



Maryland

Land Preservation and Recreation Plan

DRAFT

2027-2037



Acknowledgements

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Kate Brower, Baltimore City Parks and Rec
 Natalia Buta Lowe, Frostburg State University
 LeeAnne Chandler, DNR - Maryland Park Service
 Sara Coleman, DNR – Watershed and Climate Services
 Keith Colston, Maryland Commission on Indian Affairs
 Angela Crenshaw, DNR - Maryland Park Service
 Lynn Davidson, DNR – Wildlife and Heritage Service
 Rob Feldt, DNR - Maryland Forest Service
 Lisa Gutierrez, DNR - Public Access, Water Trails and Recreational Planning Program
 Debbie Herr Cornwell, Maryland Department of Planning
 Elizabeth Hughes, Maryland Historical Trust
 Sara Kramer, DNR – Maryland Forest Service
 Isabel Layton, DNR – Office of Outdoor Recreation
 Steve Miller, Wicomico County Recreation, Parks and Tourism
 John Mullican, DNR - Freshwater Fisheries Program
 Sandi Olek, DNR - Office of Outdoor Recreation
 John Papagni, DHCD, Division of Neighborhood Revitalization
 Jared Parks, Lower Shore Land Trust
 Marci Ross, Maryland Office of Tourism Development
 Sumi Selvaraj, DNR - Environmental Justice Officer
 Jackie Specht, DNR - Resilient Systems Officer
 Nick Spurgeon, City of Bowie, Community Services

Sam Stivers, National Park Service

Jacqueline Tahsuda, DNR – Land Acquisition and Planning

CORE PROJECT TEAM

Angela Crenshaw
 Carrie Lhotsky
 Hilary Bell
 Kenneth Miller
 Molly Pickel
 Jonas Williams

CONSULTANT TEAM

Agency Landscape + Planning
 PROS Consulting, Inc.
 CHM Government Services
 Assedo Consulting, LLC

SPECIAL THANKS TO

Eric G. Luedtke, DNR - Director, Capital Projects
 Lily Muhlbaum
 Kevin Coyne

*DNR - Department of Natural Resources

The preparation of this plan was financed in part through a planning grant from the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, under the provisions of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 (Public Law 88-578) as amended.

Plan at a Glance

Maryland’s diverse landscapes are preserved and highlighted through public parks, recreational areas, and other protected lands, providing residents and visitors with a wide array of experiences and educational opportunities that benefit and enhance both the environment and quality of life. Our preserved lands matter because they protect the State’s natural resources, support public health and recreation, and strengthen the environment and economy for future generations.

The Land Preservation and Recreation Plan (LPRP) 2027-2037 focuses on all preserved land in Maryland to identify essential and contemporary issues impacting outdoor recreation and natural resource protection. The 2027-2037 LPRP identifies how Maryland can improve and expand access to recreational opportunities for communities that have not had equal access and makes recommendations to expand the benefits of land and water resource conservation.

VISION

Maryland will steward its protected lands with care, with a goal of conserving 40 percent of the state’s land by 2040 through collaboration and coordinated action.

By investing in vibrant, high quality parks, open spaces, and natural resources that reflect the needs of every Marylander, the state will conserve landscapes that nurture health, community, and economic vitality.

PRINCIPLES

PRINCIPLE ONE

Steward What’s Already Protected

Natural Resource Stewardship
Healthy Forests
Clean Water and Healthy Waterways
Agricultural Land Preservation
Historic and Cultural Resources

PRINCIPLE TWO

Grow, Together

New Open Space and Recreation
New Preserved Lands
Coastal Climate Adaptation
Balanced Development

PRINCIPLE THREE

Reinvest in People, Reinvest in Parks

Ongoing Parks and Open Space Care
Capital Projects
Expanding Access
Interpretation and Programs
Heat Resilience

PRINCIPLE FOUR

Blue and Green Connections

Expanded Multi-use Trail Network
Trail Experiences
Water Access
More Transportation Options

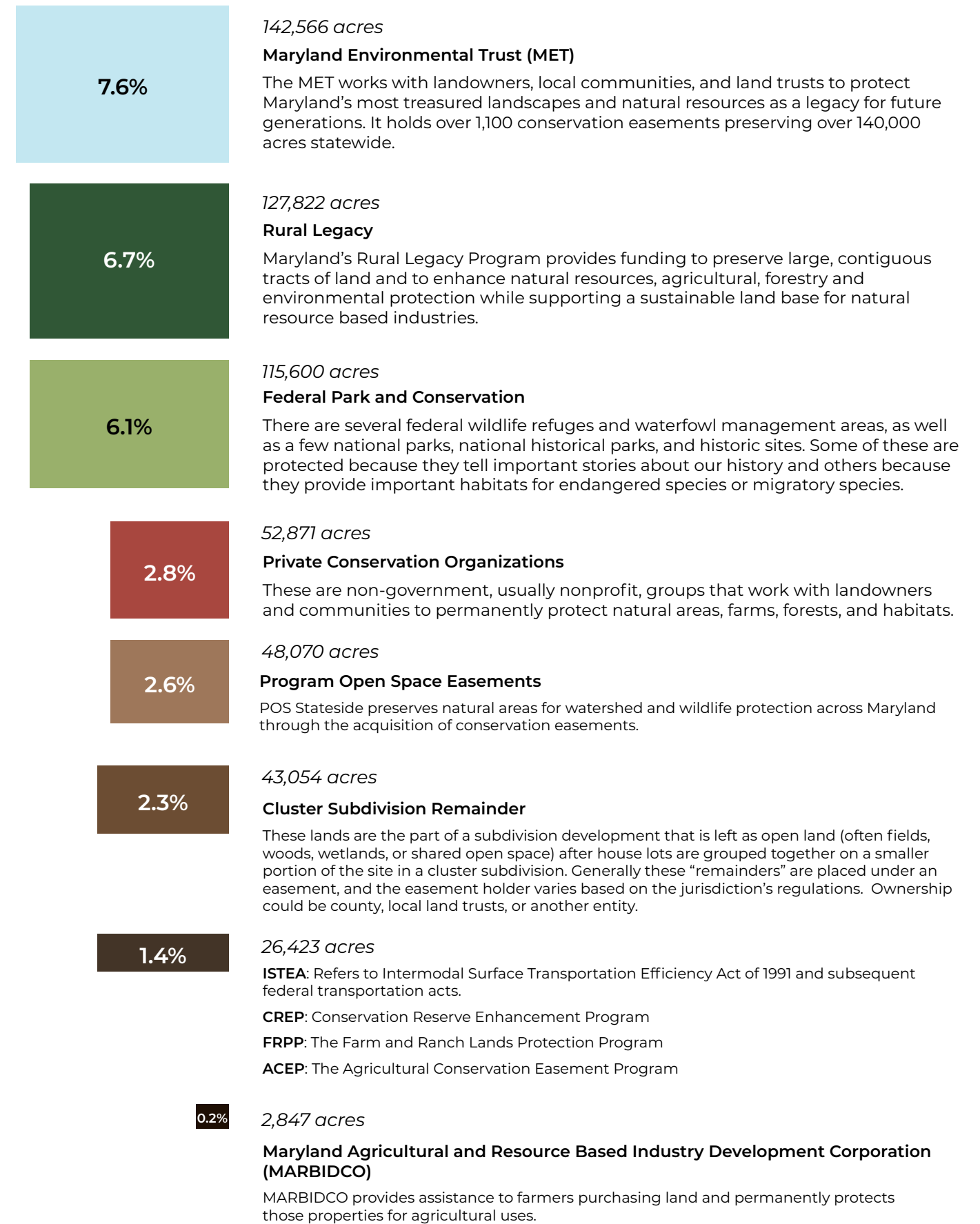
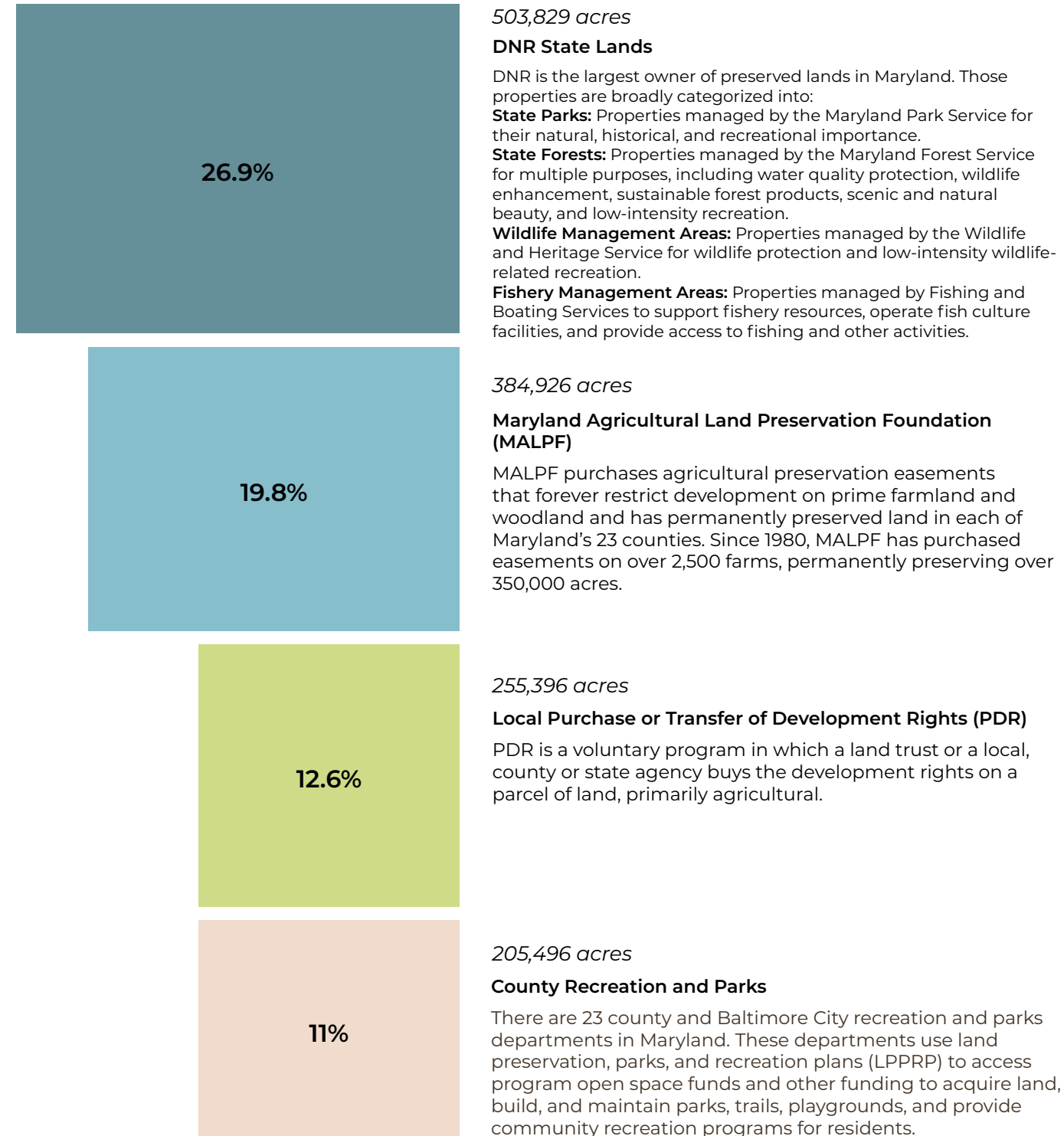
ENDNOTE

With the vision and guiding principles defining Maryland’s collective direction, and the goals and actions outlining the steps needed to realize that vision, **this plan provides a clear path forward for decision-making and investment.**

Through committed leadership, collaboration, and a strong framework for implementation, **the plan serves as both a roadmap and an invitation to champion the values of stewardship, access, and connection** that will shape the future of protected lands across the state.

Land Preservation and Protection

Maryland has been a leader in land conservation for more than 50 years. The types of protected and preserved lands listed below have brought recognition to Maryland’s success with land conservation and recreation. Together, these will continue to meet the goals of land conservation for Marylanders. The acreages presented below reflect acquisitions up to August of 2025. For updated figures and to learn more, please visit the [Maryland Protected Lands Dashboard](#).



142,566 acres

Maryland Environmental Trust (MET)

The MET works with landowners, local communities, and land trusts to protect Maryland’s most treasured landscapes and natural resources as a legacy for future generations. It holds over 1,100 conservation easements preserving over 140,000 acres statewide.

127,822 acres

Rural Legacy

Maryland’s Rural Legacy Program provides funding to preserve large, contiguous tracts of land and to enhance natural resources, agricultural, forestry and environmental protection while supporting a sustainable land base for natural resource based industries.

115,600 acres

Federal Park and Conservation

There are several federal wildlife refuges and waterfowl management areas, as well as a few national parks, national historical parks, and historic sites. Some of these are protected because they tell important stories about our history and others because they provide important habitats for endangered species or migratory species.

52,871 acres

Private Conservation Organizations

These are non-government, usually nonprofit, groups that work with landowners and communities to permanently protect natural areas, farms, forests, and habitats.

48,070 acres

Program Open Space Easements

POS Stateside preserves natural areas for watershed and wildlife protection across Maryland through the acquisition of conservation easements.

43,054 acres

Cluster Subdivision Remainder

These lands are the part of a subdivision development that is left as open land (often fields, woods, wetlands, or shared open space) after house lots are grouped together on a smaller portion of the site in a cluster subdivision. Generally these “remainders” are placed under an easement, and the easement holder varies based on the jurisdiction’s regulations. Ownership could be county, local land trusts, or another entity.

26,423 acres

ISTEA: Refers to Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 and subsequent federal transportation acts.

CREP: Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

FRPP: The Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program

ACEP: The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

2,847 acres

Maryland Agricultural and Resource Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO)

MARBIDCO provides assistance to farmers purchasing land and permanently protects those properties for agricultural uses.



Hazelwood Skate Park, Baltimore, MD

Table of Contents

Letter from DNR	01
Acknowledgements	02
Plan at a Glance	03
Introduction and Background	06
Value of Parks and Other Protected Lands	07
History of Maryland's Public Lands	08
Plan Purpose	09
Planning Process Overview	10
Engagement Overview	11
Engagement Key Findings	12
State of the System Today	13
Maryland's Land Preservation Toolbox	15
Recreation Trends	16
Community Context	18
Climate Considerations	19
Access to Maryland's Outdoor Experiences	20
Vision and Principles	27
How to Use this Chapter	28
Principle #1: Steward What's Already Protected	29
Principle #2: Grow, Together	37
Principle #3: Reinvest in Parks, Reinvest in People	44
Principle #4: Blue and Green Connections	53
Region Snapshots	59
Central Region	60
South Region	65
Eastern Region	70
Western Region	75
Implementing the Vision	80
Funding Strategies	81
Appendix	80

All images are sourced from Maryland DNR, unless otherwise noted

I.

Introduction and Background

A roadmap for continued protection of Maryland's varied, scenic lands

Maryland is often called “America in Miniature” due to its unique combination of mountains, valleys, wetlands, shorelines, beaches, and freshwater streams.

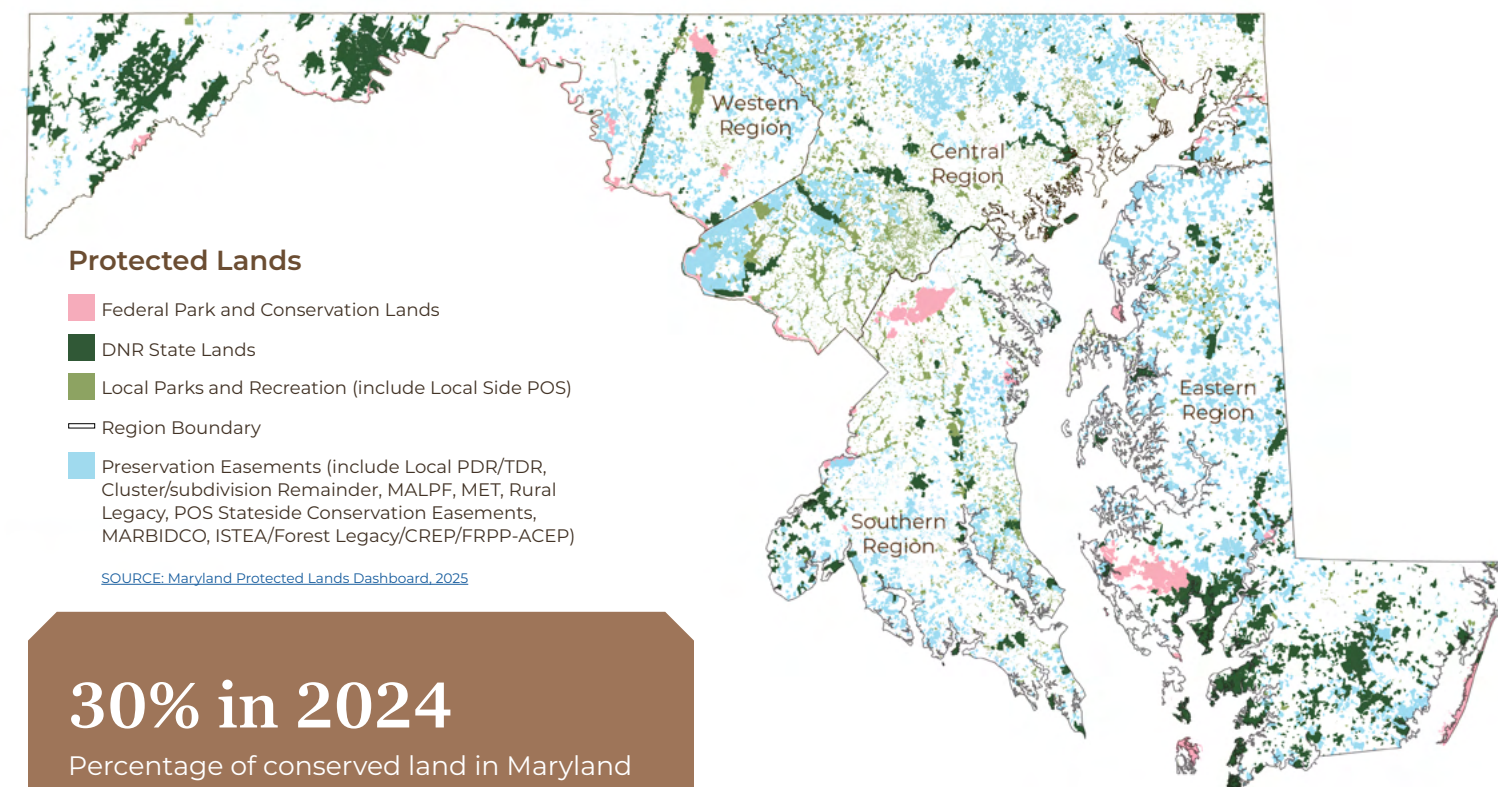
Public parks, recreational facilities, and protected lands provide residents and visitors with a wide array of experiences and educational opportunities that benefit and enhance both the environment and quality of life.

For 6.2 million Marylanders (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024), these places and their amenities foster healthier communities, stimulate local economies, and are critical components of Maryland's culture and heritage. National, State, and local parks, forests, trails, beaches, and open spaces form the foundational infrastructure that supports the variety and quality of outdoor recreation, contributing to the high quality of life for Marylanders and making the State attractive to visitors.

Maryland's landscapes range from the Appalachian Mountains to the Atlantic coastal plain, offering endless opportunities for individuals to engage in outdoor activities, such as boating, fishing, hunting, hiking, and camping.

Over 50 years ago, the U.S. Congress passed the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act (LWCF) to ensure outdoor recreation opportunities for all Americans. Continued protection is made possible by federal funding programs, such as LWCF, and state and local funding programs and private philanthropy and donations. Without these programs MD's protected lands program would be far smaller.

Maryland's DNR has the authority to represent the state with the LWCF program and applies for funding for outdoor recreation on behalf of state, county, and municipal applicants. This document makes Maryland eligible to receive LWCF funds for the next ten years, and may be updated as needed in five years.



30% in 2024

Percentage of conserved land in Maryland

Value of Parks and Other Protected Lands

The benefits of outdoor recreation and land conservation are far-reaching and have positive impacts on quality of life, the environment, and the economy.

Quality of Life

Public agencies across Maryland manage thousands of parks and other public properties that provide residents and visitors with access to a diverse set of recreation opportunities that improve quality of life.

Trails, athletic fields, playgrounds, and more provide opportunities for people of all ages to stay fit and have fun. Water-based recreation helps the public stay cool through the summer, and facilities like pavilions and picnic areas enable social connection through family and community gatherings. Preserved historic and cultural sites create educational resources and moments of connections to the past.

Increasingly, the public is also recognizing the benefits of outdoor recreation for mental health. Taking a hike in the woods, walking along the shoreline, and observing wildlife in its natural habitat are peaceful activities that allow people to enjoy the beauty of nature.

Survey results presented in the following sections demonstrate that Marylanders already utilize public lands heavily for maintaining a high quality of life. Future improvements to amenities and access will ensure that people across the state experience these benefits.

Environment

Land conservation also benefits Marylanders by protecting valuable natural resources. Natural surfaces and vegetated areas control stormwater to prevent flooding and filter runoff, helping to maintain water quality for aquatic life and human use. Further, conserved lands contribute to clean air by maintaining tree canopy and protect wildlife habitat for a wide variety of species. At many conserved sites, environmental education signage and programming builds the next generation of stewards of our natural resources.



Economy

The environmental benefits listed above create significant economic savings for Marylanders. The concept of ecosystem services attempts to quantify that value*. Ecosystem services were estimated to have a value of \$8 billion by providing stormwater mitigation, wildlife habitat, and various forms of water and air purification. In this way, land conservation enables natural systems to provide services for a lower cost and with less maintenance than manmade alternatives.

In addition to providing ecosystem services, protected lands generate important regional economic activity, including through tourism, equipment rentals and purchase, and services. In 2024, outdoor recreation added \$10.6 billion to Maryland's gross domestic product (GDP) and contributed 85,083 jobs to the economy**. Maryland continues to grow in this sector, with guidance from the [Office of Outdoor Recreation at DNR](#). With these many benefits, it is clear that land conservation is a good investment for Maryland.

* [Accounting for Maryland's Ecosystem Services](#), Maryland Department of Natural Resources

** [2024 Outdoor Recreation Economic Statistics](#), Bureau of Economic Analysis

1,908,894 acres

Total preserved lands including state, local, and privately owned easements



Recreation Value

Outdoor recreation contributes **\$10.6B** to Maryland's GDP annually.



Ecological Value

Maryland's preserved lands provide stormwater mitigation and wildlife habitat.



Economic Value

For every \$1 the State invests in State lands, **\$29.27** is generated in economic activity.*

History of Maryland's Public Lands

For over 100 years, the Maryland State Forest, Park and Wildlife and Heritage Services have maintained and provided public access to Maryland's most beautiful and historic places.

Since its earliest days, Maryland's DNR has balanced competing demands on public lands. In the 1910s, the focus centered on forest health over recreation, with urgent attention to wildfires and erosion.

By the 1950s, public demand for affordable outdoor recreation increased, and parks adapted to meet that demand. Another significant increase in demand during the 2020 pandemic created unprecedented pressures on our parks, leaving the Department to confront an enduring challenge: preserving natural spaces while providing Maryland families affordable outdoor spaces to recreate in.

Forestry Crisis and Conservation

The origin of the agency was decidedly forest-conservation oriented. Observers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century noted the rapid disappearance of tree cover in many States, including Maryland. Much of the destruction

was due to forest fires and excessive logging. Conservationists believed that a more rational management system based on science was needed to protect the State's remaining forests. This led to the establishment of the State Board of Forestry in 1906, whose priorities included forest fire prevention and conservation education.

Rise of Outdoor Recreation

Although the emphasis was purely on forest conservation, tight budgetary appropriations forced the laws to broaden, which eventually expanded the definition to include State forest reserves as public parks. Beginning in the late 19th century all the way till the early 20th century, the growing middle class sought to "get back to nature" by spending free time outdoors. These demands were met by public parks and wildlife management areas (the oldest of which dates back to 1919), which could also meet the budgetary needs for forest reserves.

CCC Modernizes Parks

The New Deal-era Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) brought a large influx of dollars and labor to Maryland's park infrastructure and amenities. The CCC disbanded when WWII began, leaving a larger park system with greater staffing needs.

Balancing Land Preservation and Parks

In 1941, the department was renamed to the Department of Forests and Parks, placing conservation and recreation in equal emphasis. The rise of highways and leisure causes park attendance to soar from 240,000 people in 1945 to 5.3 million people by 1959.

Ellis Era Planning

Under Dir. Spencer P. Ellis, the department prioritized planning and developed ambitious master plans to improve recreation and access.

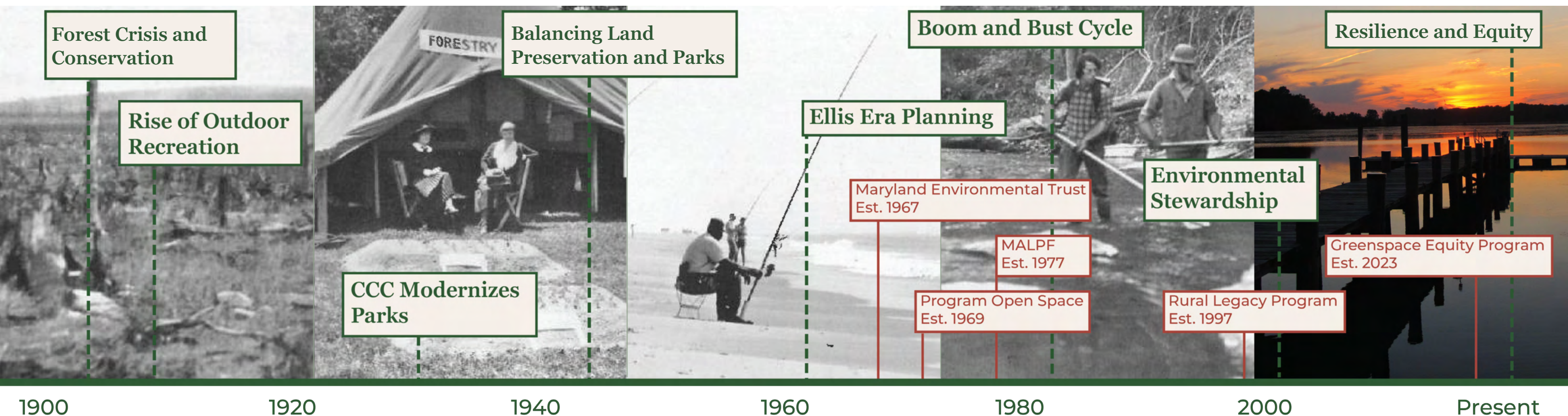
End-of-Century Trends

It was not until 1969 that the Maryland Department of Natural Resources was established, recentering the protection of natural resources and the enjoyment of preserved parks and natural areas into one organization. Within DNR, the Department of Forests and Parks was split into Maryland Park Service and Maryland Forest Service. Also in 1969, Program Open Space was created to preserve open lands and outdoor recreation areas for public use and long-term conservation. Ever since, with the help of Program Open Space and its required land preservation and recreation planning, Maryland's State lands and county parks have become critical places for outdoor recreation and sensitive ecosystem protection.

Present Day

As the state and local jurisdictions look to the future, recent programs and investments have focused on increasing climate preparedness and resilience, as well as addressing environmental justice concerns. Climate resilience plans have been developed for specific lands with high risks, and grant programs have supported coastal resilience. Likewise, DNR is developing an Environmental Justice Strategic Plan and programs like Greenspace Equity have funded investment in communities with limited park access and/or those experiencing adverse health, environmental, economic, and social stressors. These efforts are being implemented in alignment with Maryland's Executive Order [Valuing Opportunity, Inclusion, and Community Equity](#) which outlines opportunities for the State government to take a whole-of-government approach to addressing environmental inequities in the state and established an Interagency Environmental Justice and Equity Advisory Council to increase coordination. While continuing its traditional role in preserving public lands, DNR seeks to prioritize climate resilience and environmental justice in the coming years.

