



FOREVER
MARYLAND

Advancing and Enhancing Land Conservation

Strategic Plan

2022-2027



Forever Maryland promotes and supports the land conservation community, through education, advocacy, and outreach, to permanently protect working landscapes and healthy ecosystems for all.



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(Updated and Adopted: March 12, 2024)

OUR MISSION

Forever Maryland promotes and supports the land conservation community, through education, advocacy, and outreach, to permanently protect working landscapes and healthy ecosystems for all.

OUR VISION

Forever Maryland envisions a future where all Maryland's lands and waters – mountain forests to ocean beaches, rural farms to city parks, sweeping rivers to tidal bays – are actively conserved, restored, stewarded, appreciated, and enjoyed by all Marylanders, including historically under-resourced communities.

STATEMENT ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION & JUSTICE

Forever Maryland is dedicated to the conservation of our state's land, water, wildlife, and other natural values – values that can be experienced and cherished by everyone and will sustain healthy, vibrant, and economically resilient communities. Racism, injustice, and exclusion must never be found in or advantaged by our work. The principles of equality, justice, and inclusion should guide us all and be honored.

INTRODUCTION

Forever Maryland's story began when key stakeholders were interviewed for Maryland Environmental Trust's 2017 Five Year Strategic Plan - A Bold Vision of Sustainability. Thus, the idea to create a new organization bloomed. After extensive research, interviews and surveys, it was determined that a unique organization was needed to provide innovative support for land trusts statewide to help advance land conservation and related efforts.

Our founding was rooted in the idea that land conservation and restoration of conserved lands, and related goals are a vital component of Maryland's future identity and prosperity. We take pride in the Forever Maryland name and logo. The White Oak leaf weaves infinitely, symbolizing our state tree's sustainability, longevity and impact; attributes we aspire to mirror.

PRIORITY #1: Advance Education and Outreach Programs to Ensure All Land Trusts and Conservation Organizations are Aware, Involved, and Engaged

OVERVIEW: The education and outreach programs should bring new, non-traditional, and previously less-engaged conservation partners together with Maryland's most active conservation leaders, so that all can plan, engage, and learn together.

Objective 1: Discover, reach out to, and intentionally engage with organizations that are involved in land conservation and related efforts.

Strategies:

1. Add un-engaged conservation organizations to Forever Maryland's database and reach out to (and target) their participation within Forever Maryland programming.

2. Judicially participate in formal partnerships that are collectively focused on conservation in Maryland.
3. Present at conferences, meetings, or events where Forever Maryland's mission is advanced and new partnerships or audiences are gained.

Objective 2: Advance educational programming that reaches all land conservation organizations in Maryland and that sets their organizations up for sustained success.

Strategies:

1. Provide dynamic training, networking and information sharing opportunities by offering an annual land conservation conference and, as desired, specialized and targeted webinars and workshops.
2. Ensure ongoing programming addresses entrenched environmental challenges – specifically within traditionally disadvantaged communities and where a focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice can improve the community as a whole.

PRIORITY #2: Use Policy and Advocacy as a Tool for Systemic and Sustained Land Conservation Successes

OVERVIEW: Forever Maryland works with land trusts and environmental nonprofits across the state to strengthen land conservation and related efforts. The policy and advocacy programs address current issues necessary for protecting the state's important lands and natural resources. Forever Maryland will stay abreast of current/future state and national conservation policy trends, introduce new strategic policy and advocacy initiatives, and protect current conservation laws and funding sources.

Objective 1: Position Forever Maryland as the policy and advocacy voice for land trusts and land conservationists in Maryland.

Strategies:

1. Annually survey Maryland land trusts and the broader land conservation community to determine how Forever Maryland can enhance or support shared goals.
2. Use policy and advocacy to support increased monitoring and stewardship of permanently conserved Maryland lands.
3. Train and engage a diverse and inclusive network of land trusts and broader frontline conservation organizations on key state and federal policy initiatives, while also helping build support for proper land use policy at the local government level.
4. Convene policy workgroups (as needed) to help educate and build consensus on key issues, such as advancing access to natural resources for all, greening urban areas, combating invasive species, advancing trail networks to connect preserved lands and open spaces, and slowing native species loss.
5. Continue to protect the state's conservation funding by being an advocate for full funding of Program Open Space, providing fiduciary responsibility as the fiscal sponsor of the Partners for Open Space, and continuing to support the Partners for Open Space Coalition.

