



2023 Chesapeake Conservation Partnership Annual Meeting

Empowering Conservation: Practical Tools and Impactful Strategies

Introduction

The 14th Annual, Chesapeake Conservation Partnership Annual meeting took place on November 8-9th at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, WV. This two-day meeting had 64 attendees working to discuss the pressing challenges, achievements, data, and action plans for land conservation in the Chesapeake Bay region. Chief Stephen R. Adkins of the Chickahominy Tribe was the opening keynote speaker.

Key Takeaways:

Through the incredible work of the CCP partners, we are making great strides to meet conservation goals including 2 million acres and 30x30 goals, but in order to reach this, we will need to accelerate our land conservation progress. New land conservation data (PLWG) is providing more clarity on the work that has been done and provides inspiration for where we can prioritize future activity. It also sheds light on what is currently missing in our discussions around measures of success. The panels, breakout sessions, and surveys provided a lot of critical insight into areas for improvement in the work that we are collectively doing, as well as identifying new ways that CCP can support the partners. CCP stands ready to support our partners with this work through new programs that are rolling out, providing data that can influence work, and creating unique spaces for meaningful conversations that can lead to radical change.

Next Steps and Ways to Get Involved

- **Ways To Get Involved Sheet**
 - [The Ways to Get Involved](#) document identifies some of the ways that CCP partners can get more involved in the work being done by the CCP. If you would like to learn more or assist with any of these projects you can either utilize the contact list on the website or you can fill out this online worksheet below.
 - [Chesapeake Conservation Partnership \(CCP\) -- Get Involved!](#)

- **Respond to the Surveys**
 - By providing your feedback on these surveys you are helping to influence the projects the CCP is working on and provide us with necessary input.
 - [Conservation Priorities-GIS Needs Survey](#)
 - [Conservation Priorities: Funding Needs and Technical Assistance Survey](#)

- **Ensure Conservation is Foundational to the Chesapeake Bay Program**
 - Listen in on **Beyond 2025 Steering Committee** meetings and contact steering committee members you know.
 - Connect with the leadership of the small groups: They are preparing recommendations to discuss with the Beyond 2025 Steering Committee in **February 2024**.
 - Register for meetings and follow-up materials at the Steering Committee page. <https://www.chesapeakebay.net/who/group/beyond-2025-steering-committee>
 - Be available as subject matter experts and champions if called on.
 - Fill out the evaluation survey from ERG if you receive it.
 - Read the resource documents and share them with advocates.
 - For more information, reach out to Kristin Saunders ksaunders@umces.edu.

- **Tools in Development**
 - Below are a few Projects CCP is working on to elevate our partner's efforts.
 - **Federal Funding Navigator:** A tool to help with the analysis of the best opportunities to capture land conservation funds through federal grants. Also up-to-date action alert system with new grant opportunities.
 - **Grant Buddies:** Grant experts providing general assistance with the grant writing process to less experienced applicants (we need volunteers for Grant Experts).
 - **Federal Grant 101 Webinar:** A webinar to assist new federal grant applicants.
 - **Conservation Concierge Scoping:** Identifying the scope of assisting with our partners' capacity needs. (This concierge service is currently outside our capacity, but may be possible as we grow.)

- **Tools You Can Use**
 - Below are some of the tools that we highlighted at the annual meeting.
 - [CCP Conservation Atlas](#)
 - [CCP Greenspace Equity Mapper](#)
 - [ParkServe- Trust for Public Land](#)
 - [WALT: Wildlife and Land Trusts--Federal Funding Tool](#)
 - [Chesapeake Bay Open Data Portal](#)

- [Parcel Prioritization Tool--Potomac Conservancy](#)
- [Solar Array Time Lapse Map](#)
- [St. Mary's County Solar Citing Tool](#)
- [Model Easements and Tools- WeConservePA](#)

Some Important Topics for Further Discussion and Focus

The topics below are just a handful of the important subjects discussed at this year's meeting. These were some of the highlighted topics prevalent in the surveys, breakout sessions, and group discussions that warrant more attention and conversations.

- Discovering solutions to addressing the issues around heirs' properties.
- The representation of small acre acquisitions that have critical cultural and biological significance in the protected lands data.
- Inspecting how we focus more on DEJI throughout the bay region and having it influence leadership and decision-making.
- Going beyond focusing mainly on total acreage of conserved land and focusing communication on how the land supports people (economically, health, culturally, etc...).
- The land conservation sector is aging, and we need to bring in the next generation with skills and training required to continue the work.
- Looking at the Virginia Land Protection tax credit as a model for other states in the watershed, which would help in areas that are land-rich but cash poor.
- The impact of solar on the land conservation efforts across the bay and the importance of solar citing.