For specific funding programs that have supported these initiatives, see pages 81-82.



Plan Purpose

The 2027-2037 Land Preservation and Recreation Plan (LPRP) focuses on all preserved land in Maryland to identify contemporary issues impacting outdoor recreation and natural resource protection and to guide land conservation and development of outdoor recreation opportunities over the next ten years.

The plan also serves as Maryland's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan and qualifies the State to receive funding through the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund. The previous plan, LPRP 2019 - 2023, focused on identification of current needs, trends, and priorities for enhancing public outdoor

recreation opportunities Statewide, expansion of the Department's GIS inventory of public outdoor recreation areas, updating Statewide goals for improving outdoor recreation by incorporating the central theme of "Connecting People and Places."

LPRP 2027-2037 builds on the prior plan and identifies how Maryland can improve access to recreational opportunities for communities with limited recreation access and meet emerging recreation needs. The plan outlines methods for the State, county and local governments, and other partners to engage with communities in planning open space and recreational opportunities. The plan also identifies gaps in service areas across the State and provides a long-term vision for land acquisition to meet the State's goal of 40% land preserved by 2040 (established by The Maryland the Beautiful Act of 2023).

Over the coming years, Maryland's public lands and protected lands will face increasing pressures, including growing visitation and intensifying climate events. The State's population is projected to increase 9% by 2040, leading to more use of parks and open spaces. Park use during COVID reached record highs, and although it has dipped slightly in the years since, outdoor recreation continues to grow gradually each year. Budget constraints mean that creative funding strategies and new partnerships will be more critical than ever to ensure the long-term health and sustainability of Maryland's parks and other preserved lands.

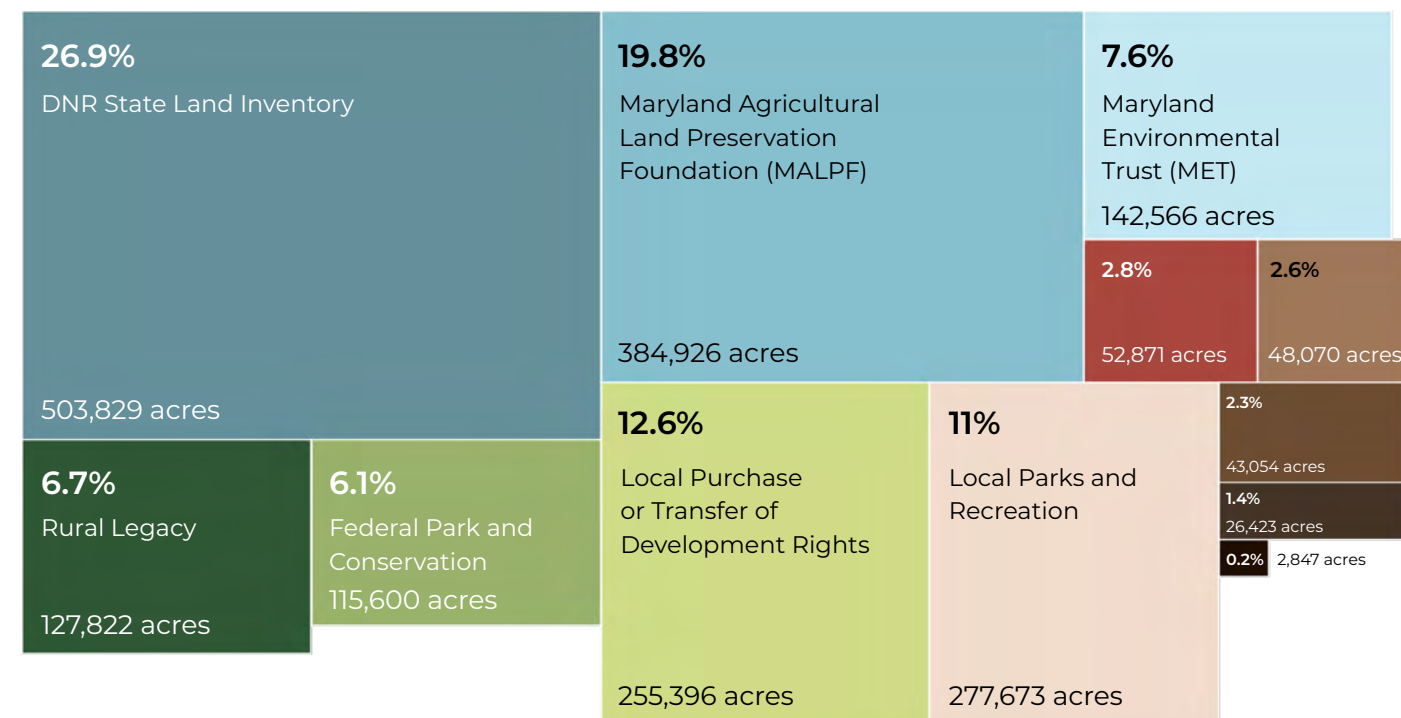
SYSTEM PRESSURES WILL ONLY GROW IN THE YEARS AHEAD



Growing Maintenance Needs

Improvements made in the mid-twentieth century are in need of reinvestment.

LPRP Covers the Full Mosaic of Protected Land in Maryland (as of Jan 2026)



- Private Conservation Organizations
- Cluster Subdivision Remainder
- ISTEA/ Forest Legacy/ CREP/ FRPP-ACEP*
- Maryland Agricultural and Resource Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO)

*ISTEA: Refers to Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 and subsequent federal transportation acts.
 CREP: Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
 FRPP: The Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program
 ACEP: The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

9% by 2040

Projected population increase of Maryland.

SOURCE: Maryland State Data Center, 2025



Changing Climate

Adapting to changing climate and recovering from weather events are costly.

Planning Process Overview

The Land Preservation and Recreation Plan 2027-2037 was a collaborative process that engaged people from across the State, including community members, state agency staff, land preservation stewards, and visitors.

Community engagement played a pivotal role in shaping the plan's recommendations, ensuring that the needs of the community were actively sought and thoughtfully reflected throughout the planning effort. The process unfolded across three distinct phases.

Phase 1: Listen and Learn

This initial phase, built on previous work by the [2023 State of the Park System Plan Study](#) and the [2019 - 2023 LPRP](#), created a comprehensive existing conditions assessment of the State's recreation, facility, and open space gaps. The existing inventory was revisited, and a statistically

valid survey was deployed to understand user demand and develop an updated level of service analysis, based on the previous land preservation and recreation plan. In order to understand user demand and needs for public land spaces and programs, a public outreach and engagement strategy was developed, which engaged the broader public and key stakeholders at major milestones.

The strategy also included approaches to expand participation and measures of success to ensure the plan included diverse perspectives from across the state. Technical Advisory Committee meetings and stakeholder focus groups provided additional perspectives and informed the operational and recreation analyses.

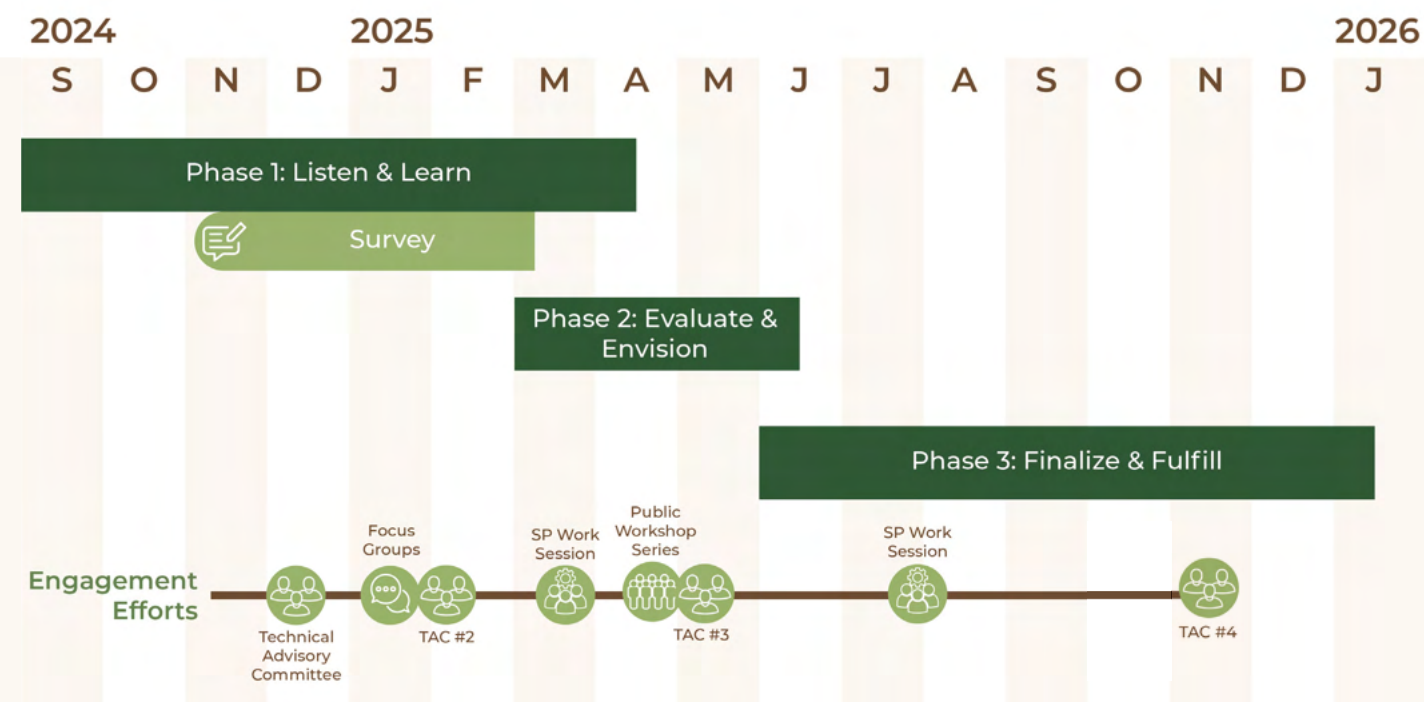
Phase 2: Evaluate and Envision

Phase 2 included the development of plan goals and objectives that complement Statewide goals and support their implementation in response to

the needs identified in the previous phase. A series of recommendations and a preliminary framework to achieve the plan goals and identify programs to achieve these goals were also created.

Phase 3: Finalize and Fulfill

This final phase synthesized the previous findings into a coherent, memorable vision for the future and an implementation strategy to bring the vision and recommendations to life. A feasible and actionable implementation program to realize the plan's vision and incorporate any feedback for final approvals was also developed.



Patuxent River State Park



Assateague State Park



Gambrill State Park

Engagement Overview

The Maryland community has provided an important input in LPRP recommendations. Public engagement ranged from meetings with a variety of stakeholders in focus groups, community conversations in farmers markets and festivals across the State, and two community surveys.

Focus Group Meetings

Five focus group meetings with various government officials, community stakeholders, and partner organizations were held in the spring of 2025. The meetings were topic specific to allow for in-depth conversations regarding plan opportunities. Topics included:

- ▶ County needs and concerns
- ▶ Land preservation
- ▶ Visitor experience / recreation
- ▶ Operations/maintenance/staffing (two focus groups to cover both State and local needs)

Community Conversations and Survey

A simpler survey was available publicly for anyone to respond, and was not statistically valid, because of the nature of the demographics of those who responded. DNR staff and the consultant team attended four pop-up events in the spring of 2025 to share analysis and survey findings and gather ideas for the plan vision.

In parallel to the pop-up events, a community survey was shared broadly with Maryland residents and frequent local and State park users. The survey included many of the same questions as the pop-up outreach. Over 1,200 people responded to the survey.

Statistically Valid Survey (SVS)

A community needs assessment survey was sent out at the end of 2024 with the goal of identifying recreation and open space needs for the entire State. The survey was sent to random households and the responses captured reflect a snapshot of Maryland's income distribution, race/ethnicity distribution, and geographic density. The survey was sent to a random sample of households. In total 2,818 surveys were completed. The overall results aligned with State demographics and included responses representing all regions of the State.

5 Focus Group conversations
Over 110 people were invited to the focus groups and between 40-50 people participated in the meetings

162 Non-English SVS responses
Spanish, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese

400+ Attendees at four pop-up events across the State

1,200 Total community survey respondents

2,818 Total statistically valid survey (SVS) respondents from across Maryland

Pop-up Community Events (pictures from Bladensburg, Salisbury and Baltimore)



Engagement Key Findings

Thousands of memories, concerns, and ideas, from surveys and focus group sessions, were collected over the duration of the plan. This feedback was cataloged by relevant topic to help understand community priorities for future recreation and land preservation.

Four key themes emerged from community and staff input. These engagement themes, along with the plan's focus on investing in land preservation frame the plan's structure and four resulting chapters. The following four takeaways highlight each engagement insight, highlights any key quotes and data points that reinforce its relevance, along with community ideas for future action.



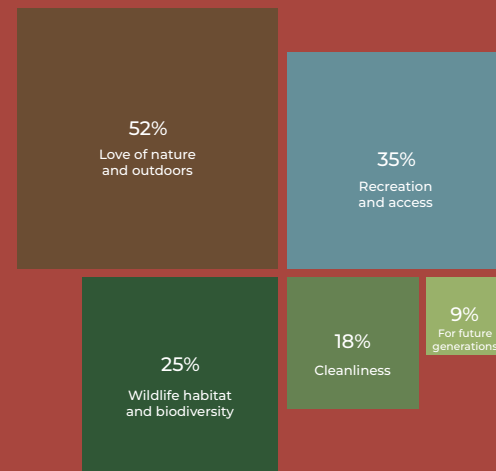
Pop-up event in Baltimore, Maryland

1 LOVE OF NATURE AND THE OUTDOORS

Marylanders cared deeply about the places they go to for many interests like hiking, hunting, fishing, and much more, and wanted those lands to be stewarded for future generations.

Reasons why the community wants parks and land protected in Maryland

Percentages are not mutually exclusive.



Community feedback on watersheds

"A wonderful watershed like Gunpowder Falls needs a lot of attention!"

"We can protect land and the bay watershed by providing recreational and educational opportunities for all."

"Preserve land and watersheds in their pristine State for current and future generations!"

Top actions the community wanted for Maryland's historical assets (parks and open spaces that have historical or cultural resources on site)

- "Improve existing parks with interactive information about the history of the area"
- "Include local knowledge for preservation of historical and cultural resources"

2 PROTECTING LAND IS INCREASINGLY CRITICAL

Many wish to expand land preservation to support the state's farming legacy and better protect valuable natural resources from future development.

Character, climate resilience, recreation, and economic development were all cited as reasons to support land preservation

"Land preservation programs help support the **rural character** (the scenic views, the farm stands, the wineries, the agriculture industry) of areas around major State parks destinations."

Sentiments on coastal and climate resiliency

- "I want to have a variety of protected lands, including various coasts and waterways"
- "I value the birds, fish, and other life dependent on coastal marshes"
- "Maryland's protected lands are important to building resilience to future threats"

Concerns from the community about future development

- "Green areas need to keep up with the population boom that Maryland is experiencing"
- "Too much development can cause loss of Maryland nature and beauty"
- "We all need to have a place to 'get away from it all'... now and in the future."

3 FUNDING PARKS AND RECREATION IS A PRIORITY

Marylanders believed that State parks require more funding to make deferred maintenance investments and provide high-quality amenities and programming.

64% of the community

Wanted to increase overall funding for State-owned parks in Maryland.

Places to cool off in the heat were among the top identified amenities residents would like more of

- Splash Pads
- Shaded Trails
- Water Stations
- Evening Park Access

Programs that ranked most important to residents

- Nature programs / environmental education
- Festivals / special events
- Fishing programs
- Firearm safety training

4 PARKS CONNECT PEOPLE

Visitors will drive to meet desired recreational needs, especially those that are not provided for at local parks, to access activities that support their social, physical, and mental health and wellbeing.

96% of the community

Typically use personal automobiles (car, truck, van, SUV, etc.) to travel to parks and facilities.

Top improvements for trails

- "More wheelchair access to trails."
- "Allow for more preservation of trails for education"
- "More staff patrol on hiking trails for safety"

Top issues where the community wanted to see improvement in water trails

- Connectivity
- Cleanliness
- Safety
- Signage and Maps

II.

State of the System Today

Land preservation is integral to Maryland's legacy.

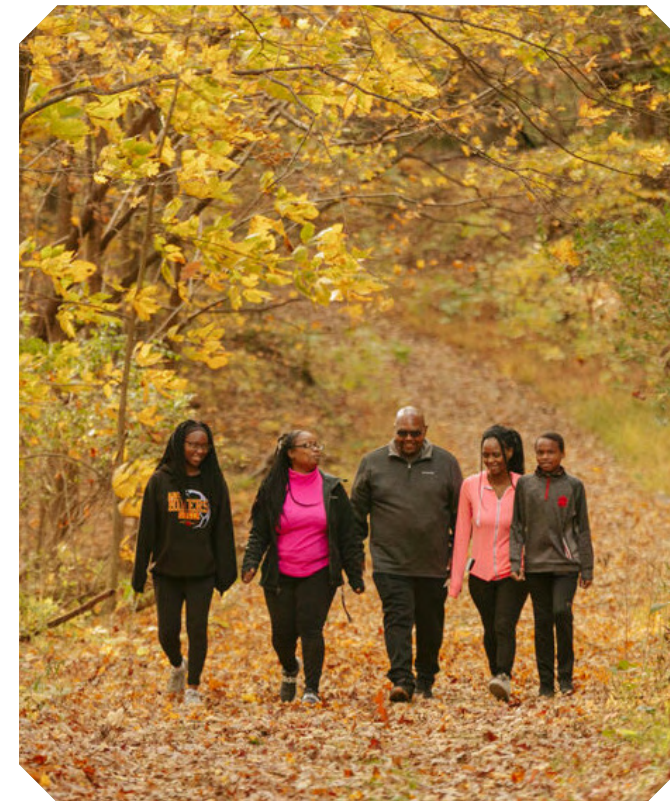
Maryland's open spaces are a testament to the State's deep respect for balance between growth and preservation.

From the marshes of the Eastern Shore to the Appalachian Mountains of the Western Region, Maryland's open space system and preserved lands have been shaped by centuries of stewardship.

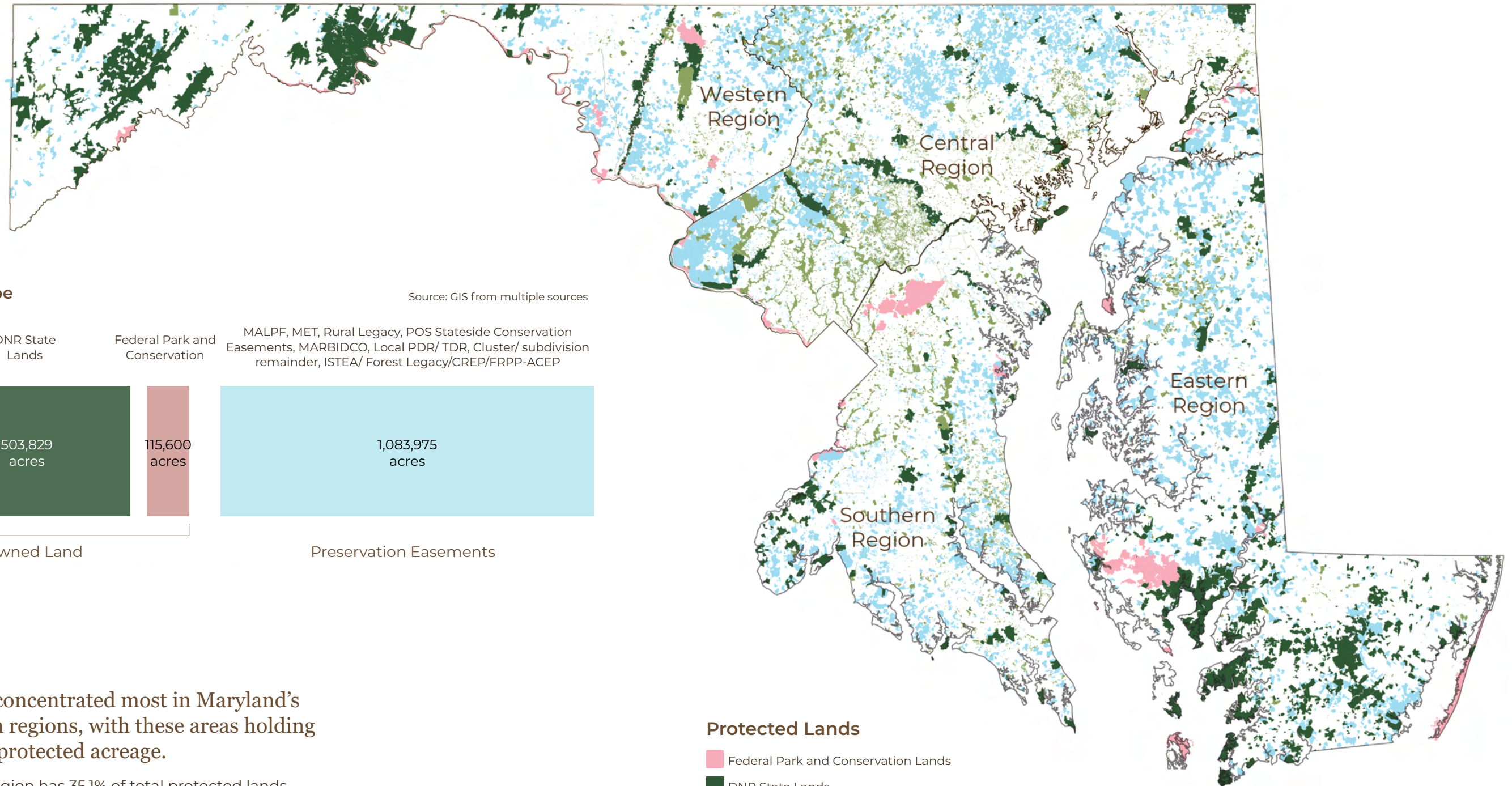
Maryland's land preservation is not merely about saving land; it is about saving identity. Its farmlands remain productive because generations of farmers have partnered with State programs that protect acreage from urban sprawl, ensuring food, heritage, and habitat endure together. Public-private conservation easements knit together a quiet network of sanctuaries for both wildlife and people, where the rhythms of migration and harvest still define the seasons.

Wetlands and buffers are restored not only to protect water quality, but to preserve a sense of belonging to a place where water is a central part of the State's economy. Trails, parks, and forests are cared for with foresight, inviting residents to experience the calm of an open meadow as easily as a city park bench.

Initiatives like Program Open Space and the Maryland the Beautiful Act support permanent protection and conservation funding, with a goal for 40% land conservation by 2040. Land preservation efforts focus on habitat protection, preserving forests and wetlands, and supporting climate resilience. Preservation also ensures historic sites, recreational access, and spaces for community engagement and education are maintained.

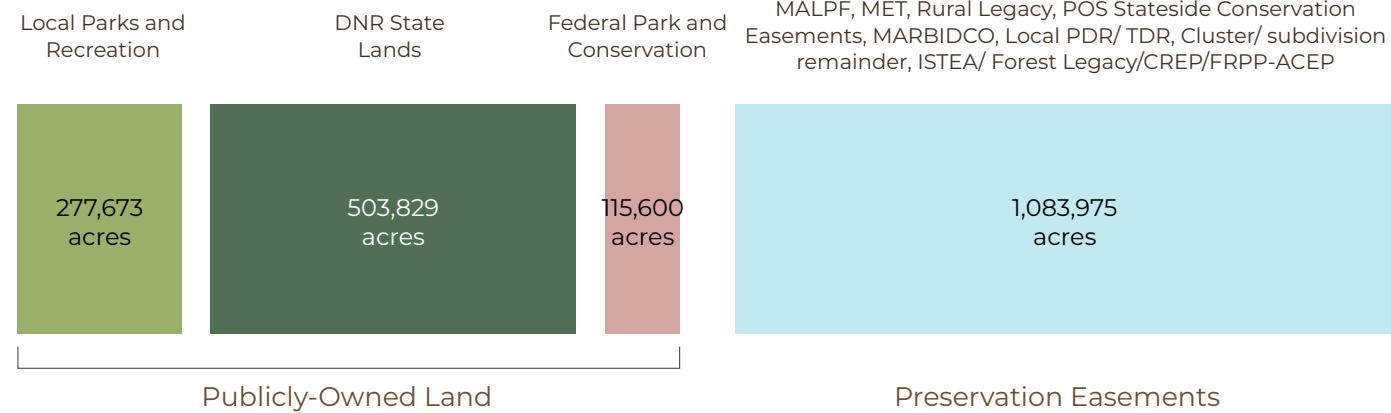


The State has achieved a goal to preserve 30% of its land by 2030...



Source: GIS from multiple sources

Land Preserved by Type



Protected lands are concentrated most in Maryland's Eastern and Western regions, with these areas holding the highest share of protected acreage.

Regionally, the Eastern region has 35.1% of total protected lands, followed by Western with 25.7%, Central with 24.5%, and Southern with 14.7%. The State is projecting forward with the Maryland the Beautiful Act of 2023, aiming to conserve 40% of Maryland by 2040, prioritizing climate resilience, important places, and increased public access through new trails and greenways.

Protected Lands

- Federal Park and Conservation Lands
- DNR State Lands
- Local Parks and Recreation (include Local Side POS)
- Region Boundary
- Preservation Easements (include Local PDR/TDR, Cluster/subdivision Remainder, MALPF, MET, Rural Legacy, POS Stateside Conservation Easements, MARBIDCO, ISTE/Forest Legacy/CREP/FRPP-ACEP)

SOURCE: Maryland Protected Lands Dashboard, 2025

And is looking to preserve 40% by 2040!

Maryland's Land Preservation Toolbox

Land preservation is predominately accomplished through three methods: fee simple acquisition, conservation easements, and agricultural easements.

These tools are often used together to bolster land acquisition strategies, especially for larger parcels and more complex acquisition needs. Each tool is described in more detail in the next few pages with a few recent examples of their use to preserve lands across the State. While these methods have helped Maryland acquire thousands of acres over the last several years, new approaches to land acquisition that tap into new funding streams, take into account long term costs of maintenance and operations of lands and buildings purchased, and ways to protect and potentially grow Stateside funding will be critical to the continued preservation of special natural, recreational and cultural resources.

Fee Simple Acquisition

Complete land purchase for permanent protection

STATE / FEDERAL

- Forest Legacy Program**
 The Forest Legacy Program is a federal program that works in partnership with States, supporting efforts to protect environmentally sensitive forests from conversion to non-forest uses.
- Program Open Space Stateside (Fee Simple)**
 Program Open Space Stateside preserves natural areas for public recreation and watershed and wildlife protection across Maryland through fee simple and conservation easement acquisitions.

STATE AND LOCAL

- Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)**
 LWCF provides grants from the National Park Service to local and state government for the acquisition of land for outdoor recreation.

- Program Open Space Local**
 It provides financial and technical assistance to local governments for the planning, acquisition, and/or development of recreation land or open space areas.

