



CHESAPEAKE BAY COMMISSION · APRIL 2025

FEDERAL AGENCY BUDGET REQUEST FISCAL YEAR 2026

THE CHESAPEAKE BAY PROGRAM PARTNERSHIP IS ONE OF THE most ambitious and successful watershed restoration efforts ever attempted. Achieved through the collaborative work of federal, state, local, and nongovernmental partners, and more importantly, an engaged and supportive public, we have a cleaner watershed than we did when the effort began in 1983, despite many environmental challenges.

As Congress begins deliberations on the FY 2026 federal budget, the Chesapeake Bay Commission offers this report identifying the federal funding needed to continue the partnership's success. We further highlight three priorities where targeted action will strategically accelerate achievement of even greater progress.

The Bay's Congressional delegation has been steadfast in its commitment and leadership to restore the watershed and its living resources. Continued success depends on maintaining the Federal funding that provides the catalyst for our restoration efforts. Each Federal dollar spent leverages three more from state, local, and private partners.

Who We Are and What We Do

The Chesapeake Bay Commission is a tri-state legislative commission with bipartisan membership from Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. We work to advance policy at all levels of government to revitalize and protect the Chesapeake Bay watershed. We are the only legislative branch member of the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership. This joint federal-state effort is producing tangible results in cleaner water, healthier fisheries, and greater economic and environmental resilience.



Chesapeake Bay Commission
Policy for the Bay

The Commission's Top Budget Priorities

✓ ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY Geographic Programs — Chesapeake Bay: \$92,000K (FY24 level \$92,000K)

These monies maintain the nucleus of the federal-state partnership to restore the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. Most of the funding supports grants to state and local governments as well as nongovernmental partners for projects that achieve water quality and living resource improvements. Program funds are also used to coordinate the complex science and monitoring efforts that drive restoration.

✓ DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR—USGS Biological Threats and Invasive Species Research Program: +\$1,000,000 and Report Language: \$1,000,000 to coordinate an adaptive invasive catfish research framework for the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.

Since the introduction of blue and flathead catfish to the Chesapeake Bay watershed, their population and range have rapidly expanded, posing a threat to native and economically important fisheries. With their diverse and opportunistic diet, long life span, large size, high salinity tolerance, and position as apex predators, these species warrant research to recommend population reduction targets, identify effective methods for removal, and limit ecological impacts.

As a respected, nonregulatory partner, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) is well-placed to coordinate research efforts for invasive catfish in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. Crafted in full partnership with the relevant state and federal agencies, this adaptive research framework will provide the region's fisheries managers with decision-support tools to protect the Bay's

economically important fisheries and productive ecosystems. It will identify key thematic research areas, collect and disseminate existing leading-edge studies, and prioritize research needs for collaborative action by stakeholders. This could include surveying invasive catfish populations, recommending a biological reference point and reduction targets, monitoring changes in density and range over time, assessing the effectiveness of removal methods and control techniques, analyzing the toxicity of large and small catfish, and measuring the socio-economic impacts of invasive catfish in the Chesapeake Bay.

This is likely a two-year effort, requiring \$1,000,000 per year. Future needs would be determined based on the research priorities identified. It is anticipated that these needs would be coordinated and distributed across the stakeholders and may include future federal funding requests within USGS or other partnering agencies.

✓ U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE Chesapeake Watershed Investments for Landscape Defense (WILD): \$15,000K (FY24 level \$8,000K)

America's Conservation Enhancement Reauthorization Act authorized up to \$15 million in grants through the Chesapeake WILD program for restoring fish and wildlife habitat in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The Commission supports fully funding this program to enhance the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) critical role in the broader Bay partnership. This non-regulatory program improves fish and wildlife habitat throughout the Bay watershed by collaborating with local partners to implement on-the-ground projects.

FY 2026 Budget Request Summary

Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

- ✓ EPA — Geographic Programs — Chesapeake Bay: \$92,000K
- ✓ EPA — Nonpoint Source (Sec. 319) Grants: \$182,000K
- ✓ EPA — Pollution Control (Sec. 106) Grants: \$237,000K
- ✓ EPA — Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund: \$3,250,000K
- ✓ DOI-USGS — Land Management Research Program: \$55,806K, with \$9,000K for Chesapeake Bay Activities
- ✓ DOI-USGS — Biological Threats and Invasive Species Research Program: +\$1,000K
- ✓ DOI-USFWS — Chesapeake Watershed Investments for Landscape Defense (WILD): \$15,000K
- ✓ DOI-USFWS — Habitat Conservation — Coastal Programs: \$13,000K
- ✓ DOI-NPS — Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Trails Program: \$6,000K
- ✓ USDA-Forest Service — Forest Stewardship Program: \$12,000K
- ✓ Land and Water Conservation Fund (all agencies): \$900,000K

