



Creating an interconnected, Indigenous landscape of the future. This is Home.

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Public Statement from Our Board of Directors

In a January 15, 2025 Declaration signed by all Chiefs of the seven federally recognized tribes currently headquartered in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, Sovereign Nations extended a hand of partnership to share our Indigenous Knowledge and contributions in healing our homelands as full and formal partners of the Chesapeake Bay Program Partnership. Indeed, our Tribal Nations are already providing leadership on Bay restoration, conservation, and climate action. Our seven Virginia Nations are already stewarding and restoring more than 10,000 acres of lands and waters on our respective rivers.

Since our declaration, we have worked in good faith to identify a pathway to signatory status for the ICC, an intertribal consortia recognized by tribal law. This pathway included changes in governance to address the full legal and political status of federally recognized tribes as has been done in many coastal partnership programs with tribes, states, and the federal government. We have also engaged with numerous working groups and advisory committees to support a thoughtful and deliberate pathway to move forward in the Partnership. In good faith, we have advocated for full funding of the Chesapeake Bay Program and restoration funding as members of the Choose Clean Water Coalition.

While we were initially pleased with the spirit and intent of the Chesapeake Executive Council's Executive Directive issued on December 2, 2025, it became clear in a recent meeting that the Partnership is unwilling to give the tribes a seat at the table. This has been disappointing given that respect for tribal sovereignty was included as a core principle in the revised *2025 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*. When tribal leaders asked the reasons for the Partnership's decision, we were stonewalled regarding the basis of the Partnership's issues and concerns. Respect for tribal sovereignty is non-negotiable and must be demonstrated with action, not just words. As a result, the ICC Board has voted to withdraw from all discussions and formal engagement with the Chesapeake Bay Program until this basic and essential principle is met.

In a time of shifting policies and rapid changes in our climate and environmental impacts, our intent from the beginning was to support the Bay Program in creating a larger impact by incorporating Indigenous Knowledge into the Partnership. Studies are clear that Indigenous Knowledge enhances the pace, quality, and effectiveness of conservation and restoration, which surpasses western science. Recognizing that we are all in this together, we thought it important that we join the efforts to help the Bay Program meet its planned goals.

When the Chesapeake Executive Council decides it is ready to uphold tribal sovereignty and provide space at the leadership table for us, then we will be happy to renew our conversations. Until then, we welcome working with

sovereign governments, nonprofits, and philanthropic partners who agree that tribal sovereignty and Indigenous Knowledge is respected and essential to heal our homelands.

The Indigenous Conservation Council is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Contributions are tax-deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law.
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