LOCAL



DNR purchased a historic property that would become the first Maryland State Park in Wicomico County.*

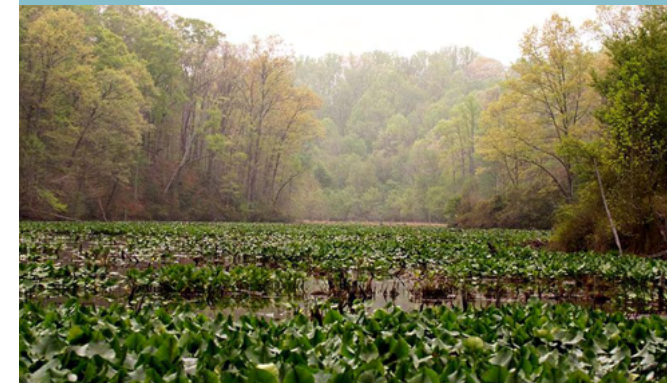
*The acquisition will expand public recreational opportunities for birding and hiking, and provide opportunities for historic and cultural interpretation of Long Hill.

Conservation Easement

Land remains private but has development restrictions

- Forest Legacy Program (Easement)**
- Program Open Space Stateside (Easement)**
- Maryland Environmental Trust**
 Maryland Environmental Trust accepts donated easements on a case-by case basis.
- Rural Legacy**
 Maryland's Rural Legacy Program provides funding to preserve large, contiguous tracts of land and to enhance natural resource, agricultural, forestry and environmental protection while supporting a sustainable land base for natural resource based industries.

- Local Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) and Purchase of Development Rights (PDR)**
- Private Conservation Organizations**
- Local Conservation Easement**



Bacon Ridge Natural Area is protected through a conservation easement between Anne Arundel County, MET, and Scenic Rivers Land Trust.

Agricultural Easement

Preserves farmland for agricultural use through development restrictions

- Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF)**
 The MALPF purchases agricultural preservation easements that forever restrict development on prime farmland and woodland and has permanently preserved land in each of Maryland's 23 counties and Baltimore City.
- Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO)**
 MARBIDCO provides financial programs, including agribusiness loans and grants, to support and enhance Maryland's agricultural, forestry, and seafood industries.
- Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), the Farm and Ranch Protection Program (FRPP), and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**

- Local Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) and Purchase of Development Rights (PDR)**
- Private Conservation Organizations**
- Local Agricultural Easement**



Washington County preserved 365 acres of farmland in March 2025 through the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF).

Recreation Trends

OVERALL GROWTH IN OUTDOOR RECREATION PARTICIPATION, BUT LESS TIME SPENT OUTDOORS

In 2023, the number of outdoor recreation participants across the United States rose to nearly 176 million, reflecting growing nationwide interest in nature and recreation. However, while overall participation numbers are climbing, the average frequency of outdoor outings declined to 62.5 annual trips per person, indicating that many people are spending less time outside. This trend reveals an opportunity, where increasing populations and expanding communities could be better engaged by encouraging casual participants to visit more often, thereby strengthening and supporting connections to outdoor spaces.

RENEWED INTEREST IN UNIQUE RECREATION EXPERIENCES

The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped outdoor recreation as public health concerns and social distancing measures drove people toward activities that prioritized health and safety. This shift led to increased participation in activities

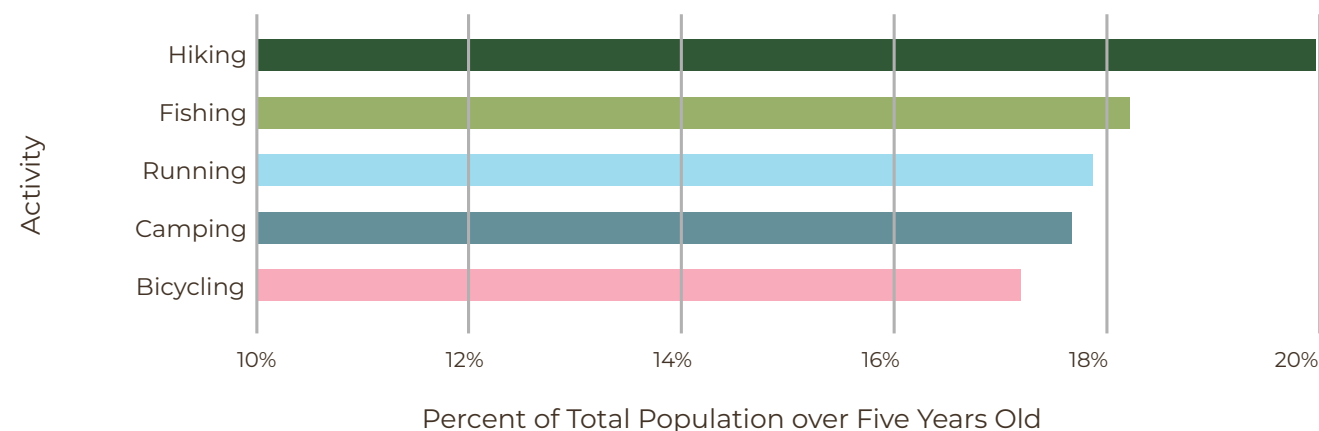
like boating, fishing, camping, golf, hiking, cycling, skiing, and snowmobiling. With this migration came the emergence of a new user group carrying expectations for the variety and quality of outdoor recreation experiences. The evolution of these shifts forced owner/operators to reposition portfolios and elevate amenities and overall quality to continue to be market relevant to this shifting paradigm.

The continued prioritization of outdoor experiences highlights a critical opportunity for the DNR to rethink how they engage with communities and meet evolving demands. At the same time, investors, developers, and operators capitalized on this surge in participation by working together to improve quality, diversify recreational offerings, and create innovative partnerships.

An example of this is seen in Pigeon Forge, TN, where developers created programs that offered glamping sites, upgraded park units, and added upscale lodging facilities for campers and visitors. The developers also enhanced the size and design of RV sites with full utilities, and added a plethora of guest amenities throughout the campground.

Top Outdoor Recreation Activities Nationwide by Participation Rate

Source: [2024 Outdoor Participation Trends Report](#)



Community Survey Trends in Participation of Recreation Activities in Maryland
 The statistically valid survey asked many of the same questions between the last plan in 2018 and this plan. The table below identifies how participation rates in different kinds of recreation in the state have changed between 2018 and 2024.

Item	2018	2024	Difference
Visiting Natural Areas	30%	70%	40%
Visiting Historical Sites	31%	64%	33%
Paddling	20%	46%	26%
Birding/Wildlife Viewing	19%	44%	25%
Walking	70%	91%	21%
Hiking/Backpacking	45%	65%	20%
Tent Camping	19%	36%	17%
Outdoor Special Events	17%	32%	15%
Picnicking	36%	48%	12%
Non-Tidal Fishing	23%	35%	12%
Target Shooting	9%	20%	11%
Archery	5%	15%	10%
Motor Boating	14%	24%	10%
Road and Paved Trail Biking	16%	25%	9%
Viewing Historical Reenactments/Other Historical Events	16%	25%	9%
RV/Trailer Camping	7%	16%	9%
Swimming Outdoors	41%	49%	8%
Hunting	13%	21%	8%
Sledding	16%	23%	7%
Nature Programs	15%	22%	7%
Playgrounds/Nature Play	36%	42%	6%
Tidal Fishing	22%	27%	5%
Camping Cabins	18%	23%	5%
Off-Road Vehicle Use	8%	12%	4%
Cross-Country Skiing	4%	7%	3%
Downhill Skiing	11%	13%	2%
Mountain Biking	15%	14%	-1%
Horseback Riding	9%	8%	-1%
Snowmobiling	4%	2%	-2%
Sailing	8%	6%	-2%
Outdoor Sports	31%	28%	-3%
Running/Jogging	41%	29%	-12%

Community Context

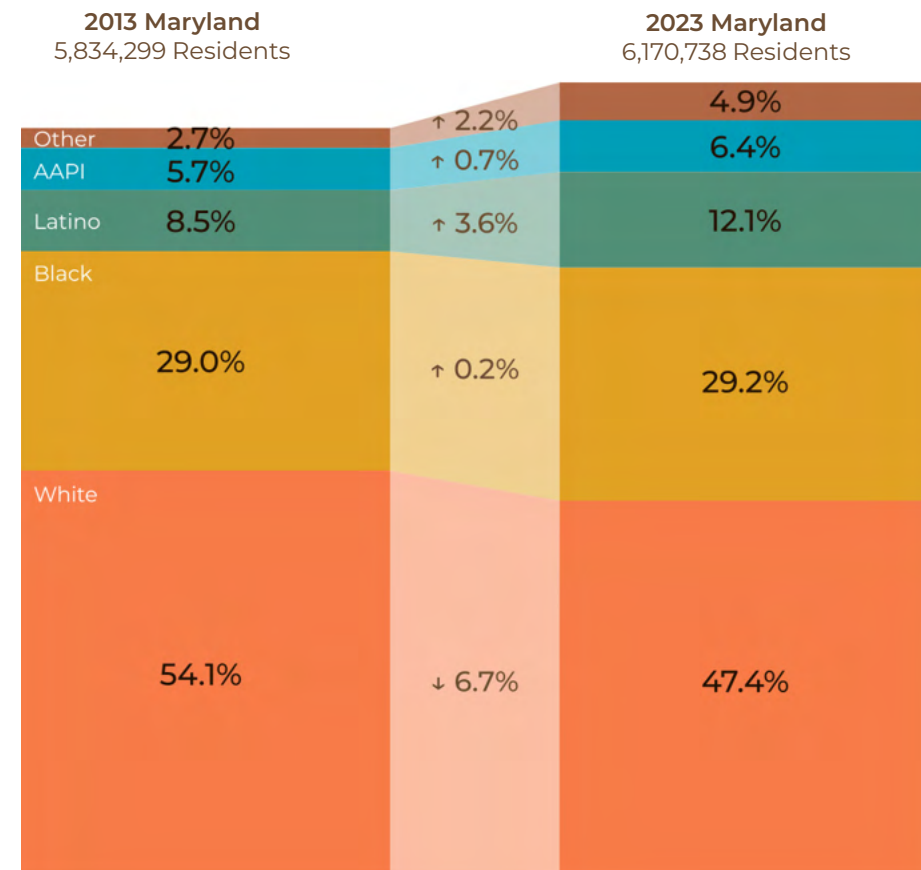
CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographic changes among Marylanders are evident. Over the past decade, diversity has increased in Maryland: the proportion of white residents decreased from 54.1% in 2013 to 47.4% in 2023, while Latino, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI), Black, and other groups all grew. Notably, 12.1% of Maryland's residents are now Latino, an increase of 3.6%. There are testimonials from rangers highlighting that many park visitors speak Spanish, and new park events have begun to focus on engaging park visitors who speak Korean. The spatial distribution of age groups is shifting. Older residents (65 and older) are primarily concentrated on the Eastern Shore, whereas younger populations (under 18) are found more

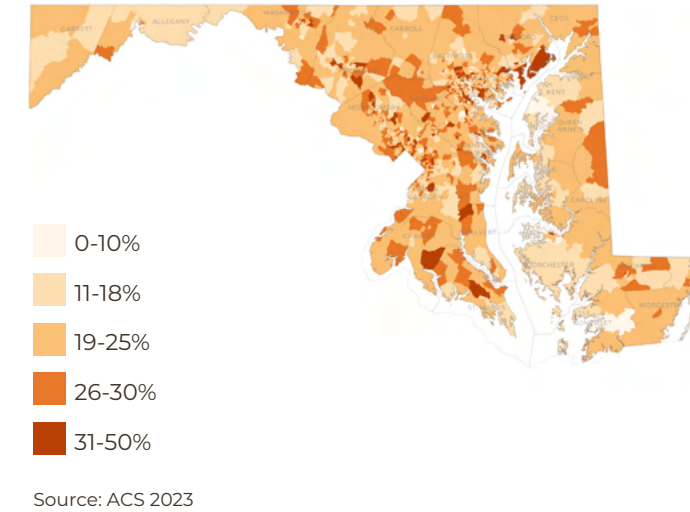
in Central and Southern Maryland. Maryland's population is not only growing, with a statewide increase of 336,439 people from 2013 to 2023, but it is also getting denser in the urban core and select counties. Most central counties are experiencing more than a 15% population growth, and Montgomery, Prince George's, Anne Arundel, Howard, and Frederick continue to show substantial growth.

Across Maryland, 91% of households reported having access to a car in 2023, with a much lower average in urban areas like Baltimore City (72%). Areas with lower rates of car ownership would benefit from the provision of small, local parks and public transportation to other public lands.

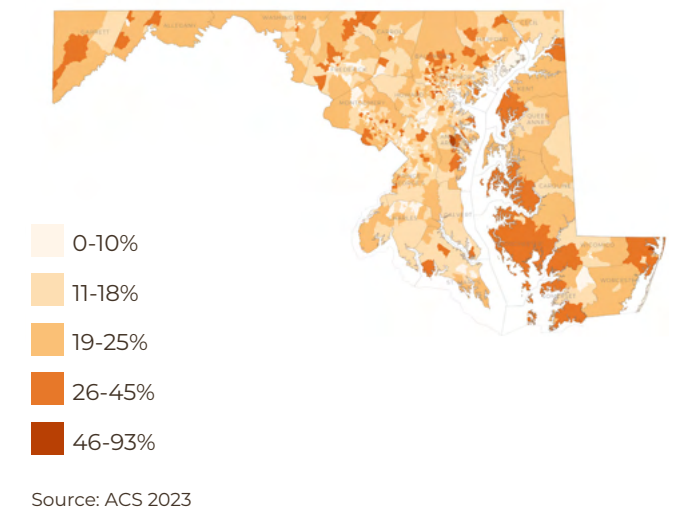
Change in Maryland Resident Demographics



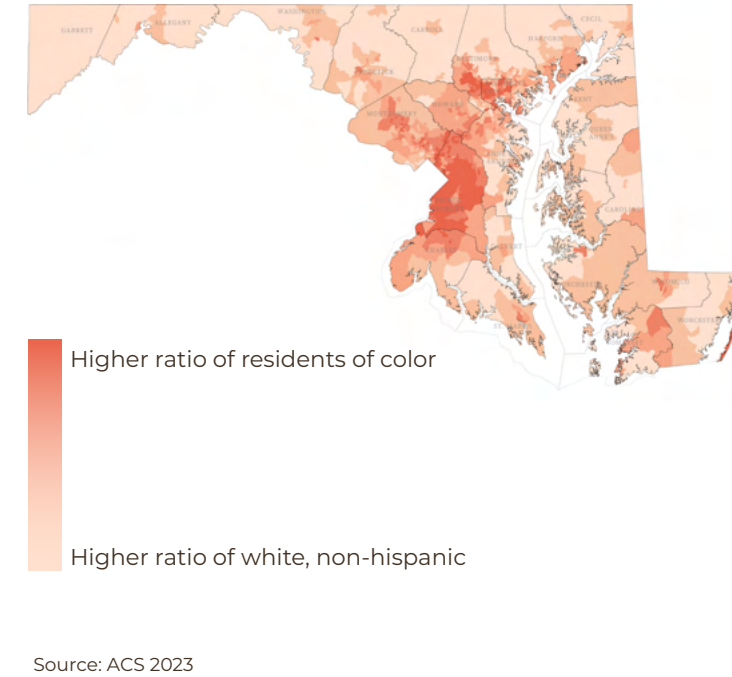
Percent population under 18 years, 2023



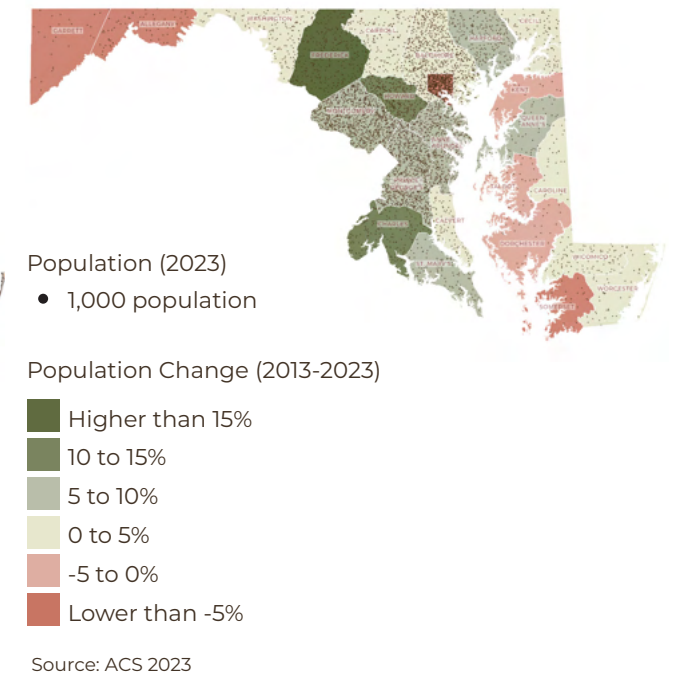
Percent population 65 years and over, 2023



Racial Diversity, 2023

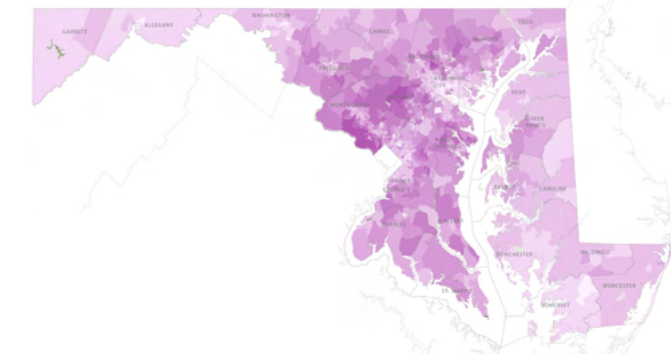


Population Change, 2023



Median Income (\$)
 0 - 33,599
 33,600 - 53,878
 53,879 - 72,500
 72,501 - 91,653
 91,654 - 112,235
 112,236 - 140,048
 140,049 - 182,703
 182,704 - 250,000
 Source: US CENSUS 2020

Median Income, 2023



Climate Considerations

SHIFTING CLIMATE

Maryland is becoming hotter and rainier, with predictions indicating the State's climate will resemble northern Louisiana within the next sixty years (study by University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science). These shifts bring about evolving recreation needs; for instance, unreliable snow is altering winter activity options, while increased flood events and hotter days draw more visitors seeking water access. Based on the 2020 - 2023 monthly state park visitor data (MD Park Service), waterfront park demand has grown, yet water sometimes becomes too warm for cooling off, adding complexity to recreation planning.

Climate change is also affecting infrastructure and landscapes. Coastal storm consequences are visible at recreation sites such as Assateague, where climate-related changes impact both the physical attributes and its visitor experiences. Wildlife is also at risk, with sites like Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge experiencing environmental stressors that threaten local ecosystems and species diversity. Rising seas particularly endanger Maryland's State parks. By 2090, 49 State parks could be affected by sea level rise, with nearly half of these projected to experience substantial inundation, placing immense pressure on preservation and conservation efforts.

In response, Maryland has opportunities to advance resilience through adaptive strategies. It is crucial to plan for wetland migration and managed retreat in vulnerable areas, steward both natural and cultural resources, and adopt new maintenance and building standards that account for long-term climate impacts. These initiatives can help ensure parks provide heat relief, maintain water and air quality, and mitigate flood risk for communities. Additionally, proactive management of invasive and climate-migrating species will become increasingly important to preserve park ecosystems. By embracing these approaches, Maryland's parks can continue to serve as vital resources for recreation and ecological health despite the challenges posed by a changing climate.



Extreme flood events (Patapsco Valley floods)



Dunes washed away from Assateague Island State Park



Extreme heat in Maryland



Invasive Species (Honeysuckle)



Sea Level Rise along Maryland Coast

1 feet



3 feet

SOURCE: Maryland Coastal Atlas, 2026

Other Resources for Addressing Climate Concerns in Maryland

The [DNR Climate Implementation Plan](#) outlines DNR's commitment to addressing climate change and fully implementing Maryland's Climate Pollution Reduction Plan (CPRP)

The [Next Generation Adaptation Plan](#) is a roadmap where adaptation and resilience are both considered core elements to reduce overall climate impacts over the next ten years.

The [DNR Climate Resilience](#) helps to find updates about efforts to increase climate resilience in the state.

Access to Maryland's Outdoor Experiences

Maryland's parks and open spaces offer a range of experiences. From trails for walking, jogging, and cross country skiing to places for camping or birding, there is something for everyone in the State's many publicly accessible parks and open spaces. The next several pages describe seven baseline activities and amenities that support a range of experiences: camping, hunting, water access, fishing, hiking, and picnicking. Paired with a description of the activity is an analysis of its geographic distribution and any areas of the State with an abundance of opportunities for the activity or limited access.

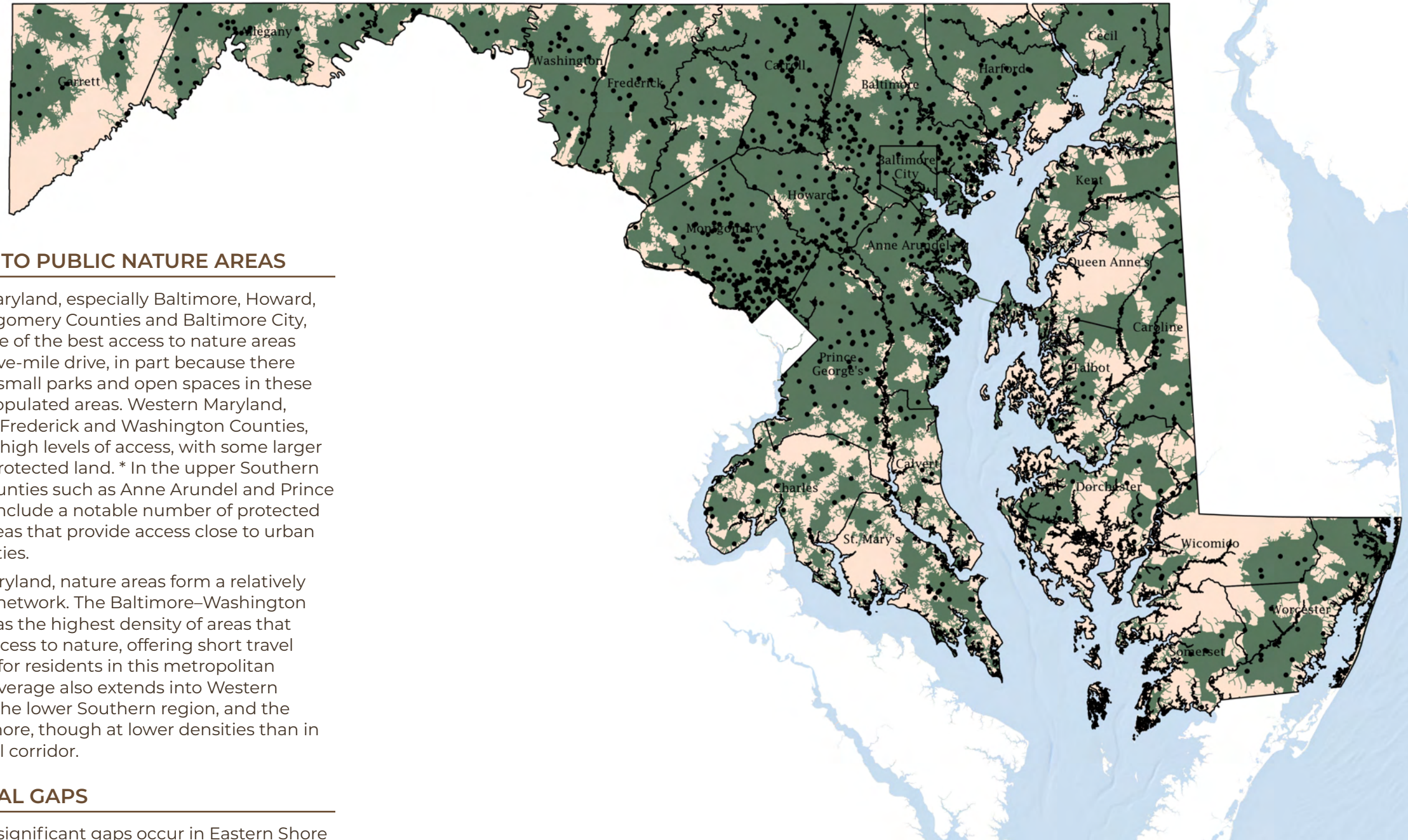


First Day Hike in New Germany State Park, 2024



Offroading in Wolf Den Run State Park

Outdoor Recreation Experiences Nature Areas



ACCESS TO PUBLIC NATURE AREAS

Central Maryland, especially Baltimore, Howard, and Montgomery Counties and Baltimore City, show some of the best access to nature areas within a five-mile drive, in part because there are many small parks and open spaces in these densely populated areas. Western Maryland, especially Frederick and Washington Counties, also show high levels of access, with some larger tracts of protected land. * In the upper Southern region, counties such as Anne Arundel and Prince George's include a notable number of protected natural areas that provide access close to urban communities.

Across Maryland, nature areas form a relatively balanced network. The Baltimore–Washington corridor has the highest density of areas that provide access to nature, offering short travel distances for residents in this metropolitan region. Coverage also extends into Western counties, the lower Southern region, and the Eastern Shore, though at lower densities than in the central corridor.

REGIONAL GAPS

The most significant gaps occur in Eastern Shore counties, where sites are scattered and residents often travel longer distances to reach nature areas. Additional gaps are found in Southern Maryland, particularly in Charles and St. Mary's counties, where inland communities lack nearby facilities. These patterns highlight uneven service distribution, despite Maryland's overall strong supply of nature-based recreation. Garrett County has areas without nature access based on this analysis because there are fewer nature areas and a more sparse road network.

1213

nature areas**

**Nature Areas include all green areas and open spaces like parks, playgrounds, open spaces, trails, preserves, centers, forests, etc.

Access to Nature Areas in Maryland

- 5-mile drive areas
- Public parks and open spaces with nature areas (includes all local, state, and federal owned sites)
- Counties

Drivesheds in some regions may not be fully accurate due to limitations of road network data (for example, presence of private roads and limited data availability in some areas).

Outdoor Recreation Experiences

Camping

ACCESS TO PUBLIC CAMPING SITES

People are generally more willing to drive farther to reach campgrounds, and so camping access was assessed using a catchment area of a 1-hour drive. Because a broader area was used, the analysis shows that nearly all parts of Maryland have access to camping amenities. Notable concentrations of campsites are found in Western Maryland, where counties such as Allegany, Washington, and Frederick contain several public parks and open spaces offering camping facilities, making the region a key destination for overnight outdoor recreation.

In Central Maryland, counties such as Montgomery, Harford, and Cecil provide additional options, though the number of sites is smaller and more dispersed compared to Western counties.

