

Change is Here





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The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

ABOVE Executive Director Kahlil Kettering delivers a speech at the “Change is Here” campaign celebration event. The event was attended by trustees, donors and staff who played a critical role in the successful completion of the chapter’s five-year comprehensive campaign. © Joy Asico-Smith; ON THE COVER An aerial (drone) photo of a controlled burn at TNC’s Dorchester Pond Preserve in spring 2023. Dorchester Pond is a unique, fire-dependent wetland habitat type known colloquially as a “Delmarva Bay.” © Severn Smith/TNC; INSET, RIGHT © Tony Campbell/Shutterstock

As a native Washingtonian, I am excited to be back at the Maryland/DC chapter where I started my career at The Nature Conservancy.

I am excited for the opportunity to work with the incredibly talented team of dedicated professionals working on some of the most pressing environmental challenges facing our region and beyond. I am excited for the opportunity to continue the chapter’s long legacy of having a lasting, tangible impact on the ground in my own backyard. And I am proud of the Maryland/DC chapter’s reputation as a leader on some of the most innovative approaches to conservation, including clean water strategies, social science, policy, climate mitigation and adaptation, protecting ecosystems and habitat, and centering benefits to people and communities in all that we do.

As a local, I am acutely aware of the environmental challenges facing our region and the growing threats that climate change adds to those challenges. However, I feel uplifted to be part of a Maryland/DC team that is addressing these challenges with both a local and global approach to our work. We are well-aligned with TNC’s global 2030 goals, so we know our efforts contribute to the big outcomes our organization is trying to achieve for the planet. And our focus on uplifting and partnering with local communities is the foundation of our impact through collaboration and indelible results.

For the past two years, I led the global implementation of the \$100M grant from the Bezos Earth Fund to TNC,

which provided me with invaluable experience and lessons that I now bring to the Maryland/DC chapter. Perhaps most importantly, my work leading TNC’s Bezos Earth Fund program made me understand the importance of building connections and relationships across our global organization, which creates an opportunity to learn from others, share knowledge and science, and create efficiencies. The urgency of the climate and biodiversity crises, and socioeconomic inequities facing communities around the world underscores the importance of prioritizing equity in our conservation strategies. I truly believe that seeking out diverse opinions and experiences, and including all interested parties in decision-making, leads to tangible, lasting results.

Though the environmental challenges we face are stark, I am optimistic and hopeful due to the unwavering teamwork of the chapter’s passionate staff, supporters, and partners. I am honored to be a part of the team as the new Executive Director of the Chapter, and I am grateful for your continued support. Together, we find a way.

Kahlil Kettering

Kahlil Kettering,
Executive Director of the Maryland/DC chapter

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY IN MARYLAND AND D.C.

2023 AT A GLANCE



Sprucing Up the Central Apps. Last year, Maryland/DC chapter staff and volunteers planted more than 4,000 red spruce trees at TNC's Cranesville Swamp Preserve. Since 1996, our chapter has planted more than 70,000 red spruce trees in the forests of western Maryland as part of the Central Appalachian Spruce Restoration Initiative (CASRI)—a group of diverse partners with a common goal of restoring historic red spruce ecosystems across the region.

"Change is Here" Campaign Successfully Completed. In 2019, the Maryland/DC chapter launched an ambitious, five-year strategic plan to tackle the greatest conservation challenges in Maryland, D.C. and beyond. The success of the "Change is Here" campaign is a testament to our dedicated supporters and our shared vision for a world where people and nature thrive together.


3 Bringing Good Fire Back to the Landscape. Last year, the Maryland/DC chapter burn crew led or assisted in the controlled burning of more than 1,500 acres of fire-adapted habitat across Maryland—and in some cases—in neighboring states. Fire is as natural a process as rain, and returning fire to these fire-adapted landscapes is an important management strategy to create the conditions that best support biodiversity.

Establishing an Urban Preserve. The Maryland/DC chapter has partnered with Mount Olivet Cemetery for more than five years on a series of stormwater projects. Last year, our partnership expanded to position Mount Olivet Cemetery as an urban nature preserve and conservation demonstration site. Visit [Nature.org/MountOlivet](https://www.nature.org/MountOlivet) to learn more.

Witness Trees in Baltimore's Turner Station. Phase 1 included a series of community visioning workshops, followed by the planting of 140 trees, nine story posts, and three story benches that contain QR codes to video interviews of residents sharing their rich community history.

A Big Year for Climate Policy. The 2023 Maryland General Assembly was a productive one when it came to passing progressive climate policies that help reduce emissions and enhance resilience. Our Government Relations team supported a total of 20 policies that were signed into law this year, such as the Clean Transportation and Energy Act and the Maryland the Beautiful Act, which are critical for the future of people and nature in Maryland and beyond.

