



CHESAPEAKE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Protecting the Forests of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed

2007 Response to Directive 06-1

In 2006, the Chesapeake Executive Council recognized that retaining, expanding, and sustainably managing forest lands is essential to restoring a healthy Chesapeake Bay by signing Directive 06-01. This implementation document responds to Directive 06-1 by identifying specific actions we will take to conserve and restore forests in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Background

Chesapeake forests prevent millions of pounds of nitrogen and other pollutants from reaching the Bay each year. While trends vary locally, the watershed has lost 100 acres of forest land per day since the mid-1980s. Every acre of forest converted to other uses means more nutrients entering the Bay, making it more difficult to mitigate development impacts and resulting in additional loss and fragmentation of forest habitat. If this forest loss continues, nitrogen loads alone will increase by 1,300 pounds per day to the Bay. As citizens and governmental agencies work to implement actions to reduce the flow of nutrients and sediment from agriculture, developed lands, and wastewater treatment plants, their overall success is threatened by the loss of our watershed's greatest natural filter: its forests. In fact, the public will spend billions of dollars on technological replacements for the services that forests provide naturally for free—such as drinking water filtration, flood control, storm water management, energy, and greenhouse gas and air pollution control.

Retaining and expanding forests across the watershed is a cost-effective strategy for reducing pollution now and maintaining caps on nutrients in the future. An investment in sustainable forestry will not only help address water quality issues, but other challenges such as climate change, sprawl, and energy independence.

A Call to Action

Previous efforts to conserve forests, though significant, have not been sufficient to keep pace with the primary threat to our forests: conversion and fragmentation due to development. The Chesapeake needs bold policies, incentives and actions to protect, restore, and manage existing forests and to sustain the multiple environmental, economic, and social benefits forests provide. However, neither the Chesapeake Bay Program nor its members have adopted a clear, overarching statement on the importance of forests to guide current and future development decisions.

Therefore, it is our intent to maximize the area of forest by discouraging conversion of the most valuable forests and giving priority to forests in land conservation programs. Further, we recognize the importance of working forests and will ensure that public policies and market-based incentives help families retain and manage these forests sustainably.



On this foundation and in order to protect our most valuable forests and reduce the loss of forests to development, we commit to the following, consistent with our respective authorities:

- ❖ **By 2020**, permanently protect an additional *695,000 acres* of forest from conversion, targeting forests in areas of highest water quality value. As part of this goal, *266,400 acres* of forest land under threat of conversion will be protected by 2012.

- ❖ **By 2020**, accelerate reforestation and conservation in:
 - *Urban and suburban areas*, by increasing the number of communities with commitments to tree canopy expansion goals to 120.
 - *Riparian forest buffers*, by reaching a restoration rate of 900 miles/year until 70% of all stream miles in the watershed are buffered over the long term.
- ❖ **By 2010**, work with local governments, legislative delegations, land trusts, or other stakeholders to create or augment dedicated sources of local funding, such as through ballot initiatives, for the conservation of forests important to water quality. Where possible, we will support these through incentive programs (e.g., matching grants).
- ❖ **By 2009**, establish and implement mechanisms to track and assess forest land cover change every five years at the county and township scale, and to deliver this capacity to local governments, watershed groups, and other partners.



In addition, each state and the federal agencies will implement strategies and actions to address the following key elements, consistent with our respective authorities:

1. Policies that discourage conversion of valuable forestlands, revision of policies that contribute to forest loss, and use of mitigation programs to more accurately reflect the full value of services lost when forest land is cleared for development.
2. Collaboration with local governments, particularly those with significant areas of valuable and vulnerable forest land, to incorporate forest conservation into their land use plans and ordinances.
3. Strong economic incentives for working forest landowners and working with private and public partners to establish a framework for market-based ecosystem service transactions.
4. Policies to reduce or ideally eliminate increased nutrient loads resulting from development, including sufficient incentives to use green infrastructure such as applying stormwater credits for tree canopy and natural area conservation.
5. Opportunities for increased support for forest conservation practices and coordination of programs through collaboration between NRCS State Technical Committee partners and state forestry agencies.

State*	Total Forest in Watershed (acres)	Forest Already Protected (acres)	2012 Protecting Goal (acres)	2020 Protecting Goal (acres)
Delaware	175,900	48,400 (28%)	5,000	15,000
Maryland	2,358,000	724,000 (31%)	96,000	250,000
New York	2,433,000	295,000 (12%)	5,800	15,000
Pennsylvania	8,716,000	2,896,000 (33%)	38,500	100,000
Virginia	8,367,000	2,093,000 (25%)	135,000	315,000

*The District of Columbia will focus on a goal to increase urban tree canopy coverage, in lieu of forest protection. The urban tree canopy goal is in addition to implementing goals to facilitate retaining existing trees in priority areas.

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