



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education*

House Bill 631

Natural Resources - Land Conservation - Establishment of Goals and Programs
(Maryland the Beautiful Act)

Date: February 22, 2023

Position: **Favorable**

To: Environment & Transportation Committee

From: Matt Stegman, MD Staff Attorney

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** HB 631 which sets a new state land conservation goal of 30% of Maryland land protected by 2030, and an additional goal of 40% of land conserved by 2040. The bill furthers this goal through the creation of a Rapid Response Revolving Loan Fund that will assist small and medium-sized land trusts in preserving critical lands right away.

The Chesapeake Bay's land-to-water ratio is 15:1—larger than any other coastal estuary in the world. When the land suffers from pollution and poor management the Bay's water quality also worsens. A profound relationship exists between the water of the Chesapeake Bay and the 64,000 square miles of land comprising the Bay's watershed. Approximately 100,000 rivers and streams run into the Bay. This tributary system directly connects farms, forests, and developed communities in six states and the District of Columbia with the Chesapeake.

Today, there are 18 million residents in the watershed, and the number is expected to grow to 19.4 million by 2025. By the late 1800s, 40 to 50 percent of the watershed's forest had been cleared of trees, according to the Chesapeake Bay Program. Between 1982 and 1997, the Bay watershed lost more than 750,000 acres of forestland to development, about 100 acres per day. Wetlands were equally decimated. These natural filters are critical to protecting the Bay from challenges like climate change, sea-level rise, and species loss.

CBF firmly believes it is possible to restore the Bay. But the continuing loss of natural filters and vital land-based ecosystems makes restoration of the Bay, and the achievement of the goals of the [Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint](#), much more difficult to achieve. Land conservation is an essential part of the Bay's recovery.

CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on HB 631.

For more information, please contact Matt Stegman, Maryland Staff Attorney, at mstegman@cbf.org.

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The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) is a non-profit environmental education and advocacy organization dedicated to the restoration and protection of the Chesapeake Bay. With over 300,000 members and e-subscribers, including over 109,000 in Maryland alone, CBF works to educate the public and to protect the interest of the Chesapeake and its resources.