 TNC Offices

 TNC Preserves and Easements

Tackle Carbon Emissions



Michelle Dietz (left), Director of Government Relations, and Caitlin Kerr (right), Conservation & Climate Policy Analyst, lead the Maryland/DC chapter's government relations team. This team prioritizes legislation addressing key issue areas such as climate mitigation, nature-based solutions for resilience, biodiversity, and advancing equity through policy. © Matt Kane/TNC

In order to meet the CO₂ emissions reductions needed to effectively tackle climate change, we need to advocate for policy solutions at all levels of government. In Maryland, we have an opportunity to push for some of the most ambitious and innovative climate policies in the country. In the 2023 Maryland General Assembly, we supported several transformational bills that have now been signed into law:

The **Clean Trucks Act of 2023** will require manufacturers to sell an increasing annual percentage of zero-emissions trucks and buses in Maryland starting in 2027. Heavy-duty vehicles are the most significant pollutant sources within the transportation sector. This new law will reduce climate impacts, as well as improve air quality and decrease occurrences of health risks associated with heavy-duty vehicle pollutants.

TNC also advocated for a new law that has been a priority for Governor Moore and the administration: the **Clean Transportation and Energy Act**. This addresses emissions from light- and moderate-duty vehicles by increasing access to electric vehicles and charging stations across Maryland. It also invests in improving residential energy efficiency.

As we prepare to transition to a clean-energy economy, it is imperative that a higher cost burden doesn't fall on low-income households. Several new laws passed this session will ensure equitable clean energy rollouts across the state. The **Low-Income Energy Efficiency** legislation commits to ensuring that energy-efficient home upgrades, which not only reduce energy bills but

also improve residents' health, are accessible to all Marylanders.

Another new law establishes a permanent **Community Solar Program**. This program will accelerate Maryland's renewable energy roll-out, allow subscribers to receive discounted rates on their energy bills, and dedicate at least 40 percent of the energy output to low-to-moderate income subscribers, or subscribers who reside in historically underinvested areas.

Preparing the electric grid for increasing renewable energy development and consumption will set our state up for success as we pursue net-zero emissions economy-wide. The recently passed **Promoting Offshore Wind Energy Resources Act**, or POWER Act, sets updated offshore wind energy generation goals and will manage competitive offshore wind transmission procurement in the state. This demonstrates increasing investment in renewable energy and further commitment to our state's climate goals.



We Welcomed a New Team Member

Humna Sharif joined the chapter in March 2023. Her role is at the intersection of climate policy, nature-based solutions, and equitable access to adaptation resources for coastal communities in Maryland.



LARGE Offshore Wind Turbines Farm at sunset. © ShutterDesigner/Shutterstock; INSETS, LEFT TO RIGHT A hydrogen fuel cell buses stands at the bus station. © Scharfsinn/Shutterstock; Electric vehicle parking. © Michael Marais on Unsplash; Technician mounting photovoltaic solar moduls on roof of house. © anatoliy_gleb/Shutterstock



Restore the Chesapeake Bay



We Welcomed a New Team Member

In 2023, Andrew Wells joined the Maryland/DC chapter as the new Wetland Restoration Specialist. Andrew will be collaborating directly with partners, farmers, and landowners in support of water quality goals in the Chesapeake region.

We Restored Critical Habitat

In 2023, TNC achieved significant accomplishments toward the multi-state, public-private partnership to restore the Chesapeake Bay. We continue to convene agencies, non-profits, academia and funding sources to restore wetlands, floodplains, oyster reefs, and other natural habitats that provide critical ecosystem services. For example, in 2023 we led or funded the restoration of more than 150 acres of wetlands and floodplains on the Eastern Shore. And, through the Supporting Oyster Aquaculture and Restoration (SOAR) program, we funded and coordinated the planting of more than 67,000 farm-grown oysters on sanctuary reefs in the Chesapeake Bay, helping the aquaculture industry and wild oyster populations thrive.

We Documented the Ecological Effects of Sea Level Rise



Last year, we also completed a multi-year study—conducted in partnership with George Mason University and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and—to quantify the wave attenuation benefits of various coastal habitats found around the Chesapeake Bay. The data from this study is being fed into models that are now driving coastal conservation efforts led by state and federal agencies, and other NGO partners, around the Chesapeake Bay. TNC understands that demonstrating ways that nature provides value to people and communities is the best way to get real conservation results on the ground.