Objective 2: Launch or strengthen strategic initiatives that will address entrenched conservation and environmental challenges – bringing about new partnerships, supporters, and funders – to enhance Forever Maryland's mission and impact.

Strategies:

1. Build informed and engaged local advocates for better land use policy.
2. Advance access to natural resources for all.
3. Advance the greening of underserved, overburdened, and urban Maryland.
4. Address native species loss and the spread of invasive species in Maryland.
5. Through partnerships and collaborations, build resilient, engaged, and stronger land conservation nonprofits.

PRIORITY #3: Improve Brand Awareness and Continue to Serve as a Trusted Resource

OVERVIEW: Forever Maryland serves as an important resource for the land conservation community and the challenges it faces. The organization is uniquely positioned to facilitate authentic relationships and collaborations capable of increasing the impact and effectiveness of local and regional land trusts, the Maryland Environmental Trust, and the larger environmental nonprofit community. Forever Maryland recognizes the importance of building brand awareness and communicating its position as a unique organization and is the only statewide nonprofit focused exclusively on strengthening Maryland's land trusts and vital on-the-ground conservation nonprofits.

Objective 1: Position Forever Maryland as the trusted leader and voice, and key resource for Maryland land trusts

Strategies:

1. Build capacity within current Maryland land trusts to service all corners of the state.
2. Work with the Land Trust Alliance, Chesapeake Conservation Partnership, and other organizations to collectively meet the needs of the Maryland land conservation community.

Objective 2: Create new partnerships and collaborate on projects and initiatives beyond land trusts.

Strategies:

1. Identify allies and ambassadors beyond the land trust community that align with local, state and federal legislative and funding priorities critical to land conservation in Maryland.
2. Support the growth and development of Regional Conservation Partnerships (RCPs) and similar collaborations while also continuing to evaluate Forever Maryland's role within RCPs.
3. Engage rural communities (including farmers, foresters and resource managers), on-the-ground nonprofits, and community organizations – including those who serve diverse, disadvantaged, and disparate communities - to determine potential collaboration around addressing systemic inequities through greenspace.

Objective 3: Leverage strategic marketing and communications to raise awareness and promote the work of the organization.

Strategies:

1. If capacity exists, develop an effective annual communications plan that identifies target audiences and key messaging to enhance effectiveness of marketing.

2. Communicate annual legislative priorities on behalf of the land trust community for government policies that support land conservation.
3. Promote Forever Maryland partner organizations to amplify its work and expand constituencies.

Objective 4: Reset and reaffirm relationship with the Maryland Environmental Trust to better leverage each organization.

Strategies:

1. Cultivate relationships between the two boards and their leadership.
2. Clarify and market each organization's unique role in Maryland.
3. Explore ways to promote and amplify each other's work and accomplishments to strengthen the missions and avoid duplication of efforts.

Priority #4: Build Internal Organizational Capacity

OVERVIEW: Building healthy, robust, and sustainable land conservation organizations requires Forever Maryland to have a stable foundation of support. By leveraging its existing relationships, Forever Maryland will expand its current Board, define and message the distinctive roles of Maryland Environmental Trust (MET) and Forever Maryland, and solidify a sustainable model of financial support.

Objective 1: Continue to develop the Forever Maryland Board to support the organization.

Strategies:

1. Align structure and governance with Forever Maryland's values and commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ), by recruiting and cultivating board members from around the state with diverse backgrounds, knowledge, skills, experiences, and networks aligned with the organization's mission. This should also include those from rural communities -- including farmers, foresters and resource managers.
2. Cultivate a board-led fundraising culture and strategy for the organization.

Objective 2: Adopt policies and practices that encourage recruiting, supporting, training, retaining, and/or promoting staff, interns, volunteers and/or contractors from diverse backgrounds.

Objective 3: Create stable and diverse funding sources that support Forever Maryland's mission and work.

Strategies:

1. Create a diverse foundation of support by pursuing multiple funding streams. Increase program and administrative money to support the organization, including individual donors, public and private foundations, corporations and government funding.
2. Develop and identify current and future programming that generates revenue while advancing Forever Maryland's core mission.