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Check It to Protect It: Marylanders can help protect the Chesapeake Bay and its Wildlife this tax season

Donations made to the Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund through Maryland's income tax checkoff program support Bay restoration efforts

(Annapolis, MD) – Tax season is here, and Marylanders can help protect our state's greatest natural treasures, the Chesapeake Bay and Maryland's rare, threatened, and endangered species, by making a tax-deductible contribution when prompted by your tax software or your accountant (or line 35 for those few remaining paper filers) to the Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund on the Maryland tax form.

The Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund was created to support Bay restoration and education programs and to protect Maryland's rare, threatened, and endangered species. The fund is split evenly between the Chesapeake Bay Trust, a top-rated nonprofit organization, and the Wildlife and Heritage Service of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. The state income tax form allows Marylanders to quickly and easily donate to help the Bay and conserve Maryland's native wildlife and endangered species. Last year, more than 20,000 individuals and families contributed to the fund.

"From the blue crab to the great blue heron, Maryland is known for its wildlife. Yet so many species in our backyard and local waterways are in danger," shared Jonathan McKnight, Associate Director of the Wildlife and Heritage Service of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. "Contributing to the Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund helps conserve habitats and protect the local wildlife across our State."

Launched in 1990, the Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund is one of the most successful voluntary tax checkoff programs in the nation. Over \$850,000 was contributed for Tax Year 2023, which funded Bay restoration initiatives, community stewardship projects, and environmental education programs throughout the state. The Chesapeake Bay Trust, a nonprofit established by the Maryland General Assembly to deliver resources back to the community through local grants, uses the donated dollars to empower community-based organizations to restore wildlife habitat and conserve ecosystems together. Every year, the Trust supports hundreds of people to design and lead projects for their communities such as neighborhood tree plantings, community clean-ups, field trips and other meaningful outdoor experiences for students, stormwater projects, and other conservation and restoration efforts.

“Residents in every community benefit from clean and healthy natural resources, and the Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund allows them to be part of the solution by both donating at tax time and by actually applying to the Fund for projects in their own communities,” said Dr. Jana Davis, president of the Chesapeake Bay Trust.

To make a contribution, Marylanders can simply agree to donate when prompted by their tax software, complete line 35 on their state income tax form, or ask their certified public accountant or tax preparer. Donations of any dollar amount can be made, and all are tax-deductible.

For more information on where your money goes via the Chesapeake Bay Trust, visit www.cbtrust.org/taxdonation, or for details on the Department of Natural Resource’s Wildlife and Heritage Service, visit www.dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife.

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About the Chesapeake Bay Trust

The Chesapeake Bay Trust (www.cbtrust.org) envisions a restored and protected Chesapeake Bay watershed and other natural resources in our area, from the Coastal Bays to the Chesapeake to the Youghiogheny River. We empower local community-based groups on the ground with the resources they need to take on a meaningful and measurable role in restoring forests, streams, rivers, bays, wildlife, and more in their own communities. Every year, the Trust empowers about 400 groups by providing grants and technical assistance to accomplish environmental education, community outreach, and local watershed restoration projects. The Trust is supported by the sale of the Protect the Chesapeake & Coastal Bays license plate; donations to the Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund on the Maryland State income tax form; donations made by hunters, fishers, and boaters in the Maryland online natural resource licensing system; donations from individuals and corporations; and partnerships with private foundations and federal, state, and local governments. The Trust has received the highest rating possible from Charity Navigator for over two decades. Over 90 cents of every dollar are directed to the Trust’s restoration and education programs.

About the Wildlife and Heritage Service of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources

The Wildlife and Heritage Service regularly reviews its database to determine areas it considers priorities for acquisition to maintain the quality of the unusual ecosystems, natural communities, or habitats for rare species. These recommendations are used by Maryland Department of Natural Resources, The Nature Conservancy, and other conservation organizations interested in purchasing ecologically significant properties. The Department of Natural Resources receives dedicated funding, through a very small percentage of the real estate transfer tax, called the Heritage Conservation Fund to be used specifically for the purchase of important natural areas harboring habitats for rare species or unique natural communities.