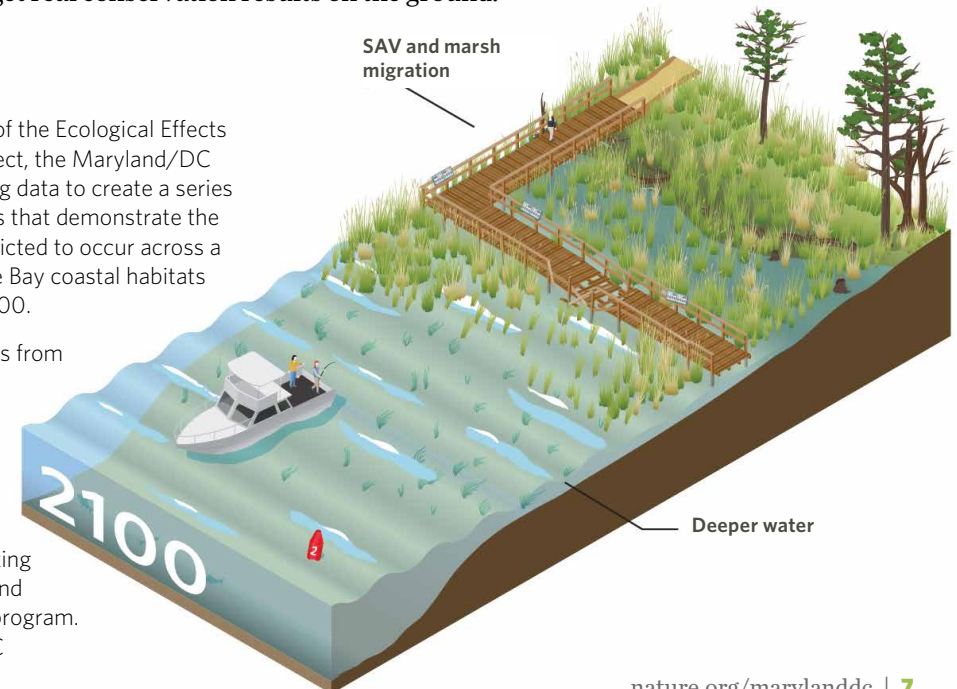
We Joined the Around the Bay Farmers Alliance



Understanding that the health of the Chesapeake Bay is intricately linked to our agricultural communities, TNC continues to focus on the transformation of our region's food production systems in ways that benefit both farmers and the environment. Last year we took an important step toward supporting and uplifting small, diverse farm operations that grow the food we find at our local farmers markets, farm stands and restaurants. TNC joined in support of the "Around the Bay Farmers Alliance," a farmer-led organization working in collaboration with the University of Maryland Eastern Shore. This organization provides funding, education, shared labor, and other resources to help small farms band together to aggregate food products for sale to regional markets—and to provide a general support system.

ILLUSTRATION As part of the Ecological Effects of Sea Level Rise project, the Maryland/DC chapter used modeling data to create a series of custom illustrations that demonstrate the changes that are predicted to occur across a variety of Chesapeake Bay coastal habitats between 2010 and 2100.

OPPOSITE PAGE Partners from the Oyster Recovery Partnership (ORP) help deposit farm-grown oysters onto a Chesapeake Bay oyster sanctuary as part of TNC's Supporting Oyster Aquaculture and Restoration (SOAR) program. © Humna Sharif/TNC



Connect Appalachian Forests



Forest managers and other conservation practitioners from across the Central Appalachian region attend a workshop at Dan's Mountain Wildlife Management Area. Participants at the workshop learned how TNC is using science-based forest management practices to accelerate old-growth conditions in a young, even-aged forest. © Matt Kane/TNC

Our Science Influences Forest Management Beyond Our Borders



For the past three years, the Maryland/DC chapter has led a science-based forest management project to demonstrate that we can accelerate old-growth characteristics in even-aged forests through specific silvicultural

techniques that mimic the natural processes that create old-growth conditions. We have established two demonstration projects in western Maryland where forest managers and conservation practitioners can come to learn about this work. In 2023, forest managers and conservation partners came from across the Central Appalachians to participate in a workshop where scientists, foresters, and wildlife biologists shared information about when and how these techniques could improve habitat for biodiversity across the region.

We're Returning Good Fire to the Landscape

The Maryland/DC chapter has a goal to improve the management of more than 100,000 acres of forest in western Maryland by 2030. A primary component of improving forest management in Central Appalachia is returning the natural process of fire to the landscape. TNC has been a leader in this space for years, and through our influence, our state and federal agency landowner partners are also gaining momentum. In 2023, we led or participated in controlled burns on TNC preserves, state parks, and wildlife management areas totaling more than 500 acres—a small but meaningful step toward our 2030 goal as we continue to build and strengthen our burn partnerships in the western part of the state.