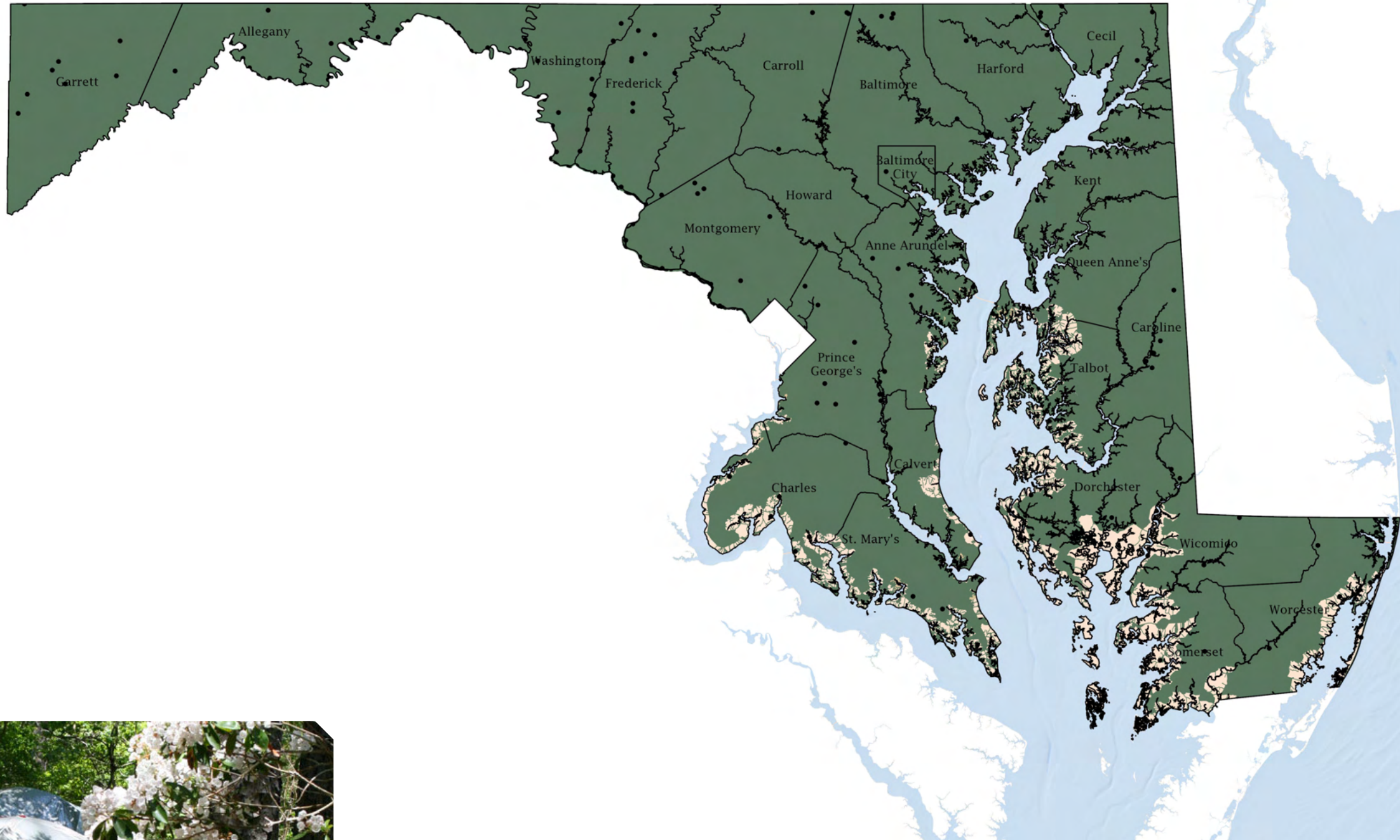
REGIONAL GAPS

There are very minimal gaps seen in the edges of Southern and Eastern Maryland related to access.

There are more campsites in Western Maryland than any other region. The map shows that there is limited availability of number of campsites in other regions, with the Eastern and Southern regions having the least.

DRIVE-TIME COVERAGE

The 1-hour drive analysis illustrates the even distribution of camping access. The green shaded areas indicate where residents are within a 1-hour drive of a camping facility.



Tent camping at Pocomoke State Park

183

public campgrounds
(most campgrounds have multiple campsites)

Access to Camping in Maryland

- 1-hour drive areas
- Public parks and open spaces with camping sites (includes all local, state, and federal owned sites)
- Counties

Drivesheds in some regions may not be fully accurate due to limitations of road network data (for example, presence of private roads and limited data availability in some areas).

Outdoor Recreation Experiences

Water Access

CONCENTRATION OF WATER ACCESS

State parks and other public lands with water access are concentrated along the Chesapeake Bay, its tributaries, and the Atlantic coast. These locations provide the widest range of opportunities for boating, fishing, and swimming. There are also many other ways to access the water. Maryland's many streams, rivers, and reservoirs provide water access as well, across all of the state's regions.

REGIONAL GAPS

Western and Central Maryland counties, including Garrett, Allegany, and Carroll, have less formal public access to water-based recreation activities than counties adjacent to the Chesapeake Bay, its major rivers, and the Atlantic Ocean. Residents in these areas often need to travel longer distances to reach parks or open spaces with water features.

In Southern Maryland, inland portions of Anne Arundel, Prince George's, and Charles counties also fall outside short travel distances to water access, despite their proximity to the Chesapeake Bay. This may be because access to navigable waterways becomes more limited or is restricted to private access.

In the Eastern Shore, the lower availability of short-distance water access reflects limited road connections to water access sites rather than a lack of water access sites.



Janes Island has access for non-motorized boating vessels.



Sandy Point State Park's beach is a popular summer destination.

522

water access* sites

*Water access is defined as any beaches, and formal places for swimming, as well as formal access for fishing, boat ramps, soft access (specifically for non-motorized vessels), and transient docking facilities.

Water Access in Maryland

Mapping of water access is based on County LPPRP and state data on formal, public water access points.

- 5-mile drive areas
- 10-mile drive areas
- State Parks with water access
- Public parks and open spaces with water access (includes all local, state, and federal owned sites)
- Waterbodies
- Counties

Drivesheds in some regions may not be fully accurate due to limitations of road network data (for example, presence of private roads and limited data availability in some areas).

Outdoor Recreation Experiences

Fishing

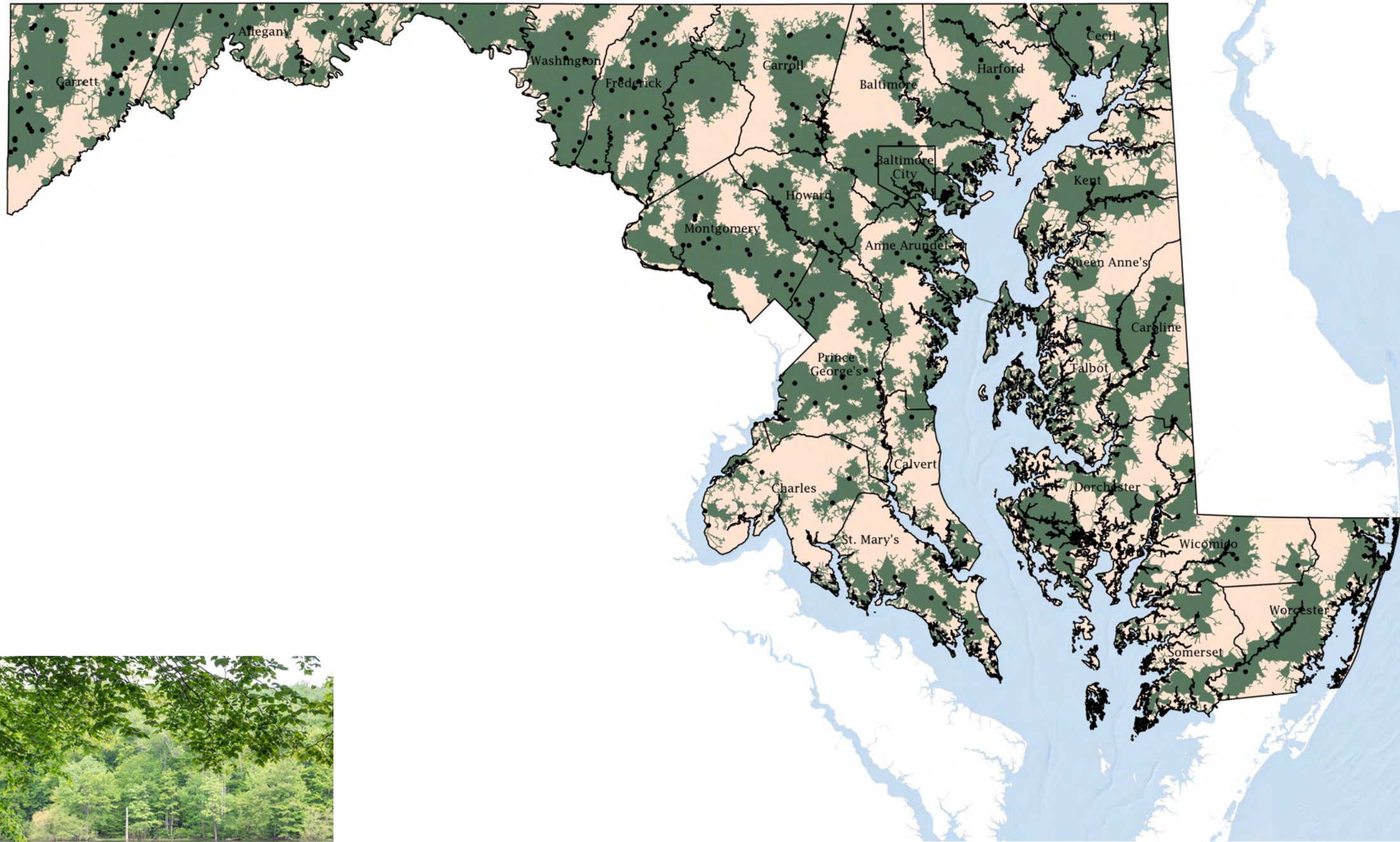
ACCESS TO PUBLIC FISHING SITES

Fishing facilities are more scattered than other recreation amenities, with clusters located along major rivers, reservoirs, and the Chesapeake Bay shoreline. The densest concentrations are found in Central Maryland, particularly in Howard and Montgomery Counties, as well as Baltimore City, where multiple parks and waterfront areas provide access. In Western Maryland, especially Frederick and Washington counties, several accessible sites are tied to reservoirs and river systems. On the Eastern Shore, counties such as Dorchester, Kent, Talbot, Caroline, and Worcester feature notable concentrations of sites along shorelines and major waterways.

The 5-mile drive analysis shows strong coverage around the Chesapeake Bay and major inland water bodies, while inland areas without large rivers or reservoirs often fall outside short-distance service zones.

REGIONAL GAPS

Significant gaps exist in Southern Maryland, particularly in Charles and Calvert counties, where inland residents are farther from designated fishing access points despite proximity to tidal waters. On the upper Eastern Shore, counties such as Queen Anne's have fewer developed facilities, resulting in longer travel distances for many communities. In far Western Maryland, portions of Garrett and Allegany counties also show weaker coverage due to mountainous terrain, even though a notable number of facilities are present.



Family fishing at Cunningham Falls State Park.

578

public fishing sites

Access to Fishing in Maryland

- 5-mile drive areas
- Public parks and open spaces with fishing sites (includes all local, state, and federal owned sites)
- Counties

Drivesheds in some regions may not be fully accurate due to limitations of road network data (for example, presence of private roads and limited data availability in some areas).

Outdoor Recreation Experiences

Hiking

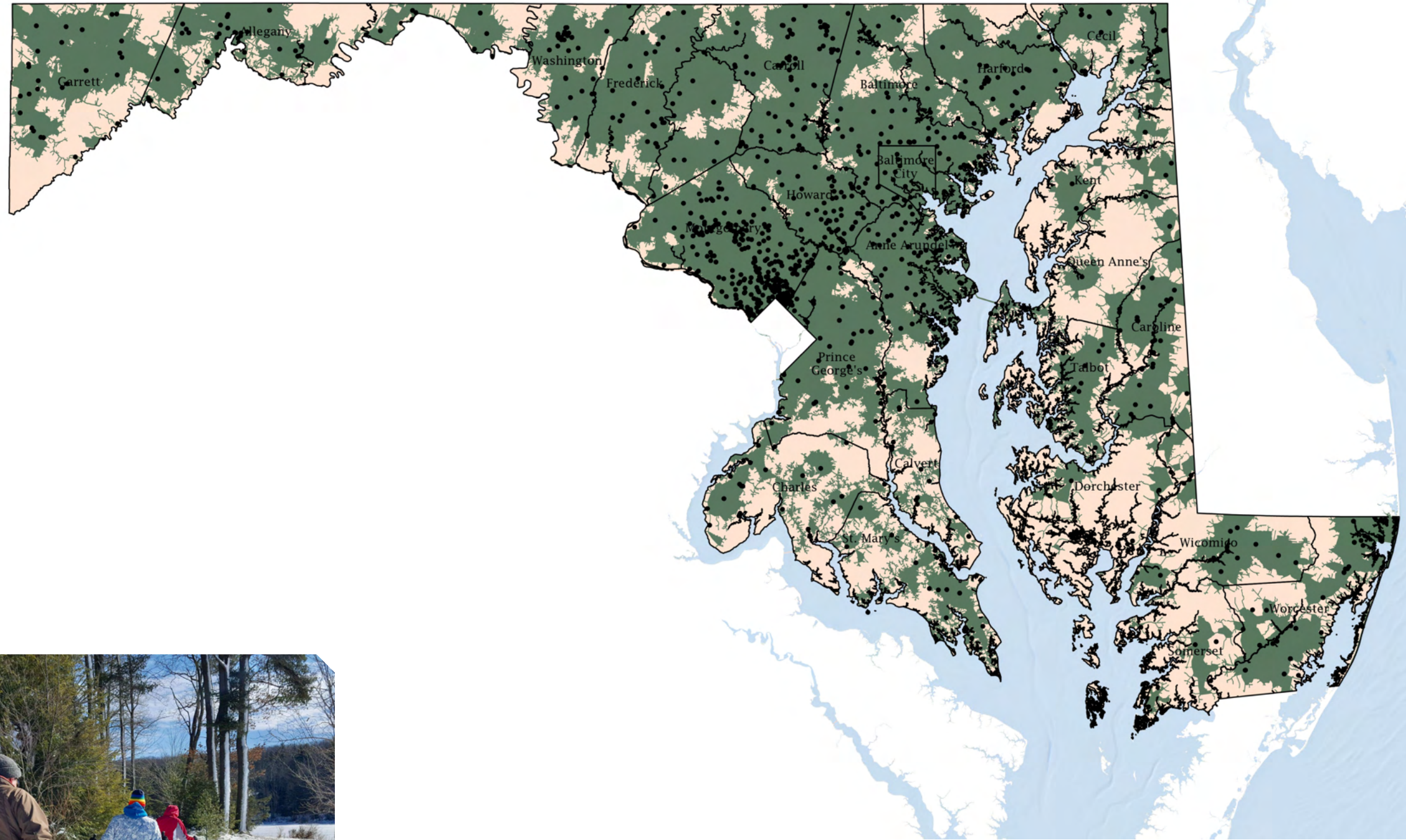
ACCESS TO TRAILS

Hiking trails are among the most widely distributed recreation facilities in Maryland. The highest concentrations are located in Central Maryland, especially in Montgomery, Howard, and Baltimore Counties, and Baltimore City, where dense networks of parks and greenways support extensive trail access.

In Western Maryland, counties such as Frederick and Carroll feature strong trail coverage within State parks, forests, and mountain landscapes. In the Southern Region, notable clusters of trail access appear in the upper northern area of Anne Arundel and Prince George's counties. The 5-mile drive analysis shows that most residents in these regions live within a short distance of a trail network.

REGIONAL GAPS

Obvious gaps are found in parts of the Eastern Shore, particularly in Queen Anne's, Dorchester, Kent, and Somerset counties, where trail sites are fewer and more scattered. Additional gaps appear in the lower Southern region and the far Western counties, where a notable number of sites exist but overall 5-mile drive coverage remains limited due to dispersed settlement patterns.



Snowshoeing in Deep Creek Lake State Park.

1024

hiking trails*

*data inaccessible for federal hiking trails

Access to Hiking in Maryland

- 5-mile drive areas
- Public parks and open spaces with trailheads (includes all local, state, and federal owned sites)
- Counties

Drivesheds in some regions may not be fully accurate due to limitations of road network data (for example, presence of private roads and limited data availability in some areas).

Outdoor Recreation Experiences

Picnicking

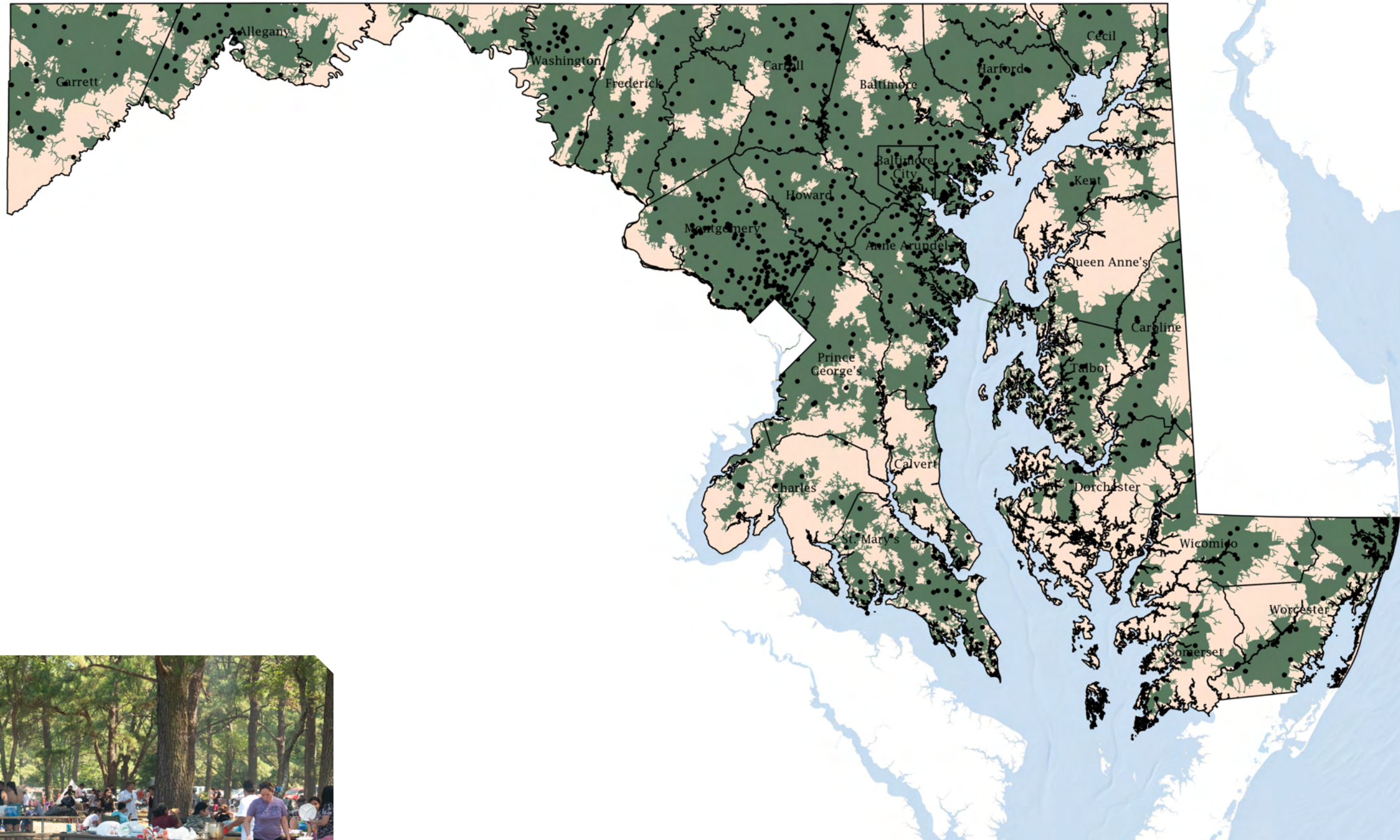
ACCESS TO PICNICKING SITES

Picnicking facilities are relatively widespread across Maryland, with the highest concentrations in Central and the north portion of Southern Maryland, particularly Montgomery, Howard, and Anne Arundel Counties as well as Baltimore City. These areas contain dense networks of parks and open spaces that provide easy access to picnicking within short travel distances. The Baltimore–Washington corridor shows especially strong coverage, with overlapping 5-mile drive areas creating nearly continuous access for residents in these metropolitan regions.

In Western Maryland, counties such as Frederick and Washington also provide solid coverage, supported by State parks and forested lands. On the Eastern Shore, picnicking opportunities are concentrated in counties like Talbot and Caroline, where multiple sites are supported by accessible road networks. The 5-mile drive analysis indicates that most of these regions are well covered, offering close-to-home access for many residents.

REGIONAL GAPS

Gaps in picnicking access are most evident in Southern Maryland, particularly in Charles, Prince George's, and Calvert counties, where sites are more scattered and many communities must travel longer distances to reach facilities. Additional gaps appear in parts of the Eastern Shore, especially in Queen Anne's and Worcester counties, where fewer designated facilities are available and large inland areas fall outside the 5-mile service range. In far Western Maryland, areas of Garrett and Allegany counties also show limited coverage, reflecting their lower density of recreation infrastructure compared to Central regions.



Many public parks are popular sites for summer picnics.

890

public picnic* areas

*Public picnic areas include outdoor pavilions, picnic tables, and grilling areas.

Access to Picnicking in Maryland

- 5-mile drive areas
- Public parks and open spaces with picnicking sites (includes all local, state, and federal owned sites)
- Counties

Drivesheds in some regions may not be fully accurate due to limitations of road network data (for example, presence of private roads and limited data availability in some areas).

Outdoor Recreation Experiences

Hunting

ACCESS TO PUBLIC HUNTING SITES

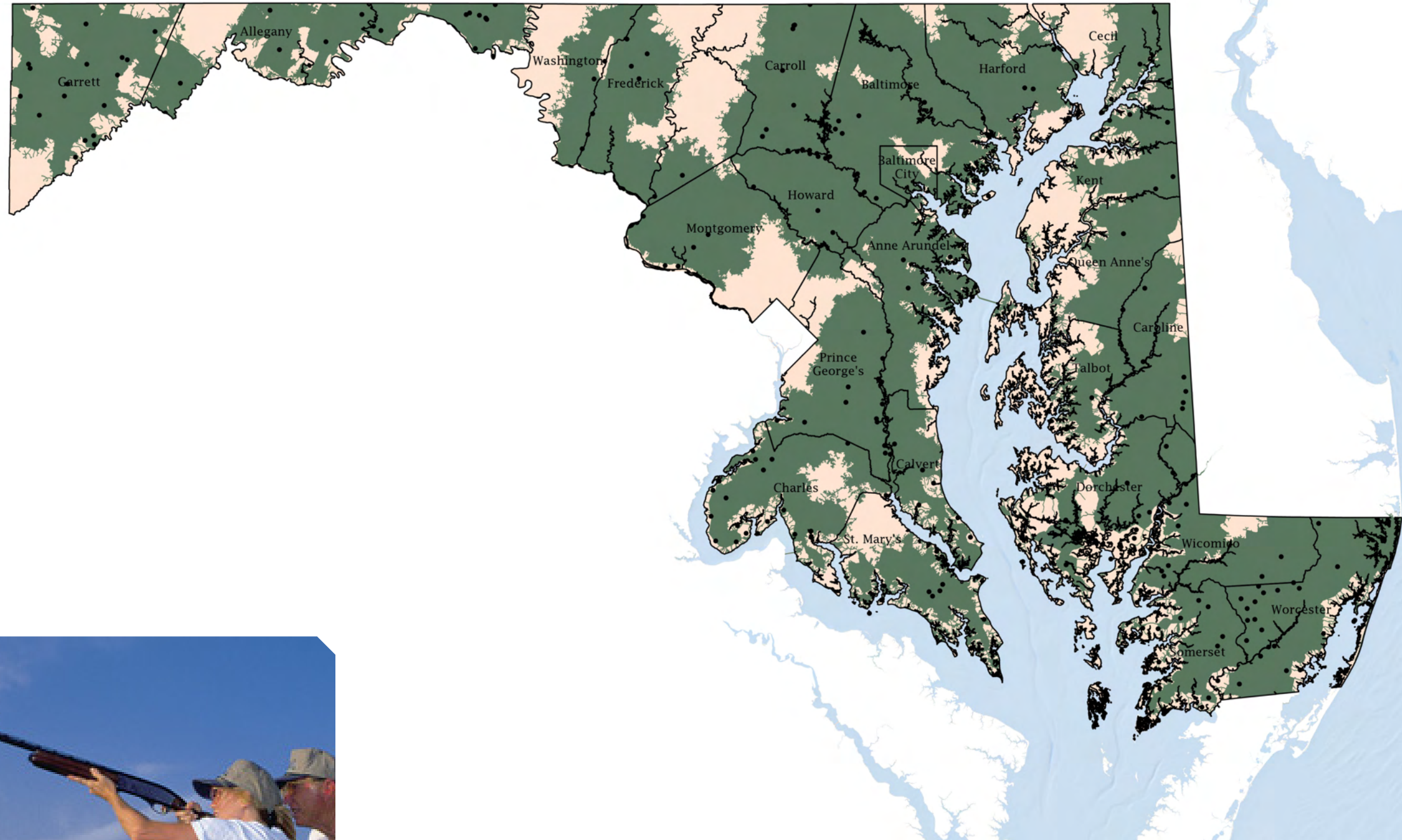
Public hunting access is concentrated in several regions of Maryland. In Central Maryland, the densest areas include Carroll, Howard, and Harford Counties. In the Southern region, concentrations are found in Anne Arundel, Prince George's, and Calvert counties. On the Eastern Shore, clusters are visible in Dorchester, Wicomico, Somerset, and Worcester counties, while in the west, major concentrations occur in Allegany, and along the Washington–Frederick county border.

REGIONAL GAPS

The most notable gaps appear along some shoreline areas of the Eastern region, and parts of the Western and Southern region where limited facility distribution leaves residents farther from designated hunting access points.

DRIVE-TIME COVERAGE

The 10-mile drive analysis indicates that most of Maryland falls within a short drive of a hunting site, with extensive coverage across Western counties, Central region, and the lower Eastern Shore.



Hunter education programs are provided by DNR for new and seasoned hunters and anglers.

257

public hunting sites

Access to Hunting in Maryland

- 10-mile drive areas
- Public parks and open spaces with hunting sites (includes all local, state, and federal owned sites)
- Counties

Drivesheds in some regions may not be fully accurate due to limitations of road network data (for example, presence of private roads and limited data availability in some areas).

III.

Vision and Principles

Plan Vision

Maryland will steward its protected lands with care, with the goal of conserving 40 percent of the state's land by 2040 through collaboration and coordinated action. By continuing to invest in vibrant, high quality parks, open spaces, and natural resources that reflect the needs of every Marylander, the state will create landscapes that nurture health, community, and economic vitality.

Maryland's landscapes tell a story of abundance, resilience, and shared identity across its many preserved lands and recreation destinations. The 2027-2037 Land Preservation and Recreation Plan builds on this legacy, uniting State and local partners, conservation organizations, farmers, and communities to protect and sustain the natural and cultural treasures that make Maryland special.

Recognizing that land connects every Marylander, to clean air and water, to recreation, to heritage, and to future opportunity, this plan

provides a roadmap to ensure that the State's open spaces continue to thrive for generations to come. This vision extends beyond land protection. It is about connection: breaking down barriers that prevent equitable access to nature and outdoor experiences and expanding trail networks and waterways to link people, places, and ecosystems across the State. Through partnership and persistence, Maryland will safeguard its rich agricultural, cultural, and ecological heritage as the foundation of a sustainable, resilient, and inclusive future.



Annapolis Rock viewpoint along the Appalachian Trail



How to Use this Chapter

The vision is achieved through four principles, each with supporting priorities and actions to guide decisions about future investment in land protection. This chapter describes the priorities in more detail and includes analysis and engagement highlights along with strengths and challenges that informed the plan strategies.

PRINCIPLE #1: STEWARD WHAT'S ALREADY PROTECTED

Maryland has achieved a major milestone: 30% of the State's land area is preserved. Now, DNR, State agencies, local governments, nonprofit partners should prioritize stewarding the lands that are already protected to sustain Maryland's vital natural resources and rich agricultural heritage for generations to come. The priorities and strategies below focus on natural resource stewardship, healthy forests, clean water, agricultural land preservation, and historic and cultural resources.

