

The Nature Conservancy's Chesapeake Bay Program



Oyster farmers get an early start to the day near the mouth of the Rappahannock River, where it empties into the lower portion of the Chesapeake Bay. © Jason Houston

Guided by Science

Like Yellowstone or the Grand Canyon, our Chesapeake Bay is a national treasure. But unlike Yellowstone, it is home to 18 million people who depend on the Bay as the natural engine that powers our region's economy. Yet in the past two hundred years, we have transformed the ecology of the Bay and much of its six-state watershed, resulting in the severe degradation of the nation's largest estuary.

But science tells us that there is hope. Since the Chesapeake Bay Program was established in 1983, partners including The Nature Conservancy (TNC), have used science to identify priorities, set targets, and track progress toward those goals. The body of scientific knowledge within the Chesapeake Bay watershed is unrivaled, virtually anywhere else in the world, and TNC is a major contributor to that body of scientific work. As the world's largest conservation organization, TNC's work in the Bay watershed helps shape conservation programs around the world.

Our Impact

250,000 acres

Of land has been protected by TNC across the watershed, including 85 nature preserves that provide critical habitat and recreation for people.

40+

TNC conservation, science, and government relations professionals work on Bay issues across the watershed.

2.0 GPA

The latest Chesapeake Bay report card gave the Bay an overall grade of "C-." A vast improvement from years past, but a reminder that we have more work to do.

Our Recipe for Success

We bring a global network of experience and knowledge-sharing to bear on Bay conservation strategies.

We invest in large-scale, place-based conservation projects that require sustained funding and management to realize success.

We are the largest, non-partisan NGO working on the Chesapeake Bay restoration. We deliver policy outcomes that no other organization can accomplish.

Our staff works on the ground, in local communities across the Bay watershed. These individuals are focused on establishing trust, building local coalitions, and supporting TNC's global mission through local action.

The Nature Conservancy 

Our Solutions

Promote Sustainable Agriculture

Agricultural nutrient runoff is the largest contributor to water pollution in the Chesapeake Bay. Farmers understand this and have become increasingly willing to adopt conservation practices that are good for business and the environment. TNC is focused on restoring clean water and healthy habitat in the Bay by engaging with the agribusinesses that supply farmers across the watershed.

Prevent Urban Stormwater Pollution

Urban stormwater runoff is the fastest growing source of pollution to the Chesapeake Bay. TNC is working both on-the-ground, and through helping shape smart policies, in cities and states across the Bay watershed to curb stormwater pollution.

Bring Back a Keystone Species

Oysters and the reefs they build provide us with many benefits, including water filtration and habitat for blue crabs and rockfish. TNC is focused on supporting the restoration of large-scale oyster sanctuaries in the 10 tributaries identified by the Chesapeake Bay Program by 2025. We have had much to celebrate in the oyster restoration work that has already taken place, but there is still much to be done to reach our goal.

Restore Wetlands

Wetlands across the Bay watershed play a critical role in water quality by storing and filtering water as it moves across the landscape. Wetlands also offer some of the most biodiverse habitat in the world. TNC is uniquely positioned to lead large-scale wetland restoration projects in some of the watershed's most important river basins.

Protect Land

Land protection is the oldest tool in TNC's toolbox, and one that is still deployed across the six-state Chesapeake Bay watershed to support our conservation goals. Within the Chesapeake basin, TNC has protected roughly 250,000 acres of land, including nearly 85 nature preserves that we own and manage for recreation and habitat.

Tackle Climate Change

When it comes to sea level rise, Chesapeake Bay coastal communities are the third most at-risk in the U.S. To protect the conservation gains made over the past nearly 70 years, TNC is tackling climate change in the Bay and around the world by promoting climate-smart policies and natural climate solutions, and building resilient communities.



A Message From The Chesapeake Bay Program Director

The Bay's size and complexity compels us to take a collaborative conservation approach across six state and the District of Columbia, including a legion of partners. TNC is helping to lead the way in showing how nature-based solutions—in our cities, in our farm fields, along our rivers, and in the Bay itself—can achieve clean water that benefits nature and people. With your support, we can make the Chesapeake Bay restoration the world's greatest success story, demonstrating to the world how committed people can restore an entire ecosystem.

Mark Bryer

Chesapeake Bay Program Director

The Nature Conservancy Chesapeake Bay Program
425 Barlow Place, Suite 100 Bethesda, MD 20814