Opening: Conversation to Inspire Conservation

- **Opening Remarks: Wendy O'Sullivan, Joel Dunn, and Mike Slattery**
 - We are making good progress, but we can't take our foot off the gas, because we need to triple the rate of conservation to meet our goal of 30x30.
 - Chesapeake Gateways has been supporting CCP for 14 years. The Power of the CCP is its ability to connect federal agencies, nonprofits, and land trusts to bring about meaningful conversations and provide tools that will help propel this conservation work.
- [Elktonia and Carr's Beaches: Vince Leggett, Blacks of the Chesapeake](#)
 - Vince shared some music that originated at Elktonia and Carr's Beaches.
 - Blacks of the Chesapeake focus on African American land conservation and heritage preservation during the period of segregation. The properties are culturally significant and include 5 acres directly on the Bay.

- Anne Arundel County has more waterfront than any other part of Maryland but only 7% of the shoreline is available to overburdened under-resourced people.
- Partnering with *Blacks In Marine Science* (BIMS), whose focus is on Environmental DNA (eDNA). They write Blacks of the Chesapeake into their grants for African-American storytelling and place-telling, looking at leisure, entertainment, and culture during segregation.
- **Hours Trust Property: Mike Powell, The Nature Conservancy**
 - 2,881 acres for this property.
 - The nature conservancy purchased the land, and then a hunt club raised the money to purchase the land under conservation easement.
 - This property helped control flooding during some of the major flooding events in the area.
 - It has a unique biodiversity and creates natural corridors for wildlife.
- **Dry Hollow: Andrea Murrell, Clearwater Conservancy**
 - 1,271 acres in total.
 - Close proximity to the largest remaining patch of pitch pine-scrub oak barrens in PA and a significant number of vernal pools.
 - Became part of Rothrock State Park.
 - It is the largest tract of land in the Rothrock State Forest.

How are We Doing? Progress and Opportunities in Land Conservation

- **Protected Lands Indicator: Aurelia Garcia, National Park Service**
 - Protected Lands Workgroup's (PWLG) Goal: Protect an additional 2 million acres across the watershed by 2025 and 30% of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed by the year 2030.
 - **Chesapeake Progress** is the website that monitors progress for the Chesapeake Bay Program's workgroups.
 - Nearly 1.64 million acres of land in the Chesapeake Bay watershed have been permanently protected since 2010. This marks an achievement of 82% of the land conservation goal adopted in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement and brings the total amount of protected land in the watershed to 9.1 million acres.
 - Twenty-two percent of the Chesapeake watershed is already permanently protected.
 - Reaching 30 percent by 2030 would protect an additional 3.1 million acres, including the remaining nearly 365,533 acres needed to achieve the 2025 outcome.

- The average rate of conservation since 2010 is at a rate of 130,000 acres protected per year, and we need at least 121,844 acres per year to attain the total of 365,533 acres to reach the 2025 goal.
 - Methodology details:
 - There isn't a confirmed number for the sub-goals because it's difficult to separate the data to view wetlands and forest lands separately. Working on identifying the progress related to the sub-goals.
 - With the 2022 data, PAD US 3.0 was used. This system underwent an update that changed definitions and boundary lines for protected lands which resulted in removal of acres from the system. These removals do not mean that those acres are now un-protected.
 - Once PAD-US 3.0 was applied, certain federal lands were removed, which included DoD lands not for permanent protection, inholdings, and reservoirs/open water.
 - PLWG is continuing to improve the methodology for more accurate accounting. It is important to create a community of practice of GIS specialists and identify actions for the workgroup to consider in their action plan to maintain their progress.
- **Floor Response and Questions**
 - What is the lag on the update of protected lands in PAD US?
 - PAD US does not have a schedule but usually has a 2 year representation period. Certain properties were asked not to be shown in the public map but are included in the numbers.
 - How do we decide if parklands are protected for conservation under PAD US?
 - The removal of lands from PAD US does not mean that those areas are not being protected but it is not specifically counted in the PAD US numbers under their definition.
 - The GIS user group will help create the strategy moving forward to match what is represented in the data.
 - PWLG asked for 7 data sets and received 35. They matched it with already existing data to merge it all together and hide other plots, which made it hard to track. These were the types of challenges the GIS team had to face.

GIS Land Evaluation Break Out Session

- **Major Takeaways Across Watershed:**
 - Having maps that could be used by land trusts and organizations to help build connections with landowners. These maps would help landowners better understand where their land fits into the greater context of the Bay and the benefits their lands provide to the overall health of the Bay.