- **Priority 1: Natural Resource Stewardship:** Continue to protect Maryland's natural resources through planning, data collection and analysis, management practices, and collaboration.
- **Priority 2: Healthy Forests:** Preserve, restore, and manage forests to ensure ecological health and economic sustainability.
- **Priority 3: Clean Water and Healthy Waterways:** Continue to improve the health of Maryland's watersheds, waterways, and wetlands through coordinated conservation and management strategies. Encourage the use of nature-based solutions—for example, living shorelines and natural stabilization techniques—to reduce flood risk and support waterway health where possible.
- **Priority 4: Agricultural Land Preservation:** Continue to conserve Maryland's farmlands to protect rural character and promote sustainable agriculture and stewardship practices on agricultural lands.
- **Priority 5: Historic and Cultural Resources:** Protect Maryland's historic and cultural resources, with an emphasis on appropriate and sustainable stewardship models.

PRINCIPLE #2: GROW, TOGETHER

Maryland has the ambitious goal to preserve 40% of its land area, 610,000 additional acres, by 2040. Achieving this goal will require collaboration and embracing a variety of approaches. The priorities below outline strategies for conserving lands to support public recreation opportunities, natural and cultural resource protection, and coastal climate adaptation, with a focus on collaborative conservation models.

- **Priority 1: New Open Space and Recreation:** Continue to increase public open space Statewide, prioritizing filling gaps in areas with the greatest park need.
- **Priority 2: New Preserved Lands:** Continue to conserve lands to support healthy ecosystems and maintain the rural character, protecting the important economic and ecosystem values these working lands provide.
- **Priority 3: Coastal Climate Adaptation:** Plan proactively for rising sea levels by strategically acquiring land to reduce flood risk, improve social and economic outcomes, and support transitioning ecologies.
- **Priority 4: Balanced Development:** Plan for future growth in a manner that strategically integrates land conservation and preservation, ensuring development occurs without compromising critical natural and agricultural resources.

PRINCIPLE #3: REINVEST IN PARKS, REINVEST IN PEOPLE

Maryland's parks are well-loved! Now is a key time to reinvest in them, as they face aging infrastructure, rising visitor demand, and increasing climate challenges. Since a surge in state and local capital investments in the 1960s to 1990s, that era of infrastructure and buildings now represents a significant amount of urgent maintenance needs for the state and for local governments. The following priorities outline strategies for sustainable funding, long-term park maintenance, major reinvestments, capital improvements, and boosting heat resilience across the park system.

- **Priority 1: Ongoing Parks and Open Space Care:** Expand maintenance capacity, staffing, and funding, and strengthen partnerships for workforce training and volunteerism.
- **Priority 2: Capital Projects:** Fund projects in parks and other recreation areas that proactively address deferred maintenance and meet contemporary community needs. Prioritize multi-benefit approaches that maximize the impact of public and private investments by aligning environmental protection, community well-being, and long-term economic sustainability.
- **Priority 3: Expanding Access:** Welcome everyone so all visitors build connections to nature and feel a sense of belonging in Maryland's parks and protected lands.
- **Priority 4: Interpretation and Programs:** Support interpretation and programs to improve park experiences, stewardship, and recreation outcomes.
- **Priority 5: Heat resilience:** Create cooler parks and improve heat safety for park visitors and staff.

PRINCIPLE #4: BLUE AND GREEN CONNECTIONS

This principle focuses on expanding Maryland's trail networks and waterway access to better connect people, places, and ecosystems across the State. Currently, 96% of Marylanders rely on personal vehicles to visit parks and outdoor areas, while only 2% walk and less than 1% bike. The strategies below aim to expand the multi-use trail network, improve trail experiences, promote ecosystem health along trails, increase water access, and enhance Maryland's water trails.

- **Priority 1: Expanded Multi-use Trail Network:** Continue to expand Maryland's multi-use trail network to connect communities, public lands, and outdoor experiences.
- **Priority 2: Trail Experiences:** Improve the quality, comfort, and safety of trail experiences.
- **Priority 3: Water Access:** Grow water access and waterside recreation opportunities, a high Statewide priority based on survey results.
- **Priority 4: More Transportation Options:** Make it easier for everyone to reach parks and trails without a car.

PRINCIPLE ONE

Steward What's Already Protected

Maryland has achieved a major milestone: 30% of the State's land area is preserved. Now, DNR and its partners should prioritize stewarding the lands that are already protected to sustain Maryland's vital natural resources and rich agricultural heritage for generations to come. The priorities and strategies below focus on natural resource stewardship, healthy forests, clean water, agricultural land preservation, and historic and cultural resources.



Pictured: Assateague Island State Park
Boat Ramp Beach

Steward What's Already Protected

PRIORITY #1

Natural Resource Stewardship

Continue to protect Maryland's natural resources through planning, data collection and analysis, management practices, and collaboration.

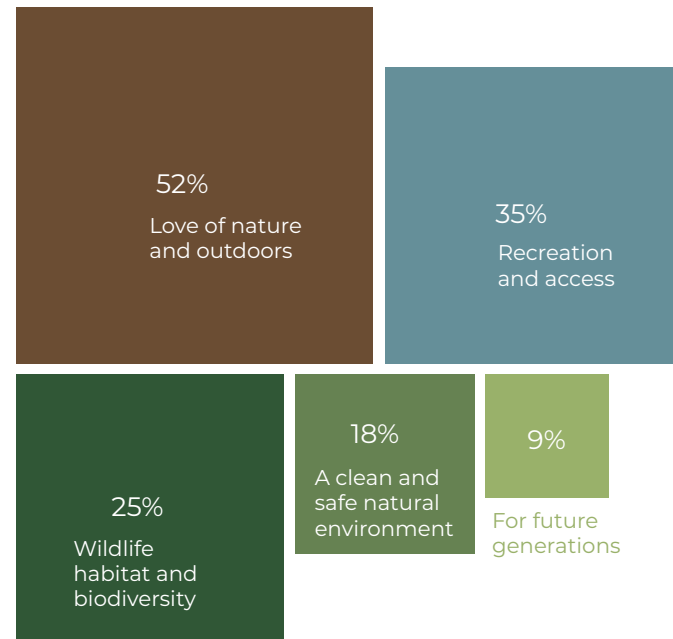
The Maryland Department of Natural Resources and its partners in other areas of government, non-profits, and academia, have set a national precedent for natural resource protection that is driven by quality data collection, synthesis, and action, underpinned by strong collaboration. The State needs to prioritize investments in this field to ensure the long-term health of Maryland's natural spaces, wildlife, and people.

Maryland and its partners should continue to maintain Geographic Information Systems (GIS) datasets on resources like forests, waterways, coastal resilience, and land conservation, and track, address, and create awareness among Marylanders about newly introduced invasive species.

The support for landowners, easement enforcement, and stewardship of protected lands remain priorities. New actions include addressing climate change, invasive species control, and considering increasing overall funding. Increasing capacity for public land maintenance and creating workforce pipelines through job corps programs will further strengthen stewardship efforts.

Reasons why the community wants parks and other lands protected in Maryland

Percentages are not mutually exclusive.
SOURCE: Community Feedback Survey



EXISTING STRENGTHS

- ▶ Diverse range of initiatives and programs to address the varying nuances of land preservation: forestry, agriculture, rural land, cultural resources, natural habitats.
- ▶ Robust planning department with collaborative structure.
- ▶ GIS frameworks like the preserved land database and the Targeted Ecological Areas centralize data on what's preserved and what needs protecting.
- ▶ Longstanding government, academic, and non-profit partnerships.
- ▶ Ecosystem services of protected lands that play a valuable role in the health of our communities – cleaning water, absorbing air pollution, and cooling nearby areas.

STRATEGIES

The State and Partners should continue to...

- ▶ Support landowners in enhancing stewardship of protected, privately-owned lands—from large tracts of land to smaller urban lots—providing technical assistance; education on best practices; and financial support including grant programs, cost share programs, and other financial incentives.
- ▶ Monitor and enforce easements on protected lands to ensure compliance with legal terms.
- ▶ Invest in and maintain GIS and other datasets to support data-driven resource management, conservation decisions, and policy development.
- ▶ Maintain datasets for forests/tree canopy, waterways/watersheds, coastal resilience, visitor-related data and land conservation priorities.
- ▶ Track and address introduced invasive species through coordinated management programs. Further engage Maryland residents in tracking and helping to safely reduce the prevalence of these species.

EMERGING CHALLENGES

- ▶ Gaps in GIS data across counties and municipalities leading to an incomplete dataset.
- ▶ Climate change exacerbating challenges such as introduced invasive species and extreme weather events.
- ▶ Insufficient funding and staffing.
- ▶ Difficult to obtain and retain resources and staff to effectively manage open space lands that provide critical ecosystem services.

STRATEGY HIGHLIGHT

Maryland State Wildlife Action Plan

State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs) are important collaborative tools for successful wildlife and habitat conservation nationwide. The overall goal of [Maryland's SWAP](#) is to provide direction and guidance for plant and wildlife conservation efforts in Maryland and, in turn, keep species from becoming listed as endangered; in other words, to keep common species common.

STRATEGY HIGHLIGHT

Maryland programs controlled invasive Nutria in marshes.

Nutria, a large semi-aquatic rodent native to South America, was introduced to Maryland in the 1940s for fur trade, but soon escaped captivity and established wild populations, especially in the lower Chesapeake Bay region. Their presence posed a significant ecological threat to Maryland's important coastal marshes. In response, a decades-long, multi-agency Nutria Eradication Project began in 2002; the result of partnerships among the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Services, and others. Through coordinated tracking and removal operations, Maryland achieved official eradication of nutria in 2022, marking the first successful eradication of this invasive species from an entire U.S. State.

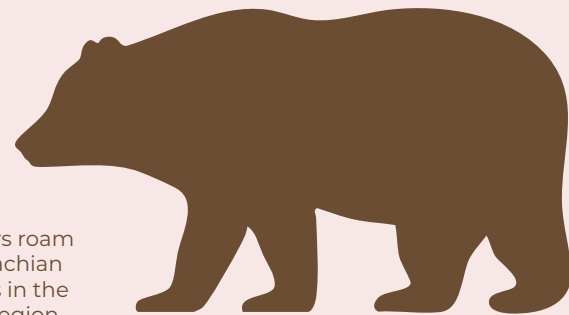
Photo of Nutria



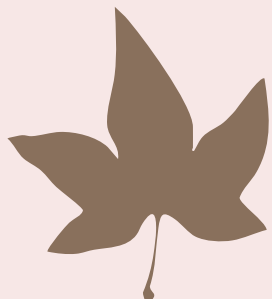
SPOTLIGHT ON MARYLAND'S NATURAL RESOURCES



The Central Bluebird is frequently found in the Central Region.



Black Bears roam the Appalachian Mountains in the Western Region.



The Sweetgum is found in many regions, especially the Southern Region.



The Eastern Red-backed Salamander can be found in the Eastern region.

- ▶ Identify priority protected areas and develop management plans for those places, addressing long-term conservation needs such as invasive species control, disease management, and adapting to climate change. Include identification of funding and partnerships to support implementation of plans.



STRATEGY HIGHLIGHT

Examples of Existing Support Programs for Landowners

The Forest Conservation and Management Program (FCMP)

The FCMP offers landowners a financial incentive to conserve and manage their forestland responsibly. It creates a partnership between landowners and the State to sustain these resources for future generations. By offering reduced and stabilized property tax assessments, the program makes it easier for landowners to maintain forest cover and commit to long-term stewardship.

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

The CREP is a State-federal partnership that enables farmers to contribute to protecting local waterways without compromising their financial interests. This program offers a one-time signing bonus, attractive annual rental and incentive payments, and cost-share assistance for streamside buffers, wetlands, and livestock fencing. Since 1997, the program has helped thousands of Maryland landowners plant streamside buffers, establish wetlands, protect highly erodible land, and create wildlife habitat while providing them with steady and dependable land rental income.

The Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)

The EQIP is a program that provides financial and technical assistance to help farmers and landowners implement structural and management practices on agricultural land. The program provides incentives in the form of cost-share payments to implement conservation practices, including forestry management practices on non-industrial private forestland. The program's focus is geared towards livestock and agricultural production interests.

The Keep Maryland Beautiful Program

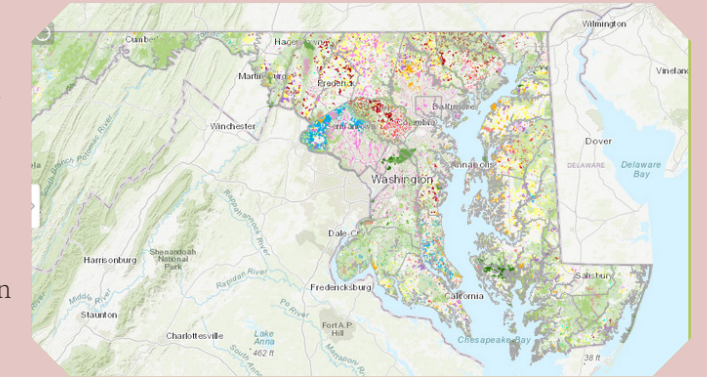
This program provides grants to help volunteer-based, nonprofit groups, communities, and land trusts in Maryland support environmental education projects, litter removal, citizen stewardship, and protect natural resources in both urban and rural areas. To date, it has provided more than a million dollars over the past three decades to nonprofits, schools, land trusts, and volunteer-based programs that work to protect natural resources while enhancing the lives of Marylanders and future generations.

STRATEGY HIGHLIGHT

Existing DNR GIS Tools

GreenPrint

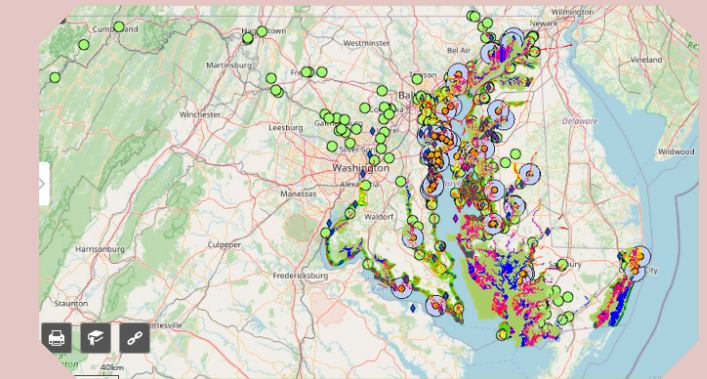
The GreenPrint map displays Targeted Ecological Areas (TEAs), lands and watersheds of high ecological value that have been identified as conservation priorities by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR). It also displays information about four of Maryland's most active State operated land conservation programs: Program Open Space - Stateside, the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF), the Maryland Environmental Trust (MET), and the Rural Legacy Program.



GreenPrint map display

Coastal Atlas

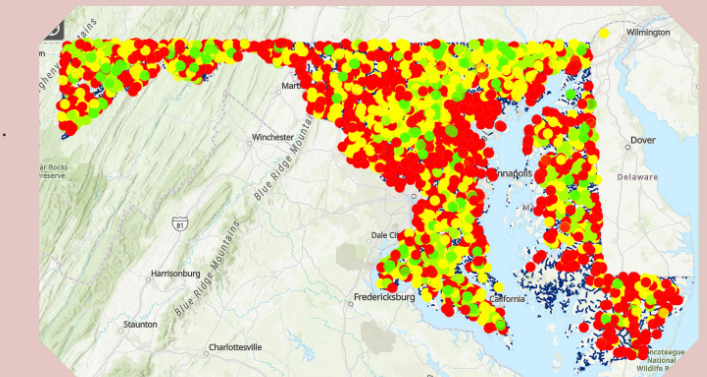
The Coastal Atlas is a mapping tool that allows State and local decision-makers to visually analyze and explore coastal and ocean data layers for project and planning purposes. Using the built-in tools and new updated layers, the user can query, map, and analyze spatial data to better understand Maryland's marine resources, and can help understand changing climate and identify coastal hazards.



Coastal Atlas map display

Maryland Biological Stream Survey

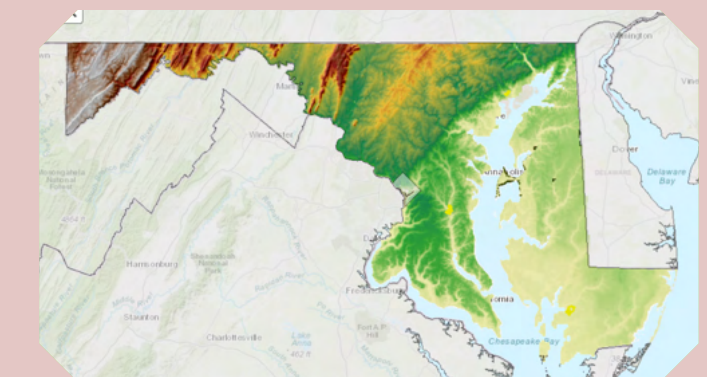
The Maryland Biological Stream Survey (MBSS) was started by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources in 1993 as a pilot study in three watersheds. A second, larger demonstration project, expanded Statewide, was conducted in 1994. The MBSS was Maryland's first probability-based or random design stream sampling program intended to provide unbiased estimates of stream conditions with known precision at various spatial scales ranging from large 6-digit river basins and medium-sized 8-digit watersheds to the entire State.



MBSS map display

Maryland's Environmental Resources and Land Information Network (MERLIN)

MERLIN Online was originally developed back in the late 1990s to satisfy everyone's "hunger" for spatial data. It was created to help people make better informed decisions. MERLIN Online allows users to produce a custom map of any location in Maryland, to include their choice of base maps and data layers.



MERLIN map display

Steward What's Already Protected

PRIORITY #2

Healthy Forests

Preserve, restore, and manage forests to ensure ecological health and economic sustainability.

Since 1940, Maryland has grown significantly, both in population and in development to support new homes, roads, retail, and job centers. These changes, along with diseases and pests like the emerald ash borer, woolly adelgid, and the beech leaf wilt have resulted in significant loss of the State's forested lands and tree canopy. This priority identifies opportunities to reverse the trend of tree canopy loss across the State.

New actions include prioritizing tree planting in sensitive and high-need areas, supporting urban forest health with climate-adapted species, and planning for ongoing care.

Forests should be monitored and managed to stay healthy in changing climate conditions through diversification, density management, wind risk reduction, prescribed fire management, and fuel breaks to reduce wildfire spread.

35% of respondents

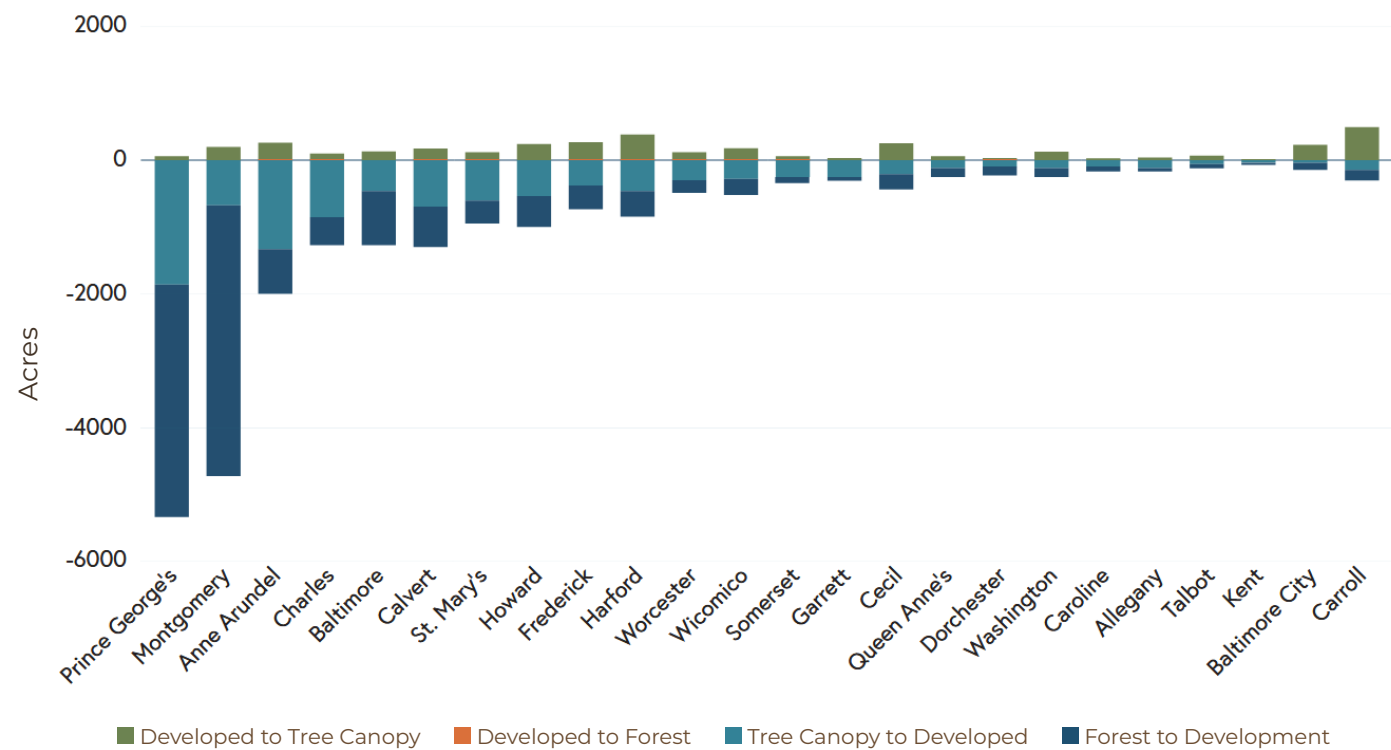
Shared ideas related to sustainability and ecological restoration.

These ideas included preserving natural parks and resisting commercial development, building green corridors to support wildlife, controlling invasive species, and improving access to State lands and parks.

SOURCE: Community Feedback Survey



FOREST AND TREE CANOPY CHANGE ASSOCIATED WITH DEVELOPMENT (2013 - 2018)



SOURCE: Technical Study on Changes in Forest Cover and Tree Canopy in Maryland, 2022

EXISTING STRENGTHS

- ▶ Net maturing forests in the State as a whole (forest growth is greater than harvest).
- ▶ Conservation education and resources for forestland owners.
- ▶ Multiple programs support tree-planting.
- ▶ Over 900,000 acres of forested land are protected.
- ▶ States and counties institutional knowledge in maintenance / management practices.

EMERGING CHALLENGES

- ▶ Land development causing tree canopy loss and fragmentation.
- ▶ Introduced invasive species (ex. multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*) and Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*)).
- ▶ Pests and disease (ex. emerald ash borer, hemlock woolly adelgid, beech bark disease).
- ▶ Time required for new forest growth and replanting.
- ▶ Urban heat island effect and inequities in tree canopy in urban areas.
- ▶ Survival of new tree planting in urban areas.
- ▶ Deer populations affecting forest regeneration and understory plantings.
- ▶ Impacts of Climate change
 - » Flooding
 - » Changing weather patterns
 - » Species migration
 - » Wildfire
 - » Saltwater intrusion
- ▶ Considering changing climate conditions in decision-making.

STRATEGIES

The State and Partners should continue to...

- ▶ Execute ongoing monitoring for disease and insects to support faster response before problems expand.
- ▶ Monitor the effects of deer populations on forest regeneration and increase management efforts in areas where deer populations are increasing or causing outsized impacts on natural and agricultural resources.
- ▶ Develop policies and programs that support a productive forestland base and forest resource industry, emphasizing the economic viability and impact of privately owned forestland.
- ▶ Prioritize new tree planting in environmentally sensitive and high-need areas, such as riparian buffers, forest restoration areas, and public lands in high heat island areas. Support urban forest health by diversifying species, siting new plantings where they are likely to thrive, selecting climate-adapted species, and planning for ongoing care/maintenance.
- ▶ Expand the use of controlled burns/fire to enhance forest ecosystem health.

New or expanded actions for the State and partners...

- ▶ Continue to evaluate on-going staffing needs and funding levels needed to enable sustainable maintenance and completion of strategies in this plan.
- ▶ Monitor and manage forests to stay healthy in changing climate conditions. For example, diversify stand age, structure, and species; manage for healthy density; design to reduce wind risks; expand prescribed fire management for forest health, and incorporate fuel breaks to reduce spread in the event of a wildfire.

STRATEGY HIGHLIGHT

Maryland 5 Million Trees Initiative

The 5 million tree planting goal was launched after the General Assembly passed the Tree Solutions Now Act of 2021, with plantings beginning in July of that year. The act directed the planting of 5 million native trees on Maryland's public and private land by 2031. More than 180,000 trees were planted in Maryland in 2023 as part of the initiative. At the start of 2024, the total number came to 471,890 trees, according to Maryland Department of the Environment data.

Steward What's Already Protected

PRIORITY #3

Clean Water and Healthy Waterways

Continue to improve the health of Maryland's watersheds, waterways, and wetlands through coordinated conservation and management strategies.

It is vital to protect Maryland's water resources, including rivers, reservoirs, wetlands, coast, and the Chesapeake Bay. These supply drinking water, seafood, and support tourism through recreational opportunities.

These water systems are critical to the human, economic, and social health of Maryland residents and the millions of visitors to the State each year. Our preserved lands also play a very important role in keeping Maryland's waterways healthy. They filter runoff, preventing excess nutrients and sediment from entering waterways. In this way, they prevent algal blooms and support the growth of submerged aquatic vegetation. In the rural areas, modern, smart farming tactics will go much further to meeting water quality goals. The actions in this priority focus on opportunities to protect our coastlines and limit pollution into waterways.

The State and partners should continue developing collaborative watershed action plans, promote multi-jurisdictional partnerships, and adopt coordinated land and watershed management strategies. Other actions include encouraging riparian buffers in agricultural and urban areas, implementing green stormwater management projects, and supporting ecological restoration through programs and best management practices.

Community feedback on watersheds

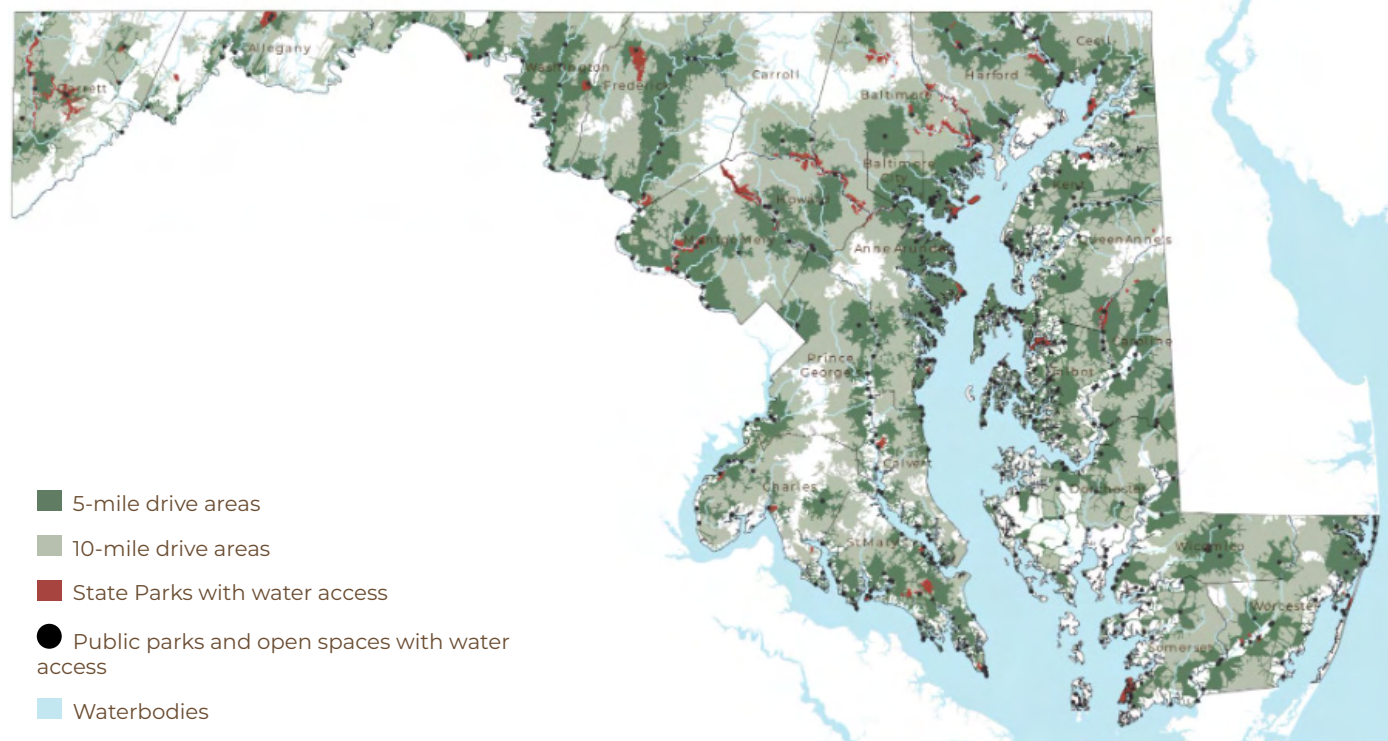
"A wonderful watershed like Gunpowder Falls needs a lot of attention!"

