancy -- *Mark Conway*

Eastern Shore Land Conservancy -- *Owen Bailey*

Forever Maryland / Harford Land Trust -- *Kristin Kirkwood*

Lower Shore Land Trust -- *Matt Heim*

MD Assoc. of County Parks and Recreation Administrators -- *Jessica Leys*

Maryland League of Conservation Voters -- *Kristen Harbeson*

Preservation Maryland -- *Nicholas Redding*

Southern Maryland National Heritage Area -- *Lucille Walker*

Rural Maryland Council -- *Charlotte Davis*

The Conservation Fund -- *Bill Crouch*

The Nature Conservancy -- *Michelle Dietz*

Trust for Public Land -- *Kent Whitehead*

FIGHTING FOR A BAY-FOCUSED BUDGET

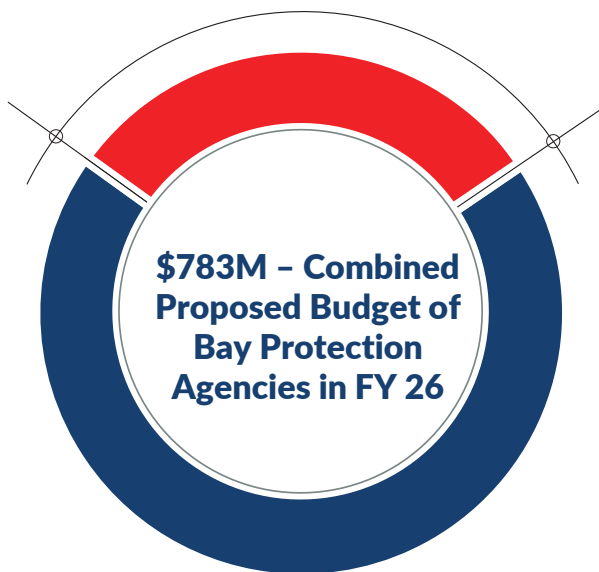
We know that investments in clean water and air are investments in Marylanders—our health, our jobs, and our ways of life. State investments in wastewater treatment, agricultural buffers, green infrastructure, and oyster restoration have paid dividends and help grow Maryland's economy. **Without sustained efforts we risk backsliding.**

Support Governor Moore's environmental budget and support revenue measures that hold polluters accountable.

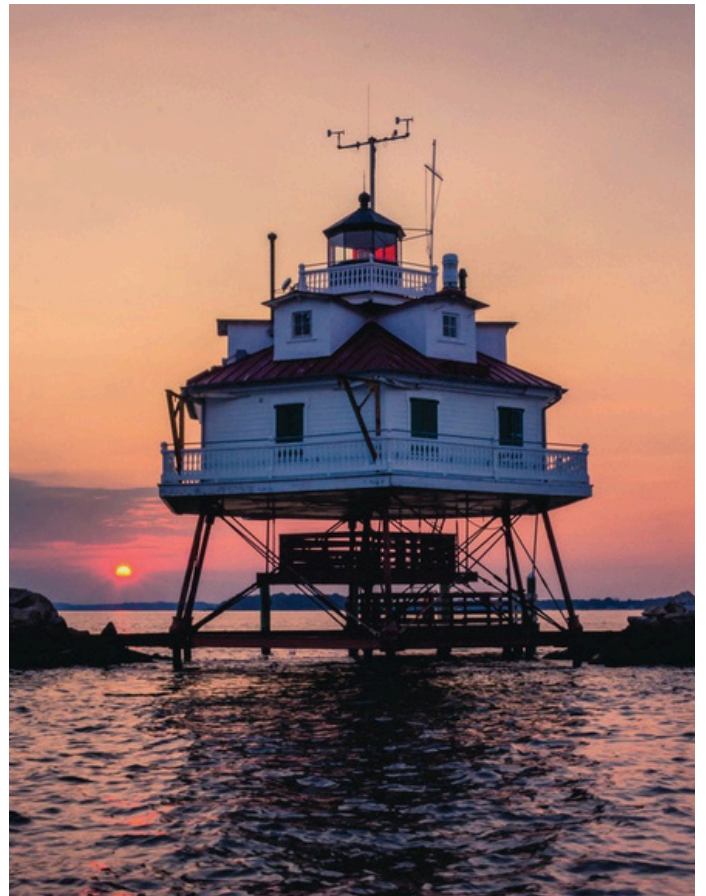
The Departments of the Environment (MDE), Natural Resources (DNR), and Agriculture (MDA)—the state agencies tasked with protecting the Bay—are **already making significant contributions to balancing the budget.**