Energy and Water Development

- ✓ USACE-Construction — Chesapeake Bay Environmental Restoration and Protection: \$12,500K
- ✓ USACE-Construction — Chesapeake Bay Oyster Recovery: \$7,450K
- ✓ USACE-Investigations — Coordination with Other Water Resource Agencies: \$2,000K
- ✓ USACE-Construction — Continuing Authorities Program — Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration (Sec. 206): \$13,000K; Emergency Streambank and Shoreline Protection (Sec. 14): \$5,000K

Commerce and Justice, Science and Related Agencies

- ✓ NOAA-NMFS — Habitat Conservation and Restoration: \$56,184K
- ✓ NOAA-NMFS — Regional Councils and Fisheries Commissions: \$44,297K
- ✓ NOAA-Office of Education — B-WET Regional Programs: \$8,700K
- ✓ NOAA-Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research — National Sea Grant College Program: \$134,985K

Agriculture, Rural Development, Food & Drug Administration and Related Agencies

- ✓ USDA-NRCS — Conservation Operations: \$1,200,000K
- ✓ USDA-NRCS/FSA — 2018 Farm Bill Programs: Full Funding of Mandatory Programs

Defense

- ✓ DOD-Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program: \$200,000K

FY 2026 Budget Request, Line-by-Line

Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Subcommittee

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

✓ Geographic Programs — Chesapeake Bay: \$92,000K (FY24 level \$92,000K)

See Page 2 for program narrative.

✓ Nonpoint Source (Sec. 319) Grants: \$182,000K (FY24 level \$182,000K)

This program provides funding to states to address impaired waterways as identified by the requirements of the Clean Water Act. Based on data from the Bay Program Partnership, in the Chesapeake region 32% of the stream miles are “unhealthy”. Section 319 grants are a key resource in the effort to improve and protect our nation’s waters. In FY 2024, this program provided \$8.7 million for Bay restoration.

✓ Pollution Control (Sec. 106) Grants: \$237,000K (FY 24 level \$237,000K)

This national program helps states in the Chesapeake Bay watershed manage the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System, or NPDES. Under the Clean Water Act, it is unlawful to discharge any pollutant into U.S. waters without a NPDES permit. Without adequate funding, this permit process gets bogged down, resulting in business losses and reduced permit monitoring and enforcement. In FY 2024, this program provided \$12.5 million for Bay restoration.

✓ Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund: \$3,250,000K (FY24 level \$1,638,861K)

Financial support for this program was substantially increased by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act through gradually increasing capitalization grants. Additionally, the Act also increased the authorized funding level for the program each year from FY 2022 through FY 2026. The Commission requests federal funding at the authorized level for FY 2026.

This program provides low-cost financing to local communities to improve water-related infrastructure

and local water quality. States have the flexibility to fund a range of projects that address their highest priority water quality needs. Using a combination of federal and state funds, state programs provide loans to eligible recipients to: construct municipal wastewater facilities; control nonpoint sources of pollution; build decentralized wastewater treatment systems; create green infrastructure projects; protect estuaries; and fund other water quality projects. In FY 2024, this program provided \$62.6 million for Bay restoration.

DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR

U.S. Geological Survey

✓ Land Management Research Program (LMRP): \$55,806K, with \$9,000K for Chesapeake Bay Activities (FY24 level \$54,806K, with \$8,000K for Chesapeake Bay Activities)

Decision makers at all levels rely on USGS science to devise and implement plans to reduce the impacts of nutrients, sediment, and toxic contaminants; improve habitat for freshwater fisheries and waterfowl; and focus land protection. USGS monitoring and analysis allow us to determine the effectiveness of our strategies.

We request a modest increase of \$1 million within the LMRP to expand and refine USGS work in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. A critical need of the partnership is to accelerate our understanding of progress towards restoration goals and outcomes, and the impacts of our management actions. This can only be done with the best science that USGS can provide. The Commission requests specific report language within the LMRP budget as follows “\$9,000,000 for Chesapeake Bay activities and maintenance of effort in other USGS program areas that support Chesapeake Bay studies.”

✓ DOI-USGS — Biological Threats and Invasive Species Research Program: +\$1,000,000 with committee narrative

See Page 2 for program narrative.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

- ✓ **Chesapeake Watershed Investments for Landscape Defense (WILD): \$15,000K** (FY24 level \$8,000K)

See Page 2 for program narrative.