"We can protect land and the bay watershed by providing recreational and educational opportunities for all."

"Preserve land and watersheds in their pristine State for current and future generations!"

SOURCE: Community Feedback Survey

WATER ACCESS IN MARYLAND



EXISTING STRENGTHS

- ▶ Multi-State and regional coordination efforts for watershed health.
- ▶ Legislation for wetland protections and preservation.
- ▶ Continue evolving wetland restoration practices and state and local permitting to allow for increased wetland rehabilitation and migration.
- ▶ Regulations for stormwater management and sediment control.
- ▶ Longstanding non-profit partnerships.
- ▶ Educational and funding resources to support stewardship.
- ▶ Introduced invasive species monitoring and management.
- ▶ Many State and local parks are along rivers and reservoirs, helping to protect these resources.
- ▶ Existing datasets and data collection programs (Coastal Atlas, water quality monitoring, etc.).

STRATEGIES

The State and Partners should continue to...

- ▶ Develop collaborative watershed action plans for watersheds of Statewide or county importance to improve ecological health and promote coordinated resource management and land use planning.
- ▶ Promote multi-jurisdictional partnerships among State agencies, local governments, educational institutions, and private stakeholders to improve watershed health.
- ▶ Adopt coordinated land and watershed management strategies that recognize the critical links between growth management and the conservation of aquatic biodiversity and fisheries production.
- ▶ Encourage riparian buffers on agricultural lands and in urban areas to reduce nutrient runoff, improve water quality, and reduce stream temperatures. Continue to support expansion of buffers through policies, programs like Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, and new conservation land and easements.
- ▶ Encourage "cooling" stormwater best management practices (BMPs) such as infiltration and subsurface treatment (i.e. submerged gravel wetlands) to increase climate resiliency and protect coldwater streams.

EMERGING CHALLENGES

- ▶ Water quality issues including:
 - » Nutrient pollution and algal blooms
 - » High bacterial counts
 - » Trash and debris
- ▶ Poor urban stream health (bank erosion, etc. resulting from flashier flooding due to increased development).
- ▶ Climate change impacts including:
 - » Warmer water temperatures, which negatively affect many aquatic species
 - » High precipitation events
 - » Saltwater intrusion impact
- ▶ Watershed boundaries cross political jurisdictions and different land owners, emphasizing the ongoing importance of collaboration.

- ▶ Consistent with the Whole Watershed Act, support ecological restoration projects in high priority or degraded waterway areas, including streambank stabilization and aquatic habitat restoration and consider and identify separate, dedicated funding sources for these projects.
- ▶ Continue to support programs like Whole Watershed Fund, Watershed Assistance Grant Program, Innovative Technology Fund, and Chesapeake and Coastal Grants Gateway Encourage the use of BMPs that have a cooling effect on water temperatures.

New or expanded actions for the State and partners...

- ▶ Pilot additional coastal habitat migration projects like salt marsh and floodplain forests, building on the success of the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge Marsh Migration and Thin-Layer Placement at Deal Island project.
- ▶ See related strategies in Principle 4, Priority 3: Water Access (Page 57).

STRATEGY HIGHLIGHT**Assateague State Park Shoreline**

A living shoreline project at Assateague State Park, completed in 2018, was designed by DNR, and built by Underwood and Associates, Annapolis, MD with funding from the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Trust Fund to prevent erosion and increase shoreline habitat.

This is one of Maryland Coastal Bay Program's (MCBP) proudest restoration accomplishments as it rehabilitates numerous ecological services to the community. Restoring this shoreline and creates a dynamic, resilient habitat for numerous bay creatures and gives the public a safe place to enjoy the outdoors. Years of wave energy and storm surges had caused extensive erosion along the Assateague State Park shoreline, resulting in a beach with a steep drop-off that was unsafe for the public to access.

Restoration was achieved using tombolos, which are small shoreline extensions that form a scalloped shaped beach. They break up the wind and wave action and make the beach more resilient. Heavy machinery was used to form the series of 10 tombolos that made up this living shoreline. The tombolos are made up of large boulders, cobble, clean sand fill, and eventually, native wetland vegetation. MCBP staff along with dozens of amazing volunteers spent numerous days planting native saltmarsh grasses like *Sporobolus alterniflorus* and *Sporobolus pumilus* along the living shoreline and within the tombolos. These grasses will reinforce the shoreline's resiliency and help control erosion.

Plantings of native grasses and invasive control continued into 2019. The shoreline replaced an eroding marsh using boulders and rocks to form the skeleton of the scalloped coastline. One challenge was to protect the seagrass beds which are found near the shoreline in Sinepuxent Bay. Monitoring of the grass beds indicates no negative effects from the shoreline stabilization efforts.

The public now has safe access to Sinepuxent Bay and can enjoy the benefits of the shoreline through kayaking, fishing, swimming, or laying out in the sun! A freshwater wetland was created in between the parking lot and the newly built living shoreline to help collect any stormwater runoff from the parking lot and surrounding area. This freshwater wetland also provides additional habitat to other species.

**STRATEGY HIGHLIGHT****Whole Watershed Act**

The Whole Watershed Act (SB 969/HB 1165), established in April 2024, is a highly collaborative, science-based approach to watershed restoration across the State promoting innovative, science-based solutions to waterway restoration efforts.

The act is a direct response to conclusions in the 2023 Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response (CESR) report—an evaluation of water quality progress for the Chesapeake Bay. The legislation has utilized existing State funds to create a five-year pilot program targeting five Maryland watersheds that best represent the State's diverse land uses, geographies, and impairments. The pilot projects will deliver not only water quality improvements, but also specific co-benefits like increased public access to waterways, wildlife

habitat, fisheries improvement, and climate change resiliency. Maryland has selected the five watersheds in the State that will receive initial State grant funding as part of the Whole Watershed Act. These are the Antietam Creek in Washington County, the Baltimore Harbor, the Newport Bay near Ocean City, the Severn River in Anne Arundel County, and the Upper Choptank River on the Eastern Shore.

This act will accelerate meaningful results towards the Chesapeake Bay restoration goals. Rooted in science and proven successes, the program is a direct response to the CESR report and will rapidly improve waterways included on EPA's impaired waters list for the benefit of the Bay and local communities.



Steward What's Already Protected

PRIORITY #4

Agricultural Land Preservation

Continue to conserve Maryland's farmlands to protect rural character and promote sustainable agriculture and stewardship practices on agricultural lands.

There are about 2 million acres of farmland across Maryland, representing almost one-third of the State's land area and supporting over 350,000 jobs. Since 2017, the State has lost over 12,000 acres of farmland, which is part of a continuing trend of agricultural land and industry loss. Protecting agricultural lands is essential to protect Maryland's rural character, sustain its agricultural economy, and continue to steward preserved lands in support of State goals. The following actions articulate a few ways that the State, counties, the City of Baltimore, and partners can take to slow the loss of farmland.

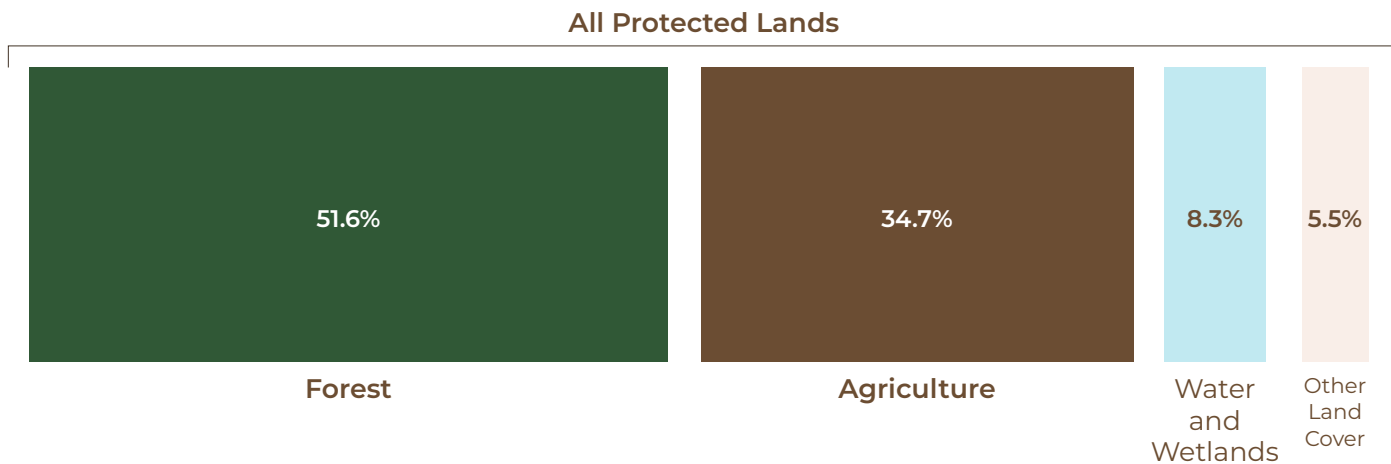
The State and Partners should continue to concentrate agricultural land preservation funds in areas supported by local investment and land use management programs. Local land use management authorities should continue to be used to protect preservation investments, and counties should offer and advertise conservation grant programs.

New actions include evaluating land lease processes to align with agricultural goals, affordability, and long-term needs such as organic farm profitability.

Focus group discussion session about Land Preservation

"Large blocks of land must be permanently protected because a critical mass of farmland is essential to safeguard agriculture and the local economy in Maryland. Agriculture is the leading industry, and even land not currently in use preserves opportunities for future farmers; once farmland is developed, it cannot be reclaimed."

LAND PRESERVED BY LAND COVER



Data source: Accessed on May 2025 Protected Lands data from DNR and Maryland iMAP, Land Cover data from Maryland iMAP

EXISTING STRENGTHS

- ▶ Agricultural land protection programs and incentives (including State and local agricultural easements).
- ▶ Available federal funding for agriculture investments.

EMERGING CHALLENGES

- ▶ Land access and education, especially for new farmers.
- ▶ Reductions in funding for land acquisition.
- ▶ Financial viability of farm businesses.
- ▶ Nutrient pollution / water quality.
- ▶ Development impacts (encroachment effects, development pressures, etc.).
- ▶ Climate change
 - » Drought / heat / other changing weather patterns
 - » Salt intrusion
 - » Flooding
- ▶ Barriers to diversifying income (e.g. agrotourism) on farm properties and need for education/technical resources, supportive zoning, etc.

STRATEGIES

The State and Partners should continue to...

- ▶ Concentrate State agricultural land preservation funds in areas where the investment is reasonably well supported by both local investment and land use management programs to ensure a good return on public investment.
 - » Consider current and future flood risks in this decision-making to ensure the long-term viability of agricultural uses.
 - » Consider alternative preservation and funding programs for salt-impacted farmland that could be a suitable location to facilitate salt marsh habitat migration.
- ▶ Use local land use management authorities effectively to protect public investment in preservation by managing development in rural preservation areas.

- ▶ Offer and advertise conservation grant programs that support the adoption of stewardship practices on agricultural lands, like the Cover Crop Program, Maryland Agricultural Water Quality Cost-Share Program, and Small Farm and Urban Agriculture Program.

STRATEGY HIGHLIGHT

Programs* that support agricultural preservation

There are many programs that help conserve and maintain Maryland's natural, agricultural, scenic, and cultural resources for future generations:

- Maryland Environmental Trust (MET)
- Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF)
- Maryland's Rural Legacy Program
- Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)

*Coastal Resiliency easements funded by POS Stateside may also preserve (and transition) agriculture lands.



Steward What's Already Protected

PRIORITY #5

Historic and Cultural Resources

Protect Maryland's historic and cultural resources, with an emphasis on appropriate and sustainable stewardship models.

Maryland's historic resources provide varied and distinct views into the lives of the State's inhabitants, its land stewards, and its eras of development and change. DNR and partners have long been stewards of forts, battlegrounds, and homesteads from early American history. Increasingly, preserved lands and structures are being used to help tell stories of Indigenous people, as well as of enslaved and indentured laborers, and their contributions to Maryland's history. While several recent investments have expanded resources for learning about all parts of Maryland's history, there are opportunities to further this work.

The State and Partners should continue to create clear management and ownership models for historic and cultural properties, consider securing funding for restoration, and develop partnerships with agencies, governments, and private organizations.

The State should also continue implementing adaptive reuse strategies, developing guidelines for reuse partnerships, and researching sites with potential archaeological or historical significance.

New actions focus on establishing prioritization criteria, funding considerations, portfolio fit, and climate risks. Additional actions include increasing specialized staffing within DNR for historic preservation and evaluating the risks of climate change to historic resources.

FREEDMAN'S STATE HISTORICAL PARK

One of Maryland's newest State parks (April 2026), Freedman's State Park connects visitors to the history of Maryland's African American residents and their paths from slavery to freedom.



Top actions the community wants for Maryland's historical assets

“Improve existing parks with interactive information about the history of the area”

“Include local knowledge for preservation of historical and cultural resources”

SOURCE: Community Feedback Survey

EXISTING STRENGTHS

- ▶ Diverse funding mechanisms through various federal, State, and local grants (including MHT's capital grant program and the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority Financing Fund, and technical assistance for climate related resilience, or Preservation Maryland adaptive reuse programs).
- ▶ Curatorship program for historic sites within State-owned properties.
- ▶ Dedicated historic preservation departments and staff in some counties.

STRATEGIES

The State and Partners should continue to...

- ▶ Create clear management and ownership models for historic and cultural properties, ensuring appropriate stewardship, care, and financial/operational sustainability. Consider securing funding for the restoration and preservation of historically significant sites, with a focus on long-term sustainability. Develop partnerships for historic resource protection between State agencies, local governments, and private organizations to maintain, restore, and/or operate historic properties.
- ▶ Implement adaptive reuse strategies for historic structures to provide new functions while preserving their historic integrity, including succession planning for buildings with existing curatorships. Develop guidelines for structuring adaptive reuse partnerships to define mutual expectations.
- ▶ Research and inventory sites with potential

EMERGING CHALLENGES

- ▶ Lack of dedicated resources and funding for interpretation of historic and cultural resources.
- ▶ Deferred and high cost of maintenance of historic sites and buildings.
- ▶ Impacts of climate change including flooding.

archaeological or historical significance.

New or expanded actions for the State and partners...

- ▶ Increase specialized staffing within DNR to support the preservation and stewardship of historic resources by hiring people with archaeological and historic preservationist backgrounds.
- ▶ Evaluate the risk of climate change to historic resources and determine what actions may be appropriate.

STRATEGY HIGHLIGHT

The Maryland Resident Curatorship Program

Pioneered in 1982, the Maryland Resident Curatorship Program offers lucky curators the right to lifetime tenancy in an historic property in exchange for restoring it, maintaining it in good condition, and periodically sharing it with the public. From the mountain regions of Western Maryland to Assateague Island, the program has nearly 50 Curatorships in operation, each offering a special glimpse into Maryland's rich history.

Photo of Young House



PRINCIPLE TWO

Grow, Together

Maryland has the ambitious goal to preserve 40% of its land area, 610,000 additional acres, by 2040. Achieving this goal will require collaboration and embracing a variety of approaches. The priorities below outline strategies for conserving lands to support public recreation opportunities, natural and cultural resource protection, and coastal climate adaptation, with a focus on collaborative conservation models.



Grow, Together

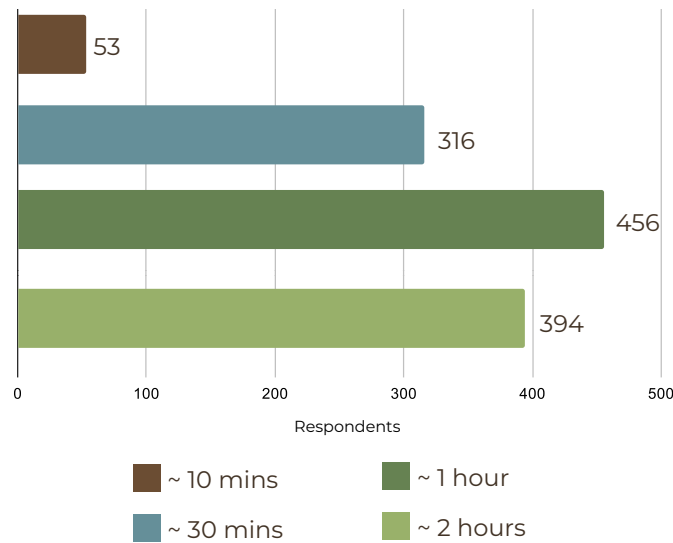
PRIORITY #1

New Open Space and Recreation

Continue to increase public open space Statewide, prioritizing filling gaps in areas with the greatest need.

While Maryland leads the way nationally in land preservation as a percent of its overall acreage, there are still opportunities to better connect and expand access to preserved lands that are publicly accessible, especially in low-income communities. The State and Partners should continue creating new parks and recreational areas or expand existing recreational areas by acquiring land in areas with limited access and other areas as other areas as explained in the strategy highlight on the following page.

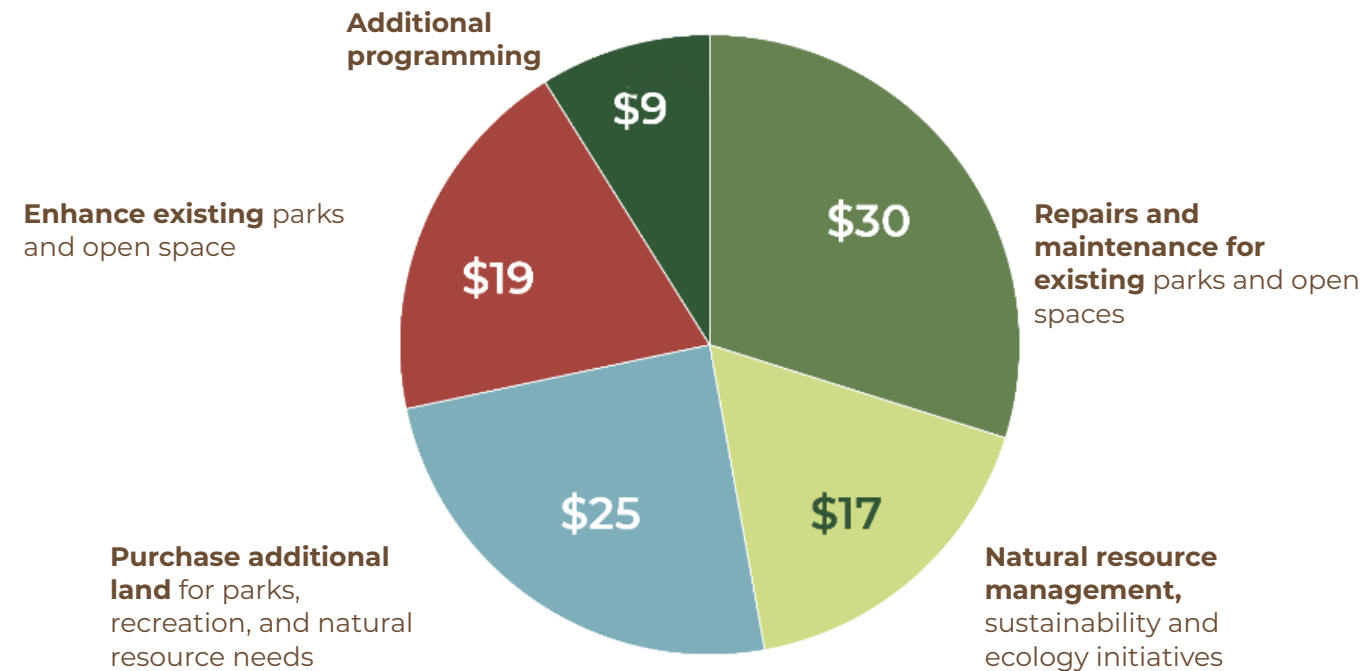
Maximum distance respondents would travel for a park/natural area



SOURCE: Community Feedback Survey

MARYLANDERS PRIORITIZE MAINTENANCE REPAIRS AND EXPANDING PRESERVED LANDS WHEN ASKED TO ALLOCATE \$100

SOURCE: Statistically Valid Survey



EXISTING STRENGTHS

- ▶ Legacy of dedicated funds for land acquisition and preservation through Program Open Space.
- ▶ Historic acquisition practices have helped counties get ahead of growth.
- ▶ State and local plans have helped prioritize park acquisitions.

EMERGING CHALLENGES

- ▶ Land value in areas with greatest need is also among the most expensive.
- ▶ Remaining land for open space is often encumbered with existing infrastructure, contamination, buildings, etc, and requires additional resources to clear the property.
- ▶ Program Open Space funds are sometimes diverted for other state budget purposes.
- ▶ Newly acquired land would mean increased upkeep and staff requirements.

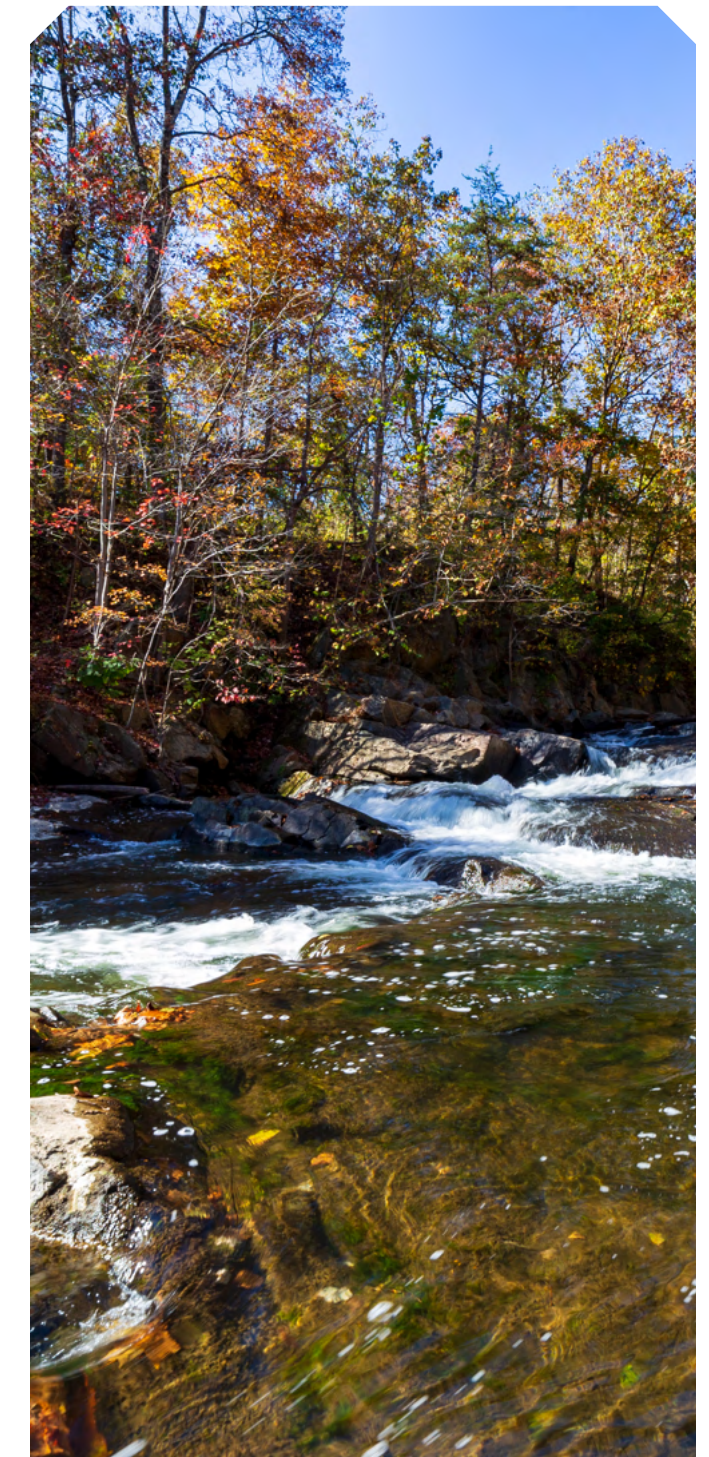
STRATEGIES

The State and Partners should continue to...

- ▶ Create new public lands or expand existing parks by acquiring land in areas with limited park access with funding sources like Program Open Space and the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Utilize the counties' and Baltimore City Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plans to determine local areas of need.
- ▶ Increase permanent legal protections for parks through deed restrictions for local jurisdictions, park overlay tools, or other methods to protect parks from future development or other municipal use.
- ▶ Assess the condition of park facilities and amenities and use this assessment to help prioritize renovations and replacements of the assets that require replacement for human health and safety reasons. Consider incorporating additional asset renovation/replacement prioritization considerations, including community need considerations and recreation trends.

New or expanded actions for the State and partners...

- ▶ Set expectations for timelines to develop new State public access sites, including parks, NRMAs, and NEAs that take into account funding availability and staff capacity for initial site improvements, longterm maintenance, and operations.



