



Resolution #1.2025

A Declaration of Tribal Nations as Sovereign Governments Committed to the Protection and Restoration of Ancestral Lands and Waters through the Chesapeake Bay Program Partnership

Whereas, the Indigenous Conservation Council (ICC) was formed by the leadership of all seven federally-recognized tribes in the Commonwealth of Virginia to advance the sovereignty and capacity of tribes in the Chesapeake Bay region to reconnect and care for our ancestral lands as original stewards; and

Whereas, the Pamunkey Indian Tribe received its federal recognition by successful petition to the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs in 2016 and the Chickahominy Indian Tribe, Chickahominy Indian Tribe-Eastern Division, the Monacan Indian Nation, the Nansemond Indian Nation, the Rappahannock Tribe and the Upper Mattaponi Tribe were federally recognized in 2018 through the passage of the Thomasina E. Jordan Act; and

Whereas, these Tribal Nations are not mere stakeholders but have unique political status as Independent Sovereign Nations and as such, enjoy a government to government relationship with the United States. This political status equates to the same authority as federal and state governments and precipitates Trust and Treaty obligations as codified in the Constitution and the Middle Plantation Treaty of 1677; and

Whereas our Sovereign Nations have complex relationships with federal, state, and nonprofit partners to protect land, air, and water for the benefit of the natural world for generations to come; and

Whereas, the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement of 2014 does not currently include any federally recognized tribes as signatories despite their political status and, as such, does not fully integrate Indigenous values, knowledge, or governance expertise needed to achieve full ecosystem restoration and health of our ancestral lands and waters; and

Whereas, the Chesapeake Bay Executive Council announced that it intends to revise the Chesapeake Bay Agreement in 2025 to update goals and strategies, including the governance and structure of the Agreement to be more successful in restoring the health of the Chesapeake Bay watershed; and

Whereas, federal trust responsibilities include building the capacity of federally recognized tribes to address hundreds of years of unmet treaty promises and dispossession of our treaty lands, including, but not limited to financial resources needed to return lands to the rightful stewardship, supporting co-management and co-stewardship, recognizing and honoring the importance of Indigenous Knowledge and practices, and enhancing tribal capacity to support nation building; and

Whereas, Tribal Nations around the world have launched Indigenous Guardianship programs to build tribal capacity to protect large-landscapes with other Sovereign Nations, Provincial and State and Commonwealth governments which has been critical to accelerate the pace of conservation, restoration, and overall ecosystem health in watersheds large and small; and

Whereas, Tribal Nations join the Sovereign governments of the United States, the Commonwealth of Virginia, the State of Maryland, the District of Columbia, the State of West Virginia, the State of Delaware, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the State of New York in taking responsibility for providing leadership and stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Therefore, we respectfully call on the Chesapeake Bay Executive Council to honor Tribal Nations as critical partners in the revised Chesapeake Bay Agreement and:

1. Include the Indigenous Conservation Council as a signatory to the revised Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement to support Tribal Nations in their right to exercise our treaty rights and serve as full partners in its protection and restoration;
2. Establish and fund an Indigenous Guardianship Program as a priority within the Agreement's revised goals and strategies that would direct funding to the ICC as a new jurisdictional Signatory partner to be sub-granted to Tribal Nation members to build their tribal capacity; and,
3. Establish an Advisory Committee for Tribal Nations within the Chesapeake Bay Program structure to guide this new Indigenous Guardianship Program to be on par with internationally recognized initiatives.

Respectfully signed this 15 Day of January, 2025,

Signed by:

Chief Stephen Adkins

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Chief Stephen Adkins

(Chickahominy Indian Tribe)

Signed by:

Chief Joanne Howard

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Chief Joanne Howard

(Chickahominy Indian Tribe-Eastern Division)

Signed by:

Chief Diane Shields

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Chief Diane Shields

(Monacan Indian Nation)

Signed by:

Chief Keith F. Anderson

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Chief Keith Anderson

(Nansemond Indian Nation)

Signed by:

Chief Kevin Brown

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Chief Kevin Brown

(Pamunkey Indian Tribe)

Signed by:

Chief Anne Richardson

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Chief Anne Richardson

(Rappahannock Tribe)

Signed by:

Chief Frank Adams

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Chief Frank Adams

(Upper Mattaponi Tribe)