- ✓ **Habitat Conservation — Coastal Programs: \$13,000K** (FY24 level \$13,000K)

This is a voluntary habitat conservation program that provides technical and financial assistance, in collaboration with partners, for the benefit of protected species and resources. The Chesapeake Bay is one of 24 priority coastal ecosystems. Funding includes support for the Chesapeake Bay Nutria Eradication Project.

National Park Service

- ✓ **Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Trails Program: \$6,000K** (FY24 level \$3,027K)

Through the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Trails Program, the National Park Service (NPS) provides unique and vital assistance to state, local, and nongovernmental partners throughout the watershed to increase public access to the Bay, to support educational programming and outdoor recreation, and to foster conservation stewardship among residents and visitors. First authorized by Congress in 1998, the Program supports local economies through the promotion of outdoor recreation and heritage tourism.

Despite serving communities and partners across the watershed, funding for the Gateways Program has not kept up with growing demand over its 25-year history. In 2004, Gateways Program funding was \$2.469 million; since then, it has increased very slowly to only \$3.027 million in FY 2023. We respectfully request that this program be increased to \$6.0 million in the FY 2026 budget to help meet the tremendous demand for access to our natural, historic, and cultural resources in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. This request is consistent with legislation to establish a Chesapeake Bay National Recreation Area, which would provide an authorized funding level of \$6 million.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

- ✓ **Forest Stewardship: \$12,000K** (FY24 level \$12,000K)

This is the primary Forest Service program focused on private forestland management and conservation. Priority uses include restoring riparian forest buffers, adding urban tree canopy, and protecting high-value forest.

- ✓ **Land and Water Conservation Fund (all agencies): \$900,000K (mandatory funding)**

The LWCF is the nation's premier land conservation program. Through locally driven projects, it provides for the permanent protection of landscapes to safeguard the rivers and streams feeding into the Bay, while supporting local economies through recreation and tourism. Each year, a handful of top-ranked projects within the Bay watershed are selected for funding.

Energy and Water Development Subcommittee

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

- ✓ **Construction — Chesapeake Bay Environmental Restoration and Protection: \$12,500K**

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) plays a vital role in Chesapeake Bay restoration. The Corps' Comprehensive Plan provides a strategic roadmap for investments in aquatic ecosystem restoration throughout the watershed. Under Section 510, USACE is provided with an enhanced opportunity to partner with non-federal sponsors to design and construct projects.

- ✓ **Construction — Chesapeake Bay Oyster Recovery: \$7,450K** (FY24 level \$7,450K)

The Corps is also very active in oyster restoration. With current populations at less than one percent of historic levels, the Bay agreement targets oyster

restoration as a key objective. The Commission recommends report language to support this work: The Committee is supportive of the Corps' work on the Chesapeake Bay Oyster Recovery program and urges the Corps to include appropriate funding in future budget submissions for these efforts.

✓ **Investigations — Coordination with Other Water Resource Agencies: \$2,000K**
(FY24 level \$1,000K)

The DoD and the Corps are full partners in the joint federal-state Chesapeake Bay restoration effort. This funding supports Corps staff to serve their critical role as programmatic and technical advisors to the Partnership in their areas of expertise, such as oyster restoration, wetland creation, and flood control. An increase in funding is requested to allow the Corps to more fully participate in Bay Program Partnership.

✓ **Construction — Continuing Authorities Program — Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration (Sec. 206): \$13,000K** (FY23 level \$13,000K)
Emergency Streambank and Shoreline Protection (Sec. 14): \$5,000K
(FY24 level \$5,000K)

These national programs provide funding for habitat restoration and for projects to reduce flood damage to public infrastructure in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Subcommittee

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

National Marine Fisheries Service

✓ **Habitat Conservation and Restoration (HCR): \$56,184K** (FY24 level \$56,184K)

NOAA's Chesapeake Bay Office is budgeted within HCR. In FY 2024, the enacted level for this program was \$5.1 million to support critical fisheries efforts, such as population assessment, restoration, and habitat

improvement. Critical species such as oysters, blue crabs, striped bass, and menhaden have huge social and economic importance. The Commission supports report language to specifically fund enhanced oyster restoration efforts within the Chesapeake Bay at \$1.75 million.

✓ **Regional Councils and Fisheries Commissions: \$44,297K** (FY24 level \$44,297K)

Regional fishery coordination is critical to the stewardship and sustainable harvest of our migratory fisheries, both commercial and recreational. Working with state representatives from the executive and legislative branches, policy and management plans are crafted based on the best science and stakeholder engagement.

