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A Return on Your Tax Return: Marylanders Can Protect the Chesapeake Bay, Wildlife, and Communities Through Their Taxes

Contributions made to the Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund on the Maryland state income tax form empower people to protect wildlife, waters, and local communities

Tax season is here, and there is an easy way for Marylanders to protect the outdoor places and wildlife we all treasure, and that all our communities benefit from. By making a 100% tax-deductible contribution to the Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund on the Maryland tax form when prompted by your tax software or your accountant (or on line 35 for those few remaining paper filers), Marylanders can invest in the health of their own communities and the natural resources that keep our homes and habitats thriving.

The Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund was created to support restoration and education programs across the state. The fund is split evenly between the Chesapeake Bay Trust, a grantmaking nonprofit organization, and the Wildlife and Heritage Service of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Contributions go right back to people conserving what makes Maryland, Maryland. The state income tax form is a quick and easy way to give everyday people resources to protect our local waters and communities, and support efforts to conserve Maryland's rare, threatened and endangered species. Last year, more than 17,000 individuals and families contributed to the fund.

"Maryland is home to thousands of species who, just like our communities, need a healthy environment to survive," shared Dr. Gwenda L. Brewer, Science Program Manager with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources Wildlife and Heritage Service. "Contributing to the Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund is a way for Marylanders to take action and support the education and conservation efforts protecting our rare plants and wildlife."

Launched in 1990, the Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund is one of the most successful voluntary tax checkoff programs in the nation. Over \$645,000 was contributed for Tax Year 2025, which funded watershed 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 empower community-based groups to get involved through local grants, uses the donated dollars to equip people across Maryland to drive projects that address environmental and community needs at the same time. These local projects inspire lifelong stewards and lead to sustained change. Thanks to the Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund, the Bay Trust empowers thousands of people every year to lead neighborhood tree plantings,

community clean-ups, field trips and other meaningful outdoor experiences for students, stormwater projects, and other conservation and restoration efforts.

“The Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund is a unique opportunity for Maryland residents to use their tax returns to give back to their own communities,” said Dr. Jana Davis, president of the Chesapeake Bay Trust. “Contributions of any size empower more people to participate in restoring nature and their neighborhoods, ensuring a healthy environment for generations to come.”

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 Resources’ 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.