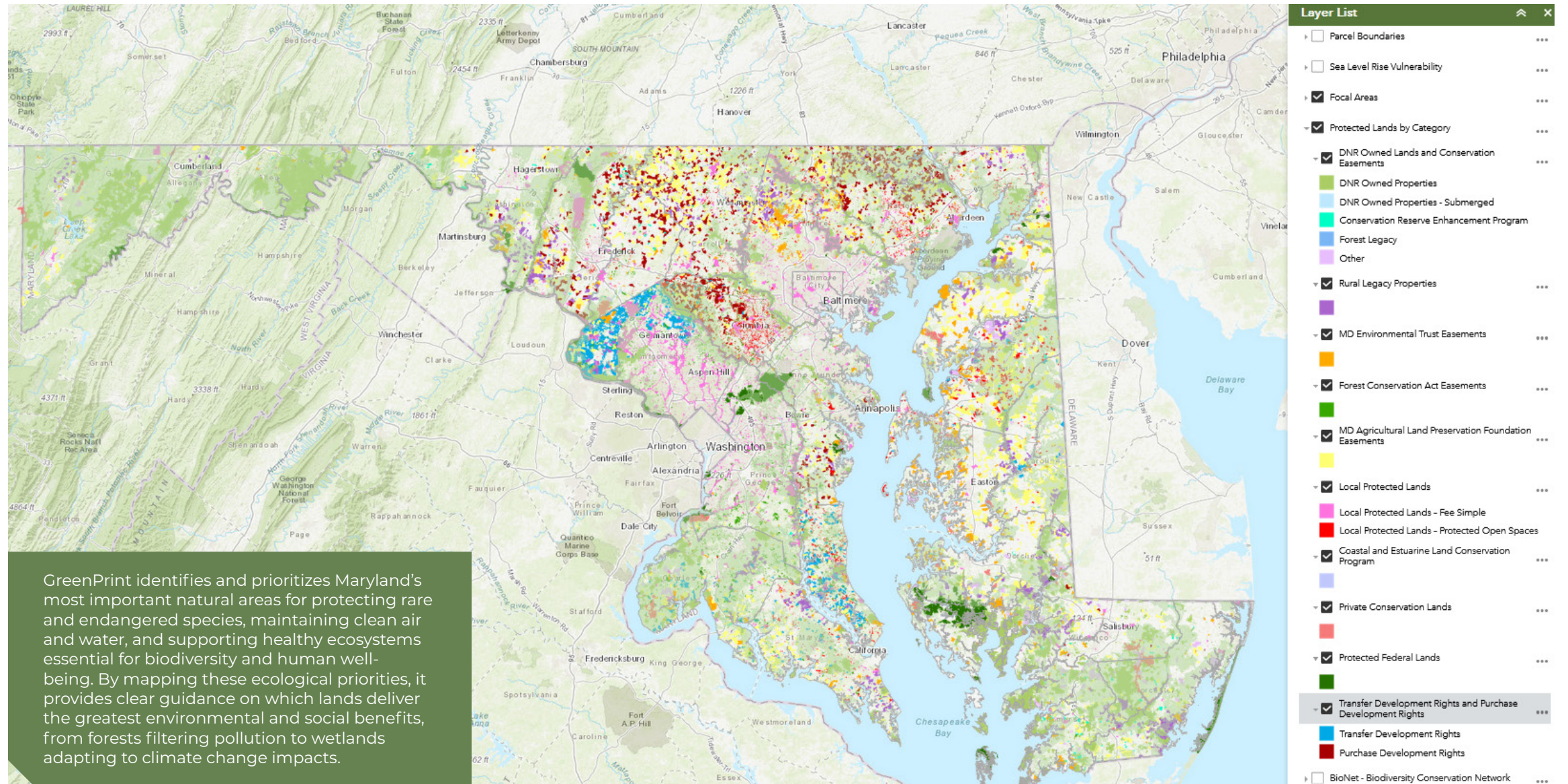
STRATEGY HIGHLIGHT

Land Preservation Priorities

As the State and partners look to prioritize new lands for permanent protection, there are a number of factors to consider. The following list outlines priorities for land acquisition to maximize ecological, recreation, and community impact. The path to 40% land preserved can create a more connected network of lands with community, environmental, and economic benefits, now and for future generations.

What characteristics are prioritized and considered for land acquisition?

- ▶ Increases park and recreation access in communities with limited access and/or health and income disparities communities
- ▶ Connections to parks, recreation, and open space destinations, including public water access points
- ▶ Contain GreenPrint conservation themes, which include:
 - Wildlife and Rare Species Habitat
 - Green Infrastructure and Forests Important for Protecting Water Quality
 - Non-tidal Streams and Fisheries
 - Tidal Fisheries, Bay and Coastal Ecosystems
 - Areas Important for Climate Change Adaptation
 - Of all GreenPrint lands, place a particular priority on protecting currently unprotected lands within Targeted Ecological Areas (TEAs)
- ▶ Important habitat types that may fall outside of designated green infrastructure (examples include: rock outcrops, karst systems, caves, shale barren communities, grasslands, shoreline beach and dune systems, mud flats, non-forested islands, etc.)
- ▶ Agricultural lands and scenic views that give Maryland's rural landscapes their unique identity
- ▶ Cultural/historical resources, especially those that reflect communities with limited park access and/or which experience adverse health, environmental, economic, and social stressors histories



SOURCE: GreenPrint

Grow, Together

PRIORITY #2

New Preserved Lands

Continue to conserve lands to support healthy ecosystems and maintain rural character—protecting the important economic and ecological value these lands provide.

Over half of all preserved lands in Maryland are protected as preservation or conservation easements, which are not typically publicly accessible, but provide a wide range of economic and environmental benefits!

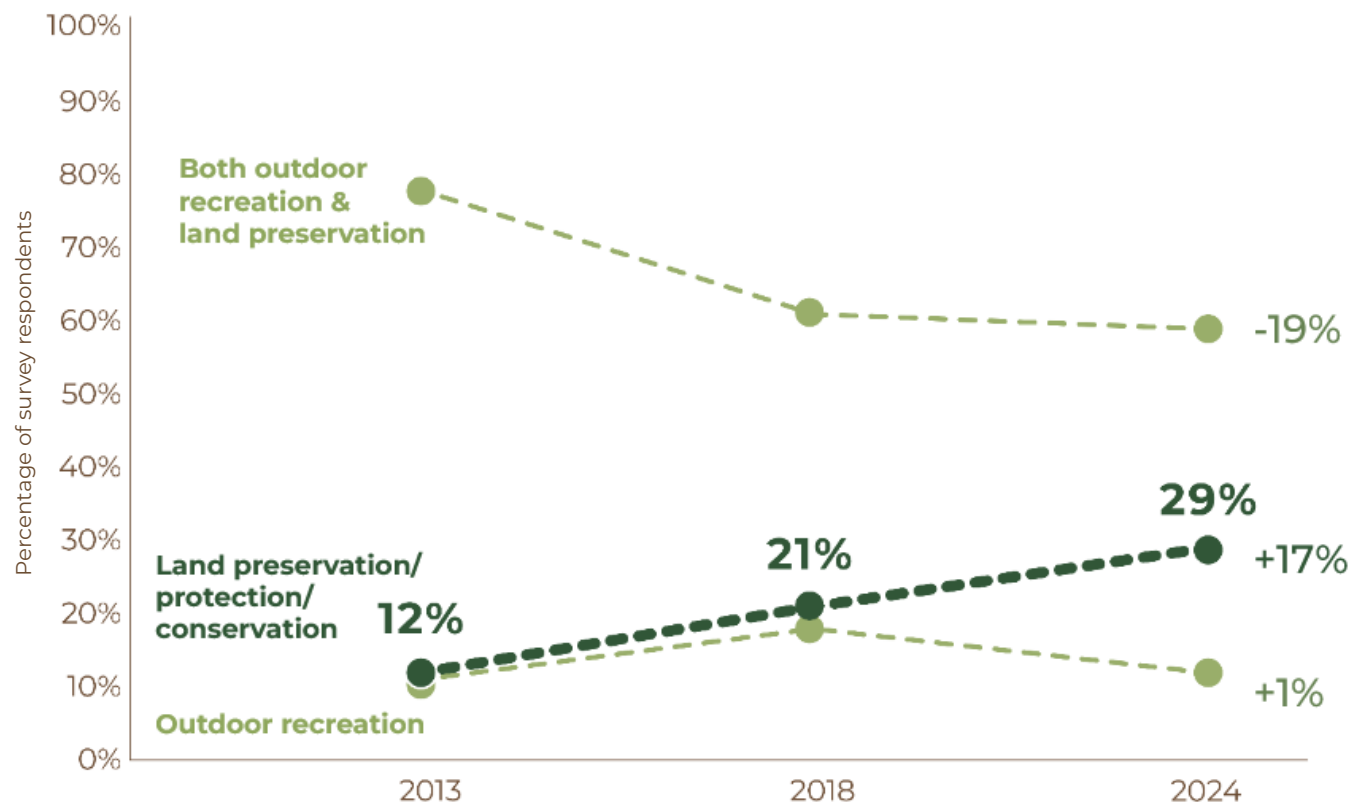
With these benefits in mind, this priority focuses on opportunities to continue land conservation partnerships that advance economic impacts and evaluate opportunities to better communicate the ecological and economic impact of the State's wetland mitigation bank and better protect the agricultural industry.

Focus group discussion session about Land Preservation

"Land preservation programs help support the **rural character** (the scenic views, the farm stands, the wineries, the agriculture industry) of areas around major State parks destinations."

RESPONDENTS' SUPPORT FOR LAND PRESERVATION IS HIGHER THAN USING PRESERVED LANDS JUST FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION

SOURCE: Statistically Valid Survey



EXISTING STRENGTHS

- ▶ The State is a national leader in natural resource conservation and monitoring.
- ▶ The State has identified Target Ecological Areas (TEAs), which is one tool used in the process of targeting lands for conservation.

EMERGING CHALLENGES

- ▶ There are limited large or contiguous parcels left to protect.
- ▶ Climate change is fast-tracking the impacts of invasive species and the need for habitat migration pathways for animals and plants.

STRATEGIES

The State and Partners should continue to...

- ▶ Collaborate for land conservation through voluntary easement programs, both purchased and donated, and conservation led by land trusts and other partners.
- ▶ Prioritize fee simple acquisition using POS and other funding sources for areas identified within GreenPrint. Support land acquisitions with staffing and maintenance funding (MD HB717 of 2025) where appropriate, transition ownership to local/county governments and partner with land trusts for long-term maintenance.
- ▶ Advance economic impact studies, similar to the recent study from the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy, as well as policies, and programs that recognize forests, wetlands, and agricultural lands as valuable economic assets, encouraging their long-term preservation and sustainable use.
- ▶ See also Strategy 1.3 – Continue to maintain current data like Target Ecological Areas (TEAs) that show priority areas for new conservation.

New or expanded actions for the State and partners...

- ▶ Work with land trusts, private landowners, local developers, and utility companies to link wildlife corridors and large core natural areas, building on key connections identified in Greenprint.
- ▶ Evaluate opportunities for the State and local governments to communicate the impact of the State's wetland mitigation bank, and expand the sale of compensatory mitigation credits.

STRATEGY HIGHLIGHT

Maryland The Beautiful Plan

The Maryland the Beautiful: Smart Growth Subcabinet Five-Year Plan complements the LPRP. Both share Maryland's success in conserving 30% of the state by 2030 and lay out plans to reach 40% conserved by 2040.



Grow, Together

PRIORITY #3

Coastal Climate Adaptation

Plan proactively for rising sea levels by strategically acquiring land to reduce flood risk, improve social and economic outcomes, and support transitioning ecologies.

Maryland is uniquely impacted by climate change - subsidence coupled with sea level fluctuation makes the relative rate of sea level rise in MD one of the highest globally - exacerbating the timeline of land loss along the State's waterways. Increasing land conservation in areas critical for climate adaptation, can help to protect Maryland's residents and industries from the impacts of climate change. Similarly, climate resiliency action planning can surface small investments with outsized impacts. Coastal flooding is just one of the climate challenges that are affecting public lands. For more information refer to Principle 1, Priority 1 for pests and Principle 4, Priority 5 for heat resilience.

Action words used to describe coastal and climate resiliency

- "I want to have a variety of protected lands, including various coasts and waterways"*
- "I value the birds, fish, and other life dependent on coastal marshes"*
- "Maryland's protected lands are important to building resilience to future threats"*

SOURCE: Community Feedback Survey

Flooding events in Allegany County

SOURCE: Baltimore Banner, 2025



EXISTING STRENGTHS

- ▶ Strong conservation legacy and local expertise in managing natural buffers.
- ▶ Existing partnerships among DNR, counties, and nonprofits for land protection.
- ▶ Strong agricultural community with history of adaptive practices.

STRATEGIES

The State and Partners should continue to...

- ▶ Create climate resiliency action plans evaluating DNR lands and facilities at risk of flooding now or in the future and implement strategies to reduce risk.
- ▶ Work to increase land conservation efforts in areas critical for climate adaptation, including natural buffers to reduce flood risk in developed regions and areas for habitat migration due to sea level rise, especially salt marsh and submerged aquatic vegetation.

New or expanded actions for the State and partners...

- ▶ Use existing datasets like the Priority Shoreline Area and Marsh Protection Potential Index to prioritize conservation efforts.
- ▶ Consider opportunities to adapt to changing climate conditions affecting farmlands like salt intrusion to support improved economic and ecological outcomes. For example, study the potential for creating a land swap program to support coastal farmers in transitioning to upland sites and preserving salt-affected agriculture lands for coastal habitat migration.

EMERGING CHALLENGES

- ▶ Rapid sea level rise outpaces current conservation pace.
- ▶ Many of the State's and local community spaces and facilities are already at risk from flooding.
- ▶ Adaptation funding and capacity are limited.
- ▶ The poor condition of tidal marshes limit their ability to help mitigate sea level rise.

STRATEGY HIGHLIGHT

Assateague Campground Adaptation

The Maryland Park Service at Assateague State Park partnered with Watershed and Climate Service to prepare a climate change adaptation and resilience planning guide for Assateague State Park that evaluates climate hazards, impacts from climate change, and potential adaptation strategies and implementation opportunities. The plan's priority recommendations include acquiring more land for future campsites, monitoring dunes, increasing sand bypassing, and improving infrastructure. Assateague State Park is one of the most visited State parks in the State of Maryland, bringing in over \$1,000,000 to the State annually. As a barrier island lined by both the Atlantic Ocean and Maryland's coastal bays, it is one of the most vulnerable areas to the impacts of climate change. As such, it is imperative to find ways to adapt to the threats of climate change and protect Assateague's natural resources for years to come.

DNR: 14-111822-336

Assateague State Park Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience Planning Guide

Protecting long-term resources and opportunities in a sustainable manner

Published November 2022

For questions about this plan please contact kate.vogel@maryland.gov.

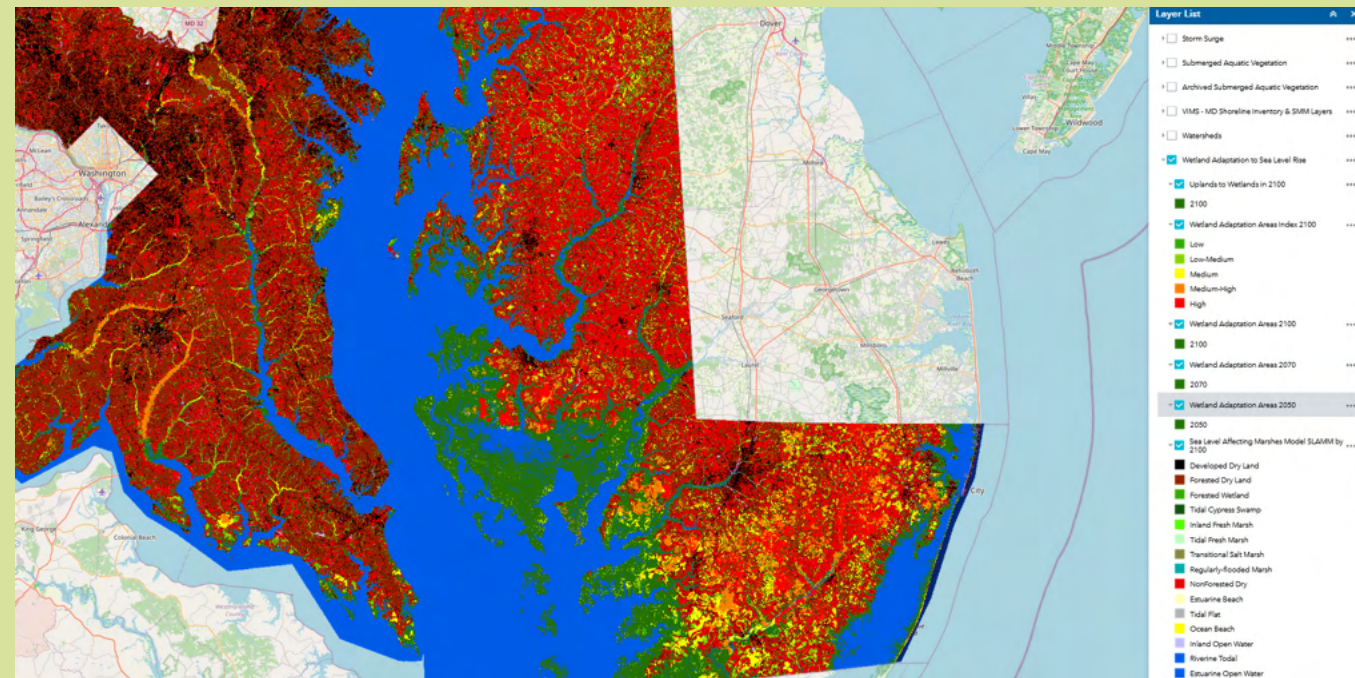
STRATEGY HIGHLIGHT

Other Climate Tools

*SLAMM = Sea Level Affecting Marshes Model
 **WAA = Wetland Adaptation Areas

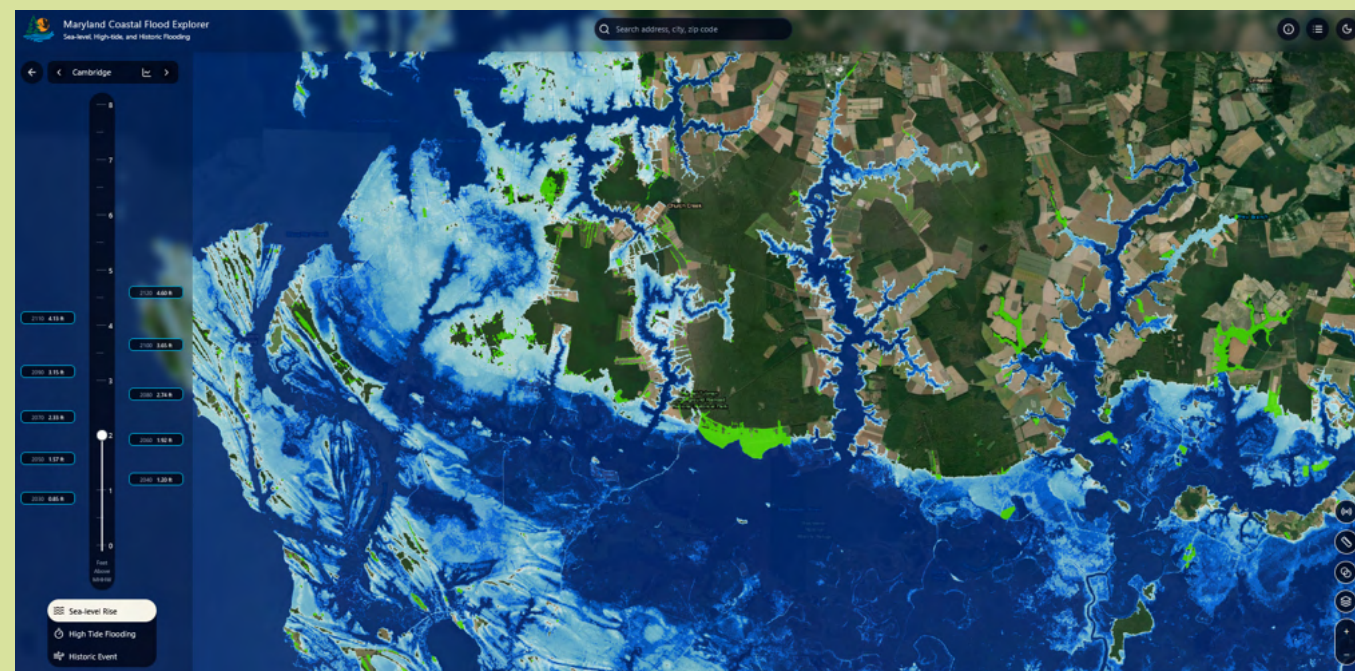
Coastal Atlas (With new tools like Wetland Adaptation to Sea Level Rise; SLAMM* results for 2050, 2070, 2100; Upland to Wetlands; Wetland Adaptation Areas; WAA Index 2100; Drowned Lands)**

The Coastal Atlas is a mapping tool that allows State and local decision-makers to visually analyze and explore coastal and ocean data layers for project and planning purposes. Using the built-in tools, the user can query, map, and analyze spatial data to better understand Maryland's marine resources.



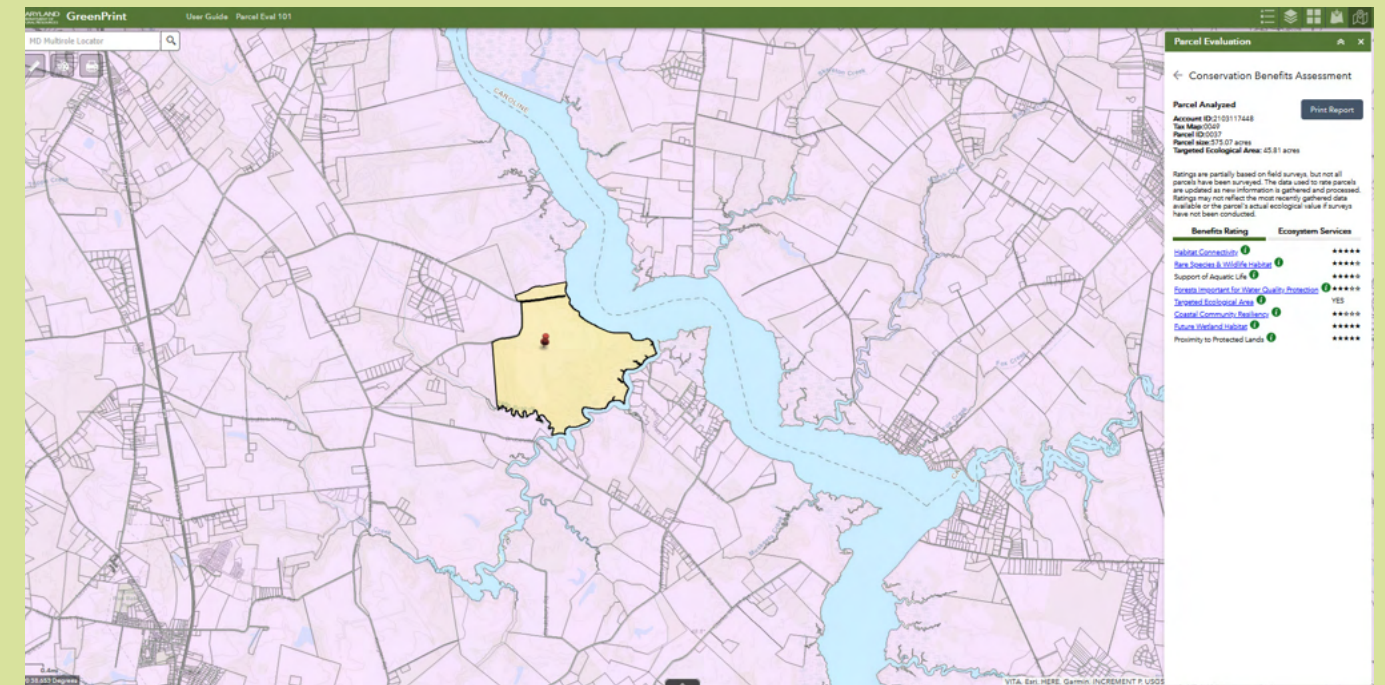
The Maryland Coastal Flood Explorer

The Maryland Coastal Flood Explorer is a valuable tool for visualizing flood risk. The goal of developing this tool is to help coastal decision makers at the State and local level understand current conditions and future vulnerability to flooding and serve as a basis for short, mid, and long term planning.



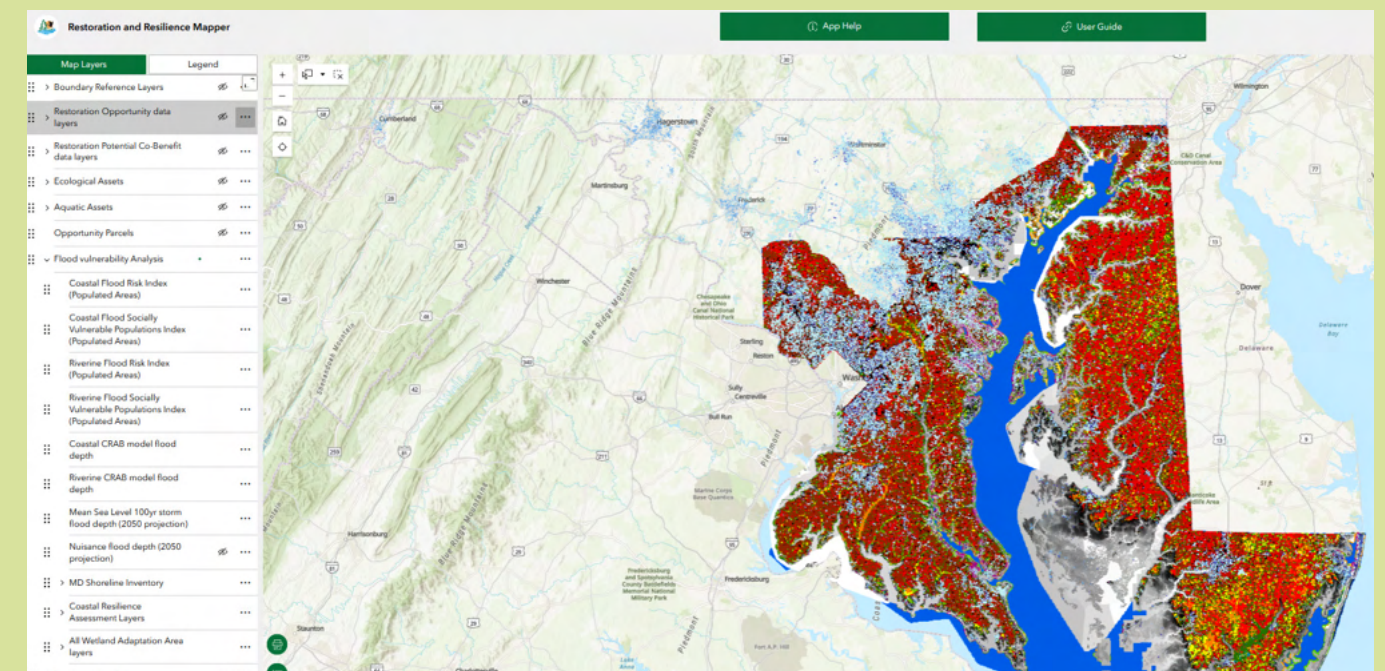
Parcel Evaluation Tool (GreenPrint)

The Parcel Evaluation Tool provides a Conservation Benefits and Ecosystem Service Assessment Report Card for every land parcel in Maryland. Ecosystem service value does not equate to a Fair Market appraisal. The Report Card values reflect many of the ecological priorities established for Stateside Program Open Space (POS).



Restoration and Resilience Mapper

The purpose of the Restoration and Resilience Mapper is to support restoration and climate resilience activities in Maryland. The tool contains a collection of environmental, hydrological, and social datasets to support landscape and parcel assessment activities.



Grow, Together

PRIORITY #4

Balanced Development

Plan for future growth in a manner that strategically integrates land conservation and preservation, ensuring development occurs without compromising critical natural and agricultural resources.

Sustainable growth principles and policies shepherded Maryland's approach to strategic, compact development patterns to counter the sprawl, and large lot subdivision activity taking hold of many rural communities across the United States. The State and Partners should continue to advocate for incentives and policies that balance housing growth and job creation, while protecting unique natural features and connected wildlife habitats.

New actions include collaborating with counties to diversify funding through fees and encouraging development reviews to ensure open spaces connect with existing infrastructure and community destinations.

Concerns from the community about future development

“Green areas need to keep up with the population boom that Maryland is experiencing”

“Too much development can cause loss of Maryland nature and beauty”

“We all need to have a place to ‘get away from it all’... now and in the future.”

SOURCE: Community Feedback Survey

MARYLAND'S PLANNING PRINCIPLES

- Land**
Optimize productivity of working landscapes, including farms and forests, and fisheries, and prioritize development within population centers that are in proximity to existing infrastructure and facilities.
- Transportation**
Prioritize transportation networks that create energy efficient, affordable, and reliable access to jobs, housing, and services.
- Housing**
Enable a mix of quality housing types and affordability options to accommodate all who want to live in the state.
- Economy**
Allow for adaptive reuse, mixed-use, and context appropriate new development that responds to changing markets and innovations.

