

CHESAPEAKE BAY COMMISSION CHESAPEAKE CONSERVANCY



In Virginia

Bay delegates say Virginia needs stable funding for land conservation

A comprehensive study of land conservation in the Chesapeake watershed conducted by the Chesapeake Bay Commission and the Chesapeake Conservancy has found that stable revenue sources and improved local government programs would greatly aid the protection of farms and forests and significant natural landscapes.

With that in mind, Virginia's members on the Commission plan to support a study to explore innovative funding mechanisms at the state level. A stable revenue source for land conservation is needed, commission members said, to provide long-term planning and purchasing power to preserve Virginia's working lands and historically and ecologically significant landscapes. Such a reliable funding stream could also encourage local action by providing matching funds for local land conservation and compliment the state's tax credit program for land conservation.

Providing localities with more flexibility to fund the purchase of land and conservation easements would further Virginia's conservation efforts. Commission members hope to increase localities' ability to use long-term installment purchase agreements such as those used in Carroll County, Maryland, and purchase of development rights to conserve land in a comprehensive manner.

Virginia's Land Preservation Tax Credit Program continues to be hugely successful and has led to the permanent protection of over 500,000 acres of open space. Conservation easements voluntarily placed on these lands allow landowners to retain ownership rights and enjoy limited use of the land. Currently when donation requests are submitted for a tax credit of \$1 million or more, the conservation value of the donated land must be verified by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). In order to maximize the effectiveness of the tax credit program in conserving lands of high conservation value, legislation will be introduced lowering the verification assessment threshold to \$500,000.

The Virginia delegation to the Chesapeake Bay commission includes: Senator Mary Margaret Whipple, the commission's vice-chair and Senator Emmett Hanger; Delegates John Cosgrove, Lynwood Lewis, and Scott Lingamfelter; Secretary of Natural Resources Doug Domenech; and John J. Reynolds, citizen representative.

The Chesapeake Bay Commission is a tri-state legislative commission (Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania) that works on a broad array of environmental policies including promoting land conservation and land management practices to benefit water quality.

Chesapeake Conservancy is a non-profit organization whose mission is to ensure conservation, stewardship, access and enjoyment of the Chesapeake's iconic landscapes, great rivers and cultural and historic assets. The principal focus of the Conservancy is the implementation of: the John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail; the Chesapeake Gateways and Watertrails Network; and a Chesapeake Treasured Landscape Initiative

Contact: Suzan Bulbulkaya

804-786-4849 (O) 804-304-1117 (C)