Office of Education

✓ **Bay-Watershed Education and Training (B-WET) Regional Programs: \$8,700K**
(FY24 level \$8,700K)

NOAA's B-WET program is an environmental education program that promotes locally based STEM learning for K-12 students and teachers. B-WET provides competitive grants to encourage capacity building and partnerships. In FY 2024, this program provided \$2.8 million towards Chesapeake stewardship and environmental literacy.

Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research

✓ **National Sea Grant College Program: \$134,985K (includes Aquaculture Research Program)** (FY24 level \$94,000K)

The Sea Grant program works to enhance the practical use and conservation of coastal and marine resources to create a sustainable economy and environment. Within the Bay watershed, priorities include research to support sustainable fisheries and aquaculture. In FY 2024, this program provided \$8.0 million towards Bay restoration. This request is consistent with that of the Sea Grant Association.

Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA, and Related Agencies Subcommittee

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

✓ **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) — Conservation Operations: \$1,200,000K** (FY24 level \$914,899K)

Conservation technical assistance (CTA) is the foundation of NRCS's ability to deliver effective conservation. By collaborating with agricultural producers to prepare and implement conservation plans, sediment and nutrient loads to our waterways are directly reduced.

In the jurisdictional Phase III Watershed Implementation Plans, over 80 percent of the pollutant load reductions are planned to come from the agricultural sector. This can only happen with increased CTA. The Commission also supports targeted, enhanced CTA to the Susquehanna River basin and other high-impact agricultural basins in the Bay watershed. Funding enhancements to Farm Bill programs in the Inflation Reduction Act make this request even more timely.

✓ **NRCS and Farm Service Agency (FSA): Full funding of mandatory programs authorized in 2018 Farm Bill**

Farm Bill programs provide the financial backbone of the region's agricultural conservation efforts. In FY 2024, \$83.3 million was programmed for cost-share assistance to Bay watershed farmers, with an additional \$91.0 million in funding made available by the Inflation Reduction Act. These dollars are critical to achieving the pollution reductions necessary to achieve clean water throughout the watershed. Core programs include the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

Defense Subcommittee

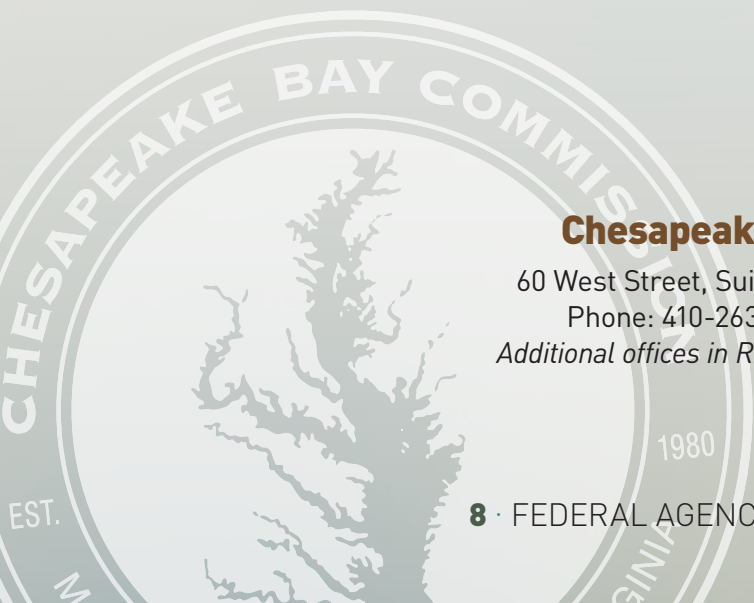
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

✓ **Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program (REPI): \$200,000K** (FY 24 level \$200,000K)

The REPI Program is the Department of Defense's key tool for protecting mission readiness by avoiding encroachment and land-use conflicts near installations. It provides funding for conservation easements to buffer the off-base impacts of military activities, such as flight or ordnance training. Tens of thousands of acres have been protected within the Bay watershed through REPI projects, and three sentinel landscape partnership coalitions are in place, designed to strengthen military readiness, conserve natural resources, bolster agricultural and forestry economies and increase public access to outdoor recreation.

In Conclusion

Congress has shown tremendous support for the Chesapeake Bay restoration effort, resulting in significant progress towards meeting our mutual goal of a healthy Chesapeake Bay. The Commission's FY 2026 funding recommendations will allow us to continue and enhance our progress. Watershed restoration can be achieved through the collaborative strength and determination of federal, state, and local governments, their legislatures, and the public.



Chesapeake Bay Commission

60 West Street, Suite 402 · Annapolis, MD 21401

Phone: 410-263-3420 · www.chesbay.us

Additional offices in Richmond, VA and Harrisburg, PA