TOP As part of the Central Appalachians Spruce Restoration Initiative (CASRI), the Maryland/DC chapter and our volunteers have planted more than 70,000 red spruce trees in the forests of western Maryland since 1996. © Jessica Wohlrobb/TNC; BOTTOM Conservation Steward Chase McLean prepares his ignition drone (IGNIS by Drone Amplified) during a controlled burn at TNC's Sideling Hill Creek Preserve. IGNIS is composed of more than 600 parts, including precision-machined aluminum, carbon fiber, five different motors, and numerous onboard sensors that are coordinated with custom electronics. It can drop up to 120 incendiary spheres per minute. This technology allows us to burn faster and safer than ever before. © Severn Smith/TNC

Our Staff and Volunteers Planted 4,000 Red Spruce Trees on Earth Day

“When we talk about red spruce, we're really talking about restoring an ecosystem.”

Kathryn Shallows,
Restoration Manager,
Central Appalachians
Program



We Welcomed a New Team Member

In 2023, we welcomed Valerie Stemac to the chapter's Resilient Forests team as an AmeriCorps Member through a partnership with Frostburg State University's ASTAR AmeriCorps program. With roots in western Maryland, Valerie will work out of our Cumberland office and will be focused on community engagement and outreach.

Support Equitable Conservation in our Cities

We Supported the New Greenspace Equity Program

Establishing a Greenspace Equity Program within the Maryland Department of Natural Resources was a top conservation and environmental justice priority for the Maryland/DC chapter's government relations team during the 2023 General Assembly. This new program, which passed the state legislature and was signed into law by Governor Moore, will enable local land trusts, local governments and community organizations to access grant funds for creating and stewarding public greenspaces in urban areas. This includes community gardens and parks, woodlands, trails and urban farms.


We Supported Community-Led Conservation Efforts

Established in 1888, Turner Station is a community rich with cultural history that was impacted by local economics. The steel mills and industries brought on by World Wars I and II attracted many workers to southeast Baltimore. Racist regulations excluded African American workers from industry housing, so many residents came together to grow nearby Turner Station into one of the largest, self-sustaining Black communities in Baltimore County. Over the decades, it has endured the impacts of environmental injustices brought about by adjacent industrial sites and landfills that polluted the air, land and water. More recently, issues of flooding, shoreline erosion, and sea-level rise have impacted the community.

Despite these challenges, Turner Station residents are proud of their past and are proactively working toward a bright future. Our chapter has been supporting the Turner Station Conservation Teams (TSCT)—a community-led group of volunteers—on a project called Witness Trees. Phase 1 of Witness Trees was completed last year and included a community design process that was facilitated by a local woman-owned design firm. The community participated in a visioning workshop series to develop a design for the planting of 140 trees and public art installations in Turner Station. In November 2022, TNC and TSCT celebrated this achievement with a community dedication day to unveil the planted trees, nine story posts, and three story benches that contain QR codes to video interviews of residents sharing their rich local history.

We Helped Bring the Healthy Trees, Healthy Cities Program to Baltimore

Healthy Trees, Healthy Cities is a partnership between the US Forest Service and TNC that seeks to protect the health of our nation's trees, forests and communities by engaging people in long-term tree monitoring and stewardship. \$700,000 in funding was secured by Maryland Senator Chris Van Hollen, who is a member of the Senate Appropriations committee and sits on the Interior and Environment subcommittee. The senator identified a need for federal investments in forests in the Chesapeake region that could benefit people and nature in the watershed. TNC was consulted by the senator's office for input on priority projects and encouraged to apply for federal funding through the U.S. Forest Service's State and Private Forestry program.



Andrea van Wyk, TNC's Baltimore Community Project Manager, testifies in support of the Greenspace Equity Program (HB0503), which passed in the 2023 Maryland General Assembly. © Matt Kane/TNC; OPPOSITE PAGE TNC-hired contractors plant more than 100 Witness Trees in the Turner Station community of Baltimore, Maryland. © Matt Kane/TNC



“Preserving green spaces in our cities helps clean our air and prevent flooding as it enhances the overall quality of life in our neighborhoods. This initiative will support that mission in historic Turner Station while providing workforce opportunities in the area of urban forestry. That is why I worked to secure federal funds for this program in Baltimore.”

Senator Chris Van Hollen

We Welcomed a New Team Member




In late 2022, our urban conservation team welcomed Austin Bamford to the chapter. Austin leads the planning, design and implementation of cultural landscape and landscape infrastructure projects that prioritize co-benefits for people and nature. Austin is a licensed landscape architect and member of the American Society for Landscape Architects (ASLA). Austin feels that everyone deserves and needs nature in their everyday lives, and considers it is a privilege to be working locally and systemically to help enable thriving cultural landscapes in Baltimore and beyond.





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