While those agencies have a combined proposed budget of **\$783 million in FY 26**, they are slated to collectively contribute well over **\$241 million to deficit reduction** in the Governor's budget plan.

\$241M - Contribution to Deficit Reduction



\$783M - Combined Proposed Budget of Bay Protection Agencies in FY 26



MONICA HAWSE

Protecting The Bay Grows Maryland's Economy

- Fully funding farm pollution-reduction programs would inject **\$655 million annually into the region's economy**.¹
- The Maryland Agricultural Cost Share Program (MACS) **returns \$1.75 for every dollar spent**, spurs additional **private investment** in conservation practices, and supports increased sales and earnings for **local businesses and workers**.
- Maryland's seafood industry contributes nearly **\$600 million to the state's economy annually**.²
- Clean air and water **reduce health expenditures, which cost the U.S. economy more than \$80 billion annually**.³

1 [Agricultural Conservation Practices: Clean Water and Climate Smart Investments](#), CBF 2022.

2 <https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/01glance/html/seafoodp.html>

3 <https://www.ajmc.com/view/cdc-study-puts-economic-burden-of-asthma-at-more-than-80-billion-per-year>





WILL PARSON/CHESAPEAKE BAY PROGRAM

Protect Key Bay Restoration Programs

- **The Bay Restoration Fund** supports upgrades to Maryland's wastewater treatment plants, septic system replacements and upgrades, and other programs that produce tangible improvements to water quality. *Oversubscribing or diverting funds from the BRF risks slowing down these investments or leaving insufficient resources to deal with emergencies that can undo years of progress.*
- **The Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays 2010 Trust Fund** directly supports Maryland's progress in addressing nonpoint source pollution in all regions of the state and is critical in funding agricultural practices that reduce nutrient runoff into local waterways. *Diversion of these funds jeopardizes our progress in addressing agricultural runoff, the largest source of nutrient pollution into the Bay.*
- **Program Open Space (POS)** supports Maryland meeting our land-preservation and forest-retention goals through the targeted acquisition of properties in every corner of the state. *POS is already under strain after a period of transfer tax revenue under attainment and further borrowing could undermine the program.*
- **The Strategic Energy Investment Fund (SEIF)** supports the achievement of Maryland's clean-energy goals and funds vital climate-resiliency measures. *The FY26 Governor's budget uses SEIF funds to maintain crucial Bay programs at MDE, DNR, and other agencies.*

Advance Revenue Measures that Support Bay Restoration

The Governor and General Assembly cannot rely on program and service cuts alone to balance the budget and close the structural deficit.

CBF supports targeted revenue-raising legislation that would hold polluters accountable for the costs of mitigation and align user fees with the needs of key service programs:

- **HB 1088 / SB 882**—Coal Transportation Fee and Fossil Fuel Mitigation Fund
 - **HB 902 / SB 425**—Coal Ash Cleanup and Accountability Act
 - **HB 128 / SB 149**—The RENEW Act
 - **HB 340**—Empowering the Attorney General to hold fossil fuel companies accountable for damages from climate change
 - **SB 250**—MDE Fees, Penalties, Funding, and Regulation
 - **HB 719**—DNR State Boat Act—Alterations
 - **HB 40 / SB 258**—DNR Fishing Licenses and Stamps—Alterations
- For more information, contact Matt Stegman, Maryland Staff Attorney (mstegman@cbf.org).*