- There are regional programs that the PLWG could help promote and disseminate to the partners to help take advantage of, such as the AMLER, which provides funding for the reclamation of abandoned mine lands in conjunction with economic and community development and reuse goals.
 - We need to focus more on equity in the mapping. The counties with the largest parcel opportunities also often have the most disadvantaged residencies that could benefit from land being used for other needs.
 - We also need to look at aggregating the smaller parcels into the larger collective of the bay mapping because they add up to make huge differences in communities and the health of the watershed as a whole.
 - We need to consider regional efforts and needs in the mapping and planning, such as wetlands, connectivity, transmission lines, sea level rise, agricultural land, and tribal lands.
 - Look at working with local governments and municipalities to focus on what they are doing with trails, greenway plans and taking advantage of things like transportation dollars.
 - Keeping in mind the “people” lens of conservation, it is important to focus on tourism and its connections with economic drivers.
- [Maryland/ DC/ Delaware](#)
 - [Virginia/ West Virginia](#)
 - [Pennsylvania/ New York](#)

What’s Working and What’s Not

Below are some key topics of discussion during the collaborative brainstorming section on what is working and what isn’t in the conservation efforts across the watershed. These are thoughts that were shared by the partners in the room and it reflects the feedback they provided.

- **Equity:**
 - There was a discussion of whether the 30x30 goal encompasses everyone or if we need another more equity-focused parallel goal that is not as focused on maximizing the number of large parcels of conservation.
 - We need greater racial diversity in the room and in leadership in order to make sure that all voices are being heard and valued.

- We need more money and training dedicated to JEDI in order to improve the overall impact across the bay work.
- The representation of small acre acquisitions that have critical cultural and biological significance in the protected lands data.
- The need for greater efforts surrounding greenspace equity both in rural and urban environments.
- Heirs Property is a major issue that is tying hundreds of thousands of acres up in the process of being owned but not properly deeded.
 - There are models and resolution centers that could assist with this issue. It will take genealogists and lawyers who can represent the families to help.
- **Messaging and Communications:**
 - Focusing on total acreage protected isn't enough, we need greater communication on how the land supports people (economically, health, culturally, ect..).
 - Desire for more communications around local efforts and how that ties into the bigger picture of the overall health of the bay.
 - CCP can help support the communications of the great work the partners are doing through the website, but Jamal is also working on docuseries as well that will help promote the work being accomplished.
- **Capacity:**
 - The land conservation sector is aging and not bringing in the next generation fast enough with the skills and training required to continue the work.
 - There was interest in the room for training opportunities or partnerships for training on the next generation of land conservationists.
 - For land trusts and smaller organizations, the need for more staffing and funds for capacity building is huge.
 - There are not enough surveyors, foresters and appraisers and other “due diligence” people involved that will help further the work.
- **Funding:**
 - Difficulty in both funding access and deployment.
 - Match requirements on grants are often too high.
 - NPS Gateways has authority to create grants without match requirements and can be used for many different needs across the bay, which could help get communication money out to the overburdened and overlooked communities.

2025 and Beyond: CESR Report and the Chesapeake Bay Program.

- [Beyond 2025 / Chesapeake Bay Program: Wendy O’Sullivan and Kristin Saunders](#)

- For the first time, land conservation and people were included ...as well as heavy science - water quality, fish passage, and habitat.
- Need the right people at the table helping to decide what to do going forward to assure equity.
- Reaching 2025 report - Charting a Course to 2025:
 - Planning to post the final document in early December.
 - Outcomes that are considered “on course” include Protected Lands and Public Access - 18 on course, 11 off course, and are 2 uncertain because we don’t have a specific indicator yet to tell us if they’re on or off course.
 - Key findings - doing well on some, not so great on water quality/ TMDL (won’t meet our target by 2025, so the work continues).
 - Hi-level recommendations (3 promoted to EC):
- Accelerate investments - infrastructure funds, etc. Use them particularly in areas where outcomes are lagging.
- Look at integrating all of the new emerging science and recommendations from the scientific community about monitoring, to know whether the things are really happening (in habitat creation and other things).
- Fast tracking action plans that are already in place, especially for outcomes that are lagging behind – they have a climate implementation strategy, ad DEIJ strategy, wetlands and forest buffer plans, etc.
 - Beyond 2025 Steering Committee:
 - By this time next year they will deliver to EC a summary of the Reaching 2025 report, an organizational evaluation (external review by contractor), and the internal review from the small groups.
 - What can we do (CCP members)?
- Get involved - listen in on SC meetings that are listed on chesapeakebay.net calendar.
- Connect to leadership of the small groups working over the next three months to provide input.
- Be available as subject matter experts and champions - talk about the things you care about - you may get a call from contractors ERG or a survey to fill out.
- Read the resource documents and share them w/ ppl who care about what you care about.

Building Our Momentum

- **[Building Our Momentum: Ben Alexandro, Chesapeake Conservancy](#)**
 - We need to triple the rate of conservation to get to the 30x30 goal.
 - In a time of unprecedented funding that we need to leverage properly.
 - Models to consider how we can do it and do it more equitably, ex. MD Greenspace Equity Act and MD the Beautiful Act, Forest Preservation & Retention Act.
 - The 2022 annual meeting identified some key challenges and needs including capacity needs, equity challenges, and access to funding, to name a few.
 - CCP is working to assist with the technical needs of our partners:
 - Funding Assistance: Fed funding Navigator, Grant Buddies, Federal Grant 101.

- Capacity Needs: Conservation concierge scoping program, GIS Data Advisory Tools Team.

- **Forever Maryland: Josh Hastings, Executive Director**
 - They support the land and water conservation community, through education, advocacy, and outreach, to permanently protect working landscapes and healthy ecosystems.
 - They are active in state policy and trying to be more active in local policy. They want to get people more comfortable in advocacy and train a new generation of people to be able to speak up.
 - The Maryland the Beautiful is Maryland's response to the federal government's executive order for 30x30.
 - They manage a grant program (Keep Maryland Beautiful).
 - The Greenspace Equity Bill helps provide grant money to overburdened and underserved communities for the purpose of implementing projects to preserve and enhance green spaces.
 - Over 50% is awarded to land acquisition
 - Establishes a Greenspace Equity Advisory Board with MD DNR

- **VaULT (Virginia United Land Trust): Natasha Skelton, Chair of the Board**
 - Founded 2 decades ago between the non-profit land trusts and partner agencies.
 - Elevates the quality and quantity of land conservation across the state through:
 - VaULT conference: Annual conference (roughly 250 attendees) is a primary way of collaborating with agency partners, members, and practitioners across the state to help propel the work forward.
 - Grant Program: Now in the second year. This can be used to help meet capacity needs for their members (ex: office equipment, strategic planning, etc.) so they can focus on going after bigger funds to fund the work they are doing.
 - Collective Impact Report: Released every 2-3 years to help talk collectively about what was accomplished towards shared goals, identify where resources are available, and collaborate on how to resolve gaps.

- **WeConservePa: Andy Loza, Executive Director**
 - Incorporated in 1995 by land trust leaders to do what they couldn't or didn't want to do on their own. There are 75 member organizations today.
 - They focus heavily on advocacy, communications, and lobbying at the state capital for money to further the work.
 - They also focus on training, connecting, inspiring people to do conservation better. They have the PA land conservation conference, biannual trails-oriented

conference, annual conference for advisory bodies to municipalities; 2 webinars per month; in person events as needed;

- They help with grants and with leveraging money to do the necessary work.
- They now have an attorney providing supplemental legal service to land trusts, trail groups.
- They help create resources to enable organizations and individuals to do their work better: 20 model easements / legal docs with commentary; 150 technical guides on various topics; they do a lot of work in GIS spatial analysis, maintain statewide database on protected lands, keep track of land trust service areas/ trail group service areas, etc.

Chesapeake WILD: Making Waves

- **Chesapeake WILD: Making Waves: Faren Wolter, Fish and Wildlife Service**
 - Announced the awards from this year's round of grants on Mon 11/13 with NFWF at the National Aquarium.
 - Next round of grants starts late January.
 - A successful effort was made in making sure outreach was done to previously disconnected communities - intentional work - place-based need for conservation.
 - WILD is working on a communications plan with Jody Couser and Chesapeake Conservancy.
 - Proposal labs, can sign up for one-on one consultations, help you fit your idea to the funding source if it's not a good fit for WILD

- **Chesapeake Gateways Grants & Technical Assistance: Eddie Gonzalez, Director of Partnerships and Grants**
 - The Chesapeake Gateways partnership network and community assistance program is authorized to receive \$3M in annual federal appropriations. This funding supports the program's technical assistance, cooperative and interagency agreements, and also the new competitive network grants.
 - The submissions for the 2023-2024 Gateways Network Grants closed on November 4th.
 - Gateways received 87 applications totaling over \$9 million in requests for 2022-2023 network grants. Based on the merit review process, 22 applications were selected for awards totaling \$2.3 million in funding.
 - In year 2, they received 56 applications for \$1 million in funding. Reviews pending.

Half Earth: Why is it Even More Important Now?

- **Dennis Liu, E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation**
 - We need to engage more diversified voices and generational voices in environmental writing.
 - **Half Earth Project**: If we protect half of the land and seas, we will be able to preserve the majority of the biodiversity in our world.
 - The Half Earth Project Map is composed of various heat maps that show human involvement as well as protected land, carbon, and biodiversity by taxa (flora and fauna) across the globe.
 - The map also tracks species protection success. This is done through the country's biodiversity report card. They recently added report cards for states and regions.