- Equity**
Engage all sectors of the community in plan development to ensure diverse voices are heard and the needs of underserved populations are prioritized.
- Resilience**
Integrate resiliency measures that will minimize the impacts of rapid and unexpected natural- and human-caused threats on communities.
- Place**
Provide for public spaces that encourage social interaction and value cultural, historical, and natural resources.
- Ecology**
Protect and restore sensitive ecological systems and conserve natural resources, including forests, agricultural areas, and waterways.

SOURCE: Maryland's Sustainable Growth Policy and Planning Principles

EXISTING STRENGTHS

- ▶ The State's existing sustainable growth programs maximize existing infrastructure investments and limit greenfield development.
- ▶ Local infrastructure and parks provide a foundation for connectivity.

STRATEGIES

The State and Partners should continue to...

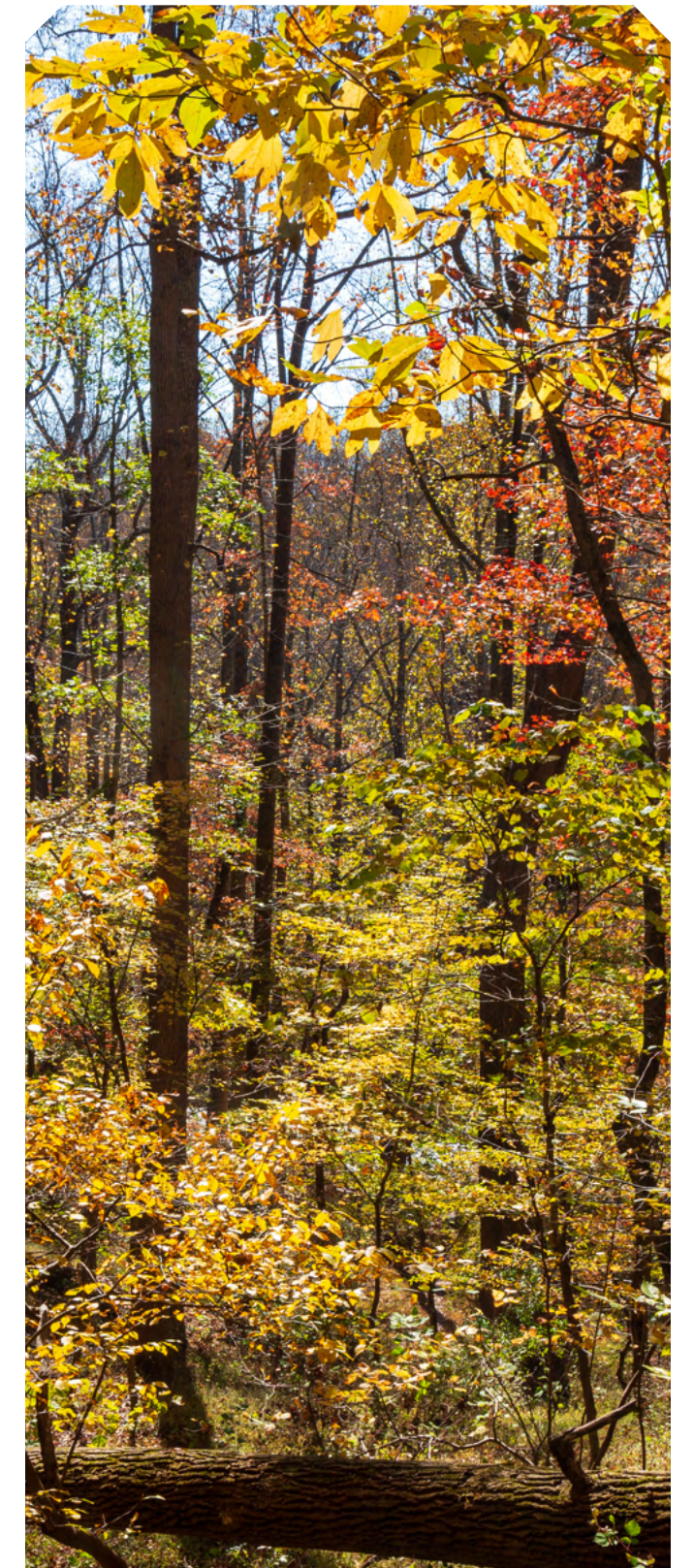
- ▶ Advocate for and develop incentives, policies, and/or requirements for large-scale new development to permanently set aside open space to meet the recreational and open space needs of new residents and assist the State in meeting its land conservation goal of 40% by 2040.
- ▶ Support sustainable growth policies that encourage infill and redevelopment and minimize the consumption of undeveloped agricultural or natural lands. Limit the intrusion of development and its impacts on rural resources and resource-based industries. Align park investments with public infrastructure and development priorities to strengthen existing communities and guide responsible growth.
- ▶ Execute development mitigation programs that support both canopy preservation and new tree planting. Monitor effectiveness and refine programs as needed to better promote forest sustainability and ecosystem service delivery.

New or expanded actions for the State and partners...

- ▶ Encourage development review processes that evaluate the placement of open spaces in developments to ensure new open spaces meaningfully connect to existing local infrastructure, parks, forest / natural areas, or community destinations.
- ▶ Encourage counties to create policies and zoning regulations that limit greenfield development and encourage dense, walkable communities with a mix of experiences, including park access.

EMERGING CHALLENGES

- ▶ Rural lands continue to face development pressure from new land uses (solar installations), while being balanced with preservation to reach the 40% by 2040 goal.
- ▶ Local approaches to development controls are varied across the jurisdictions resulting in various levels of success in land conservation and preservation.



PRINCIPLE THREE

Reinvest in Parks, Reinvest in People

Maryland's parks are well-loved! Now is a key time to reinvest in them, as they face aging infrastructure, rising visitor demand, and increasing climate challenges. Maryland State Parks has over \$100 million in urgent maintenance needs. Addressing these issues will require both funding and more efficient project delivery. The following priorities outline strategies for sustainable funding, long-term park maintenance, major reinvestments, capital improvements, and boosting heat resilience across the park system.



Reinvest in Parks, Reinvest in People

PRIORITY #1

Ongoing Parks and Open Space Care

Expand maintenance capacity, staffing, and consider funding, with a focus on strengthening partnerships to address staffing and resource gaps for parks and State-owned recreational areas.

The COVID-19 Pandemic reconnected Marylanders to the great outdoors and stressed park systems that were woefully underfunded. It also reinforced that the long-term health of State and local parks requires budgets that appropriately allocate funds to the care of those special places, both in ways that build staff capacity and resources and in capital funding to fix or rebuild parks that are beloved and in need of reinvestment.

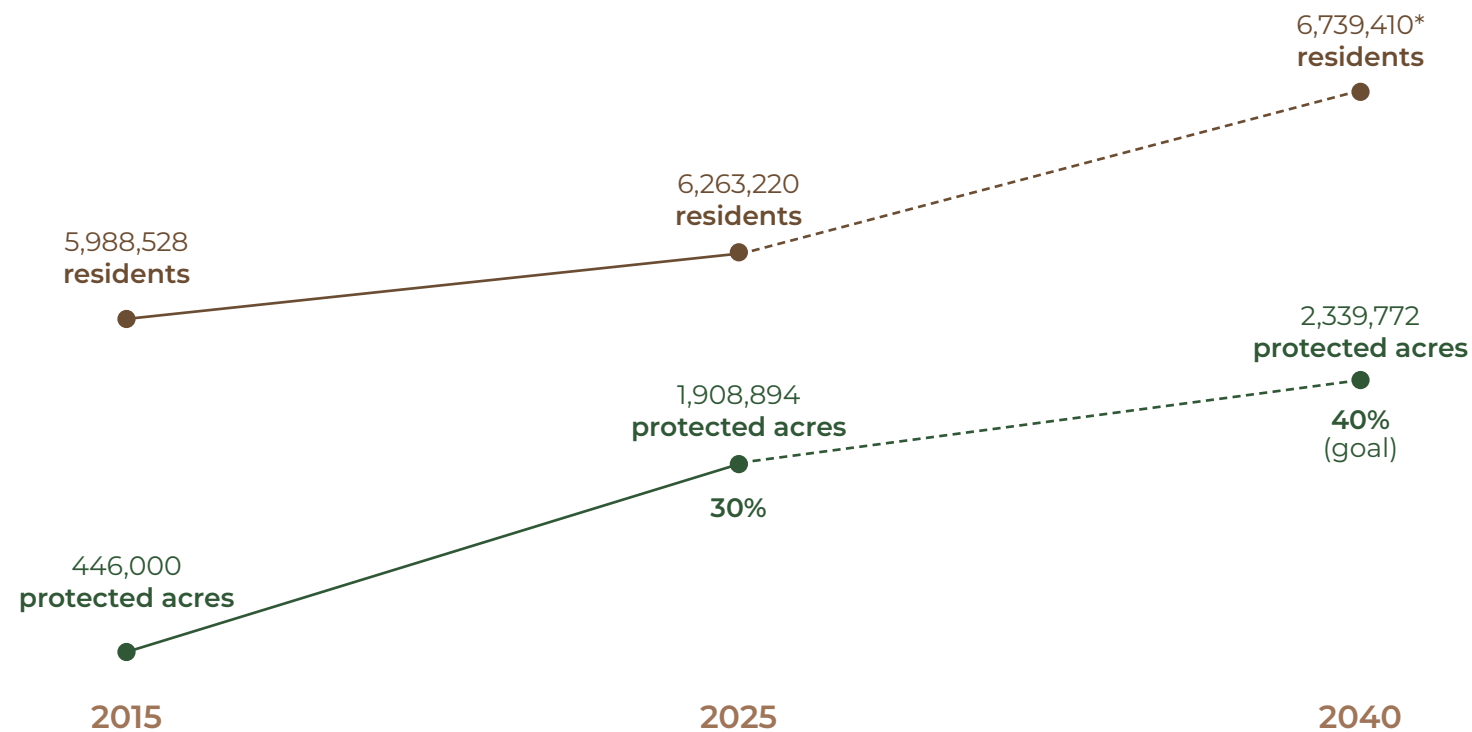
The actions within this priority focus on opportunities to expand staffing and funding for parks, focusing on proactive maintenance, workforce training, staff development, and competitive compensation to support retention.

Top themes about staffing from focus group discussions

- Underfunding
- Staff Shortages
- Backlogs
- Aging Infrastructure

SOURCE: Community Feedback Survey

INCREASED REQUIREMENTS BASED ON POPULATION GROWTH



*estimated by Maryland State Archives

EXISTING STRENGTHS

- ▶ Strength of local funding for maintenance and reinvestment.
- ▶ State partnerships for maintenance and stewardship.
- ▶ Passage of the Great Maryland Outdoors Act (GMOA).
- ▶ Existing, dedicated funding streams, including Program Open Space, help to grow and care for the state and local open space network.

EMERGING CHALLENGES

- ▶ Fluctuations in funding available for maintenance and operational staffing.
- ▶ Increases in acreage and visitation of protected lands does not always correspond with increases in operational funding and staffing.

STRATEGIES

The State and Partners should continue to...

- ▶ Considering expanding staffing and funding to operate and maintain parks and other State-owned recreational areas, with a focus on proactive maintenance to address issues early before they become more expensive to fix later.
- ▶ Partner in workforce training and recruitment opportunities to bring a new generation into the parks field. For example, coordinate with educational institutions, vocational training programs, internship programs, and youth outreach to promote careers in parks.
- ▶ Routinely review and evaluate long-term contracts and partnerships, addressing any identified issues of quality of service or products and costs
- ▶ Invest in the morale and professional development of staff through job training, staff outings, and supportive office policies.
- ▶ Adjust staffing compensation levels to be competitive with comparable, local jobs to support staff retention.
- ▶ Balance public access with conservation needs, ensuring that visitors' activities do not negatively impact ecological health. Accomplish this through education, signage, limiting access in the most environmentally sensitive areas, and locating new trails, facilities, and programs to minimize negative environmental impacts.



- ▶ Foster community stewardship and raise awareness of the value of Maryland's parks and protected lands through volunteer programs, signage/education, and partnerships with youth and family-focused programs like Es Mi Parque and the Junior Ranger Program.

New or expanded actions for the State and partners...

- ▶ Determine optimal DNR staffing needs by completing a workforce analysis, including time-task analysis, of current staffing positions, prioritizing roles that fulfill DNR's core mission.
- ▶ Review current job titles and specifications and update to align with private sector positions to establish competitive positions in the market.
- ▶ Evaluate opportunities for public-private partnerships for asset management in a manner that does not compromise natural resources.
- ▶ Using recent legislation (HB 717 of 2025) which authorizes DNR to establish affiliated foundations, create and expand "Friends of" groups to create a reliable, accountable mechanism to support operations, maintenance, and fundraising for parks that do not currently have an established Friends Group.
- ▶ Assess existing facilities and services for alignment with the department's core recreation and conservation mission, identifying opportunities for reinvestment, consolidation, partnership operation, or disposition to support system sustainability and agency goals.
- ▶ Increase capacity for natural resource management on public protected lands. Partner with existing State programs to create a natural resource management workforce jobs pipeline. Continue to support job corps programs that help steward and maintain parks and protected lands.



STRATEGY HIGHLIGHT

HB 717 of 2025 - Natural Resources - Public Lands - Acquisition, Staffing, Operations, and Funding

Altering provisions of law regarding the acquisition of real property by the Department of Natural Resources; establishing a Land and Property Management Program in the Department to process certain transactions; authorizing the Department and the Natural Resources Police to establish affiliated foundations; authorizing the Governor to transfer certain Program Open Space funds to the Department under certain circumstances; altering and repealing certain provisions of law regarding the use of Program Open Space local funding; etc.

STRATEGY HIGHLIGHT

Maryland Strategic Plan

In parallel with this planning effort, the Maryland Park Service (MPS) developed a strategic plan that focuses on opportunities for the agency to respond to financial strains, a growing population and increased visitor numbers, and aging infrastructure. MPS is one of the nation's oldest state park systems with its origin dating back to the establishment of Patapsco Valley State Park in 1907.

Today MPS operates a highly diverse system of protected state lands and public recreation assets including 54 state parks, 26 natural resources management areas, seven (7) natural environment areas, two (2) historic state battlefields, one (1) state historical park and three (3) rail trail sites. This complex system hosted over 18,465,000 visitors in 2024, including over 17,500,000 day-use visitors and nearly 921,000 overnight visitors.

The strategies detailed within the strategic plan include strategies that cover staffing and operations, improved financial performance, optimized asset management, alternative management strategies, and policy and procedural improvements.

The Maryland State Park Strategic Plan is based on detailed analyses of current MPS operations, national best practices for state park systems, emerging innovations for improved operational and financial performance, and collaborative solutions developed with agency leadership. It includes four pillars to guide decision making over the next five years:

- **STRENGTHEN OPERATIONS AND STAFFING:** Implement management and staffing models that address major challenges while improving the efficiency and effectiveness of park operations.
- **EXPAND ALTERNATIVE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES:** Develop and grow earned revenues and improve expense management to ensure stronger financial sustainability.
- **ENHANCE FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE:** Engage operational partners, concessions, and stakeholder agencies to share responsibility for managing resources, park assets, amenities, and services.
- **POLICY AND SYSTEMS IMPROVEMENTS:** Modernize human resources, finance, and purchasing systems to improve overall agency resiliency and performance.

STRATEGY HIGHLIGHT

Es Mi Parque and Junior Ranger

The Es Mi Parque program was launched by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources in 2016 as a pilot project to improve customer service and reduce access barriers for the Latino/Hispanic community. It has since then evolved to be the umbrella term for Spanish bilingual programs and events at parks, such as the bilingual Junior Ranger program at Patapsco Valley State Park, the Hispanic Heritage Month celebrations at Seneca Creek State Park, and much more!



Reinvest in Parks, Reinvest in People

PRIORITY #2

Capital Projects

Fund projects in parks and State-owned recreation areas that proactively address deferred maintenance and meet contemporary community needs. Prioritize multi-benefit approaches that maximize the impact of public and private investments by aligning environmental protection, community well-being, and long-term economic sustainability.

The State and local governments have made great strides to proactively respond to deferred maintenance needs within their park and recreation systems. Anne Arundel County (during a focus group meeting) has shared about the development of a model for reinvestment in capital projects that limits its need to pass bonds. DNR recently received over \$100 million in funding to address critical deferred maintenance needs in buildings and is also creating an asset management system to better track investments and plan for future investments. The following actions identify opportunities for the State and local partners to best prioritize which capital projects are prioritized to support sustainable funding and operations and modernize aging infrastructure.

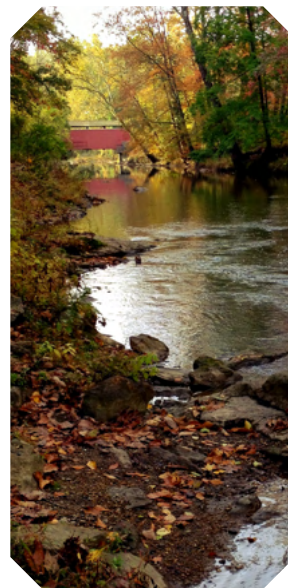


SOURCE: Community Feedback Survey

CRITICAL MAINTENANCE (INFRASTRUCTURE) PROJECTS FUNDED FOR FY2024

A total of 593 critical maintenance projects worth \$75 million were funded for FY24. The ten state parks with highest funding (2015 - 2024):

1. Fair Hill NRMA: \$7,998,000
2. Rocky Gap SP: \$6,545,000
3. Gunpowder Falls SP: \$5,503,000
4. Patapsco Valley SP: \$3,306,000
5. New Germany SP: \$2,599,000
6. Deep Creek Lake SP: \$2,524,000
7. Tuckahoe SP: \$2,230,000
8. Cunningham Falls SP: \$2,085,000
9. Point Lookout SP: \$1,821,000
10. North Point SP: \$1,696,000



Fair Hill Natural Resource Management Area



Rocky Gap State Park



Gunpowder Falls State Park

EXISTING STRENGTHS

- ▶ Program Open Space real estate tax directly supports land acquisition and park improvements.
- ▶ Strong public support for park and open space investment and natural resources.

EMERGING CHALLENGES

- ▶ Recent State budget shortfalls.
- ▶ Rapidly changing community priorities and recreation trends make it difficult to effectively plan for capital improvements.
- ▶ Lack of Program Open Space protections against diversions to other State budget needs.
- ▶ Limited local regulations or incentives for publicly accessible private open space and trail creation.

STRATEGIES

The State and Partners should continue to...

- ▶ Align new capital projects with priority community needs and recreation trends. Highest priority statewide needs identified in the 2025 statistically valid survey include: natural areas/open spaces, trails (paved multi-use and hiking), water access (outdoor swimming, non-motorized watercraft, and fishing), indoor recreation spaces, bird watching/wildlife viewing, historical sites/museums, and shooting ranges. Additionally, support the development of community gardens. See the survey results for more details for priority needs in different parts of the State.
- ▶ Coordinate State, county, and local investments in parks, recreation, and open space to complement and mutually support each other.

New or expanded actions for the State and partners...

- ▶ Improve systems for asset management of infrastructure and buildings. Track deferred maintenance needs and use prioritization criteria to identify the highest needs, focusing on safety, supporting communities

- with limited park access and/or which experience adverse health, environmental, economic, and social stressors communities, climate resilience, accessibility, and economic benefits. Develop a plan to keep data up-to-date over time.
- ▶ Invest in administrative staff support to identify and address bottlenecks in the project delivery process for permitting, contracting, etc.
- ▶ Improve the capital project delivery process to support goals for financial sustainability, accessibility, and climate resilience. Develop a plan for sustainable funding, operations, and maintenance when planning for new capital investments. Ensure the design of new facilities includes consideration of sustainable operations and maintenance, universal design principles, natural resource protection and climate resilience.
- ▶ Where appropriate, work with Friends Groups (Friends of Maryland State Parks and the individual Friends Groups associated with different state parks throughout Maryland) on capital projects, including fundraising campaigns. Provide guidance to Friends Groups on what capital projects are most important to ensure alignment of efforts with high priority park needs.

Reinvest in Parks, Reinvest in People

PRIORITY #3

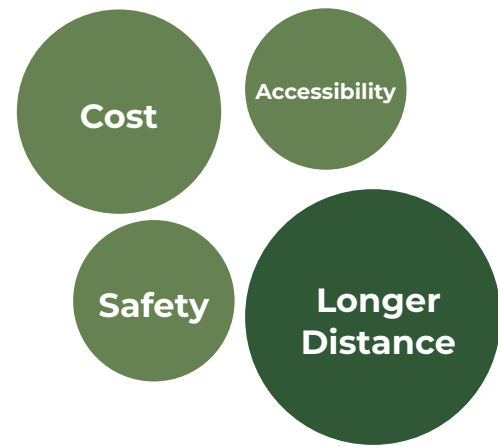
Expanding Access

Welcome everyone so all visitors build connections to nature and feel a sense of belonging in Maryland’s parks and protected lands.

According to the community survey, access to nature was both the top activity that Marylanders participated in and the number one priority for future investment. Marylanders that participate in nature-based activities or visit natural areas most typically live in denser, urban areas of the State and have more limited local access to a range of nature-based experiences.

Much of the parks and recreation marketing has gone online which limits engagement by folks who are not digital natives (program guides and mailers were sunsetted because of costs). Also many communications happen within parks, so non-park users do not have access to that information. Many communities do not see relevant programs/activities/amenities reflected in offerings.

Reasons why people lacked access to parks and natural areas



SOURCE: Community Feedback Survey

REASONS WHY RESPONDENTS DON'T PARTICIPATE OFTEN IN OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Item	2013	2018	2024	Change from 2018 to 2024
Not aware of program/facilities offered	9%	12%	44%	32%
Lack of facilities/programs	6%	8%	19%	11%
Price/User fees	7%	6%	16%	10%
Size of facilities/amount of space available	3%	3%	8%	5%
Hours of operation	3%	4%	9%	5%
Condition of parks/facilities	3%	4%	8%	4%
Safety and security	4%	5%	8%	3%
Lack of ADA-accessible features	N/A	4%	5%	1%
Transportation/Access issues	6%	6%	6%	0%
No time	46%	39%	23%	-16%

SOURCE: Statistically Valid Survey

EXISTING STRENGTHS

- ▶ State and local parks offer diverse programs and nature-based experiences.
- ▶ Partnerships with local governments and organizations provide a foundation for collaboration.
- ▶ Existing ADA facilities and amenities demonstrate progress toward inclusive design.
- ▶ Staff show commitment to serving all residents, including those with unique needs.
- ▶ Community events and recreation programs draw participation from a broad audience.
- ▶ Some state parks were able to hire bilingual staff and there is a bilingual (Spanish/English) team out that supported MPS in the 2025 season.

EMERGING CHALLENGES

- ▶ Many amenities and programs are not fully accessible to people with disabilities.
- ▶ Affordability remains a barrier for low-income families to access programs.
- ▶ Limited culturally relevant amenities reduce engagement from diverse communities.
- ▶ ADA transition plans are incomplete or absent in some well-attended parks. (E&C, OFP, and OOR are working on an ADA plan for state facilities)
- ▶ Lack of bilingual staff and translated signage limits outreach to non-English speakers.
- ▶ Facilities and programs often lack inclusivity for all identities (e.g., sensory spaces, gender-neutral restrooms).
- ▶ Respondents to the statistically valid survey and online community survey who identified as people of color shared that they faced barriers to feeling welcome or represented in parks.

STRATEGIES

The State and Partners should continue to...

- ▶ Invest in adaptive or accessible park amenities and equipment to increase access to park and nature experiences for all abilities. Expand inclusive and specialized recreation programs.
- ▶ Build strategic community partnerships that expand access and foster deeper community involvement. For example, foster inclusive park experiences by partnering with trusted community organizations to host meet-up events, special outings, and recreation programs that cater to diverse groups, including affinity groups, low-income residents, and the disabled community. Focus on offering culturally relevant activities and ensuring access to all Marylanders, particularly those facing barriers to reaching parks or affording experiences.
- ▶ Incorporate strategies like scholarships to make programs and parks affordable to visit for visitors with lower incomes.

- ▶ Expand culturally relevant park amenities and programs to ensure Maryland’s parks are offering experiences that let all cultures connect with nature and enjoy outdoor experiences.
- ▶ Increase language access in parks, programs, and written materials. Utilize digital tools to supplement and expand written materials used for outreach. Provide incentives to hire bilingual staff and encourage Spanish language learning programs for staff in parks with higher rates of Spanish-speaking visitors.

New or expanded actions for the State and partners...

- ▶ Improve ADA accessibility and incorporate universal design principles in parks and open spaces across the State. Implement ADA transition plans. In places without transition plans, analyze existing ADA accessibility, which could include incorporation of park visitor reviews about accessibility from those with disabilities.

- ▶ Expand inclusive infrastructure and programming to support the comfort of all identities in Maryland's parks (for example, sensory friendly spaces and programs; gender neutral / family restrooms).
- ▶ Increase engagement with communities with limited park access and/or which experience adverse health, environmental, economic, and social stressors identities to identify barriers to use, enjoyment, or feeling welcome. Make changes based on feedback and lessons learned.
- ▶ Enhance and diversify communications strategies to spread awareness to broader audiences about programs and amenities offered.
- ▶ Strategies to enhance communications include:
 - ▶ Use a variety of communications channels, including community partners, multilingual campaigns, and local events to share information and promote events.
 - ▶ Attend community and cultural events to promote park resources and programs.
 - ▶ Upgrade web resources to feature a searchable list of parks with filters for each amenity (e.g. swimming, ADA accessible experiences, distance, etc).
 - ▶ Identify gaps in awareness, especially among demographic groups who are less likely to visit Maryland parks and preserved lands, and develop strategies and partnerships to increase communication to target audiences.

STRATEGY HIGHLIGHT

Spanish-Language Outreach on Safety and Stewardship

For many years, the Maryland's DNR recognized a disparity in relating laws, regulations, and safety information to one of the fastest-growing communities enjoying the outdoors. Spanish-speaking residents faced multiple barriers to access at the parks, particularly with customer service and community programming.

In 2024, the International Boating and Water Safety Summit honored the Maryland Natural Resources Police (NRP) for providing boating safety education to Spanish-speaking boaters. These awards recognize the creative ways boating and water safety advocates are communicating with the public about safety on and in the water. NRP received the communications award for printed media, as the agency developed translated materials and signage to reach Spanish-speaking boaters, including the Maryland State Requirements for Recreational Vessels. One NRP reserve officer spent more than 100 hours translating materials in conjunction with NRP's Safety Education and Outreach Unit.

The Maryland State Requirements for Recreational Vessels is a summary of boating laws and regulations for Maryland. The guide includes information on boat registration and proper licensing, safety requirements, "rules of the road," and life saving tips. Maryland is also one of the first States to offer the State's boater safety course in Spanish, mandated for all boaters born on or after July 1, 1972. Additionally, Maryland offers Spanish-language services including fishing license sales, fishing regulations, and a personal watercraft (Jet-Ski) rental test.



STRATEGY HIGHLIGHT

Adaptive mountain biking at Patapsco and Savage River.

Savage River State Forest

The Savage River State Forest has four brand-new mountain bike trails, including the first adaptive mountain bike trail on State forestlands. Tucked in the mountains of Western Maryland near Accident in Garrett County, the Margraff Plantation Trail System offers six miles of newly-constructed trails – a 1.4-mile beginner trail, a 1.4-mile intermediate trail, a 1.2-mile advanced trail and a 2-mile intermediate-level adaptive trail.

The interconnected trail system gives both riders and hikers the chance to try out varied terrain and progress in skills and challenges, depending on how they feel. Trail users will enjoy traversing through diverse habitats, including pine and deciduous forests, as well as mountain laurel and meadow landscapes.

The design and installation of the trails were a collaboration of many partners. The MD Forest Service, Office of Outdoor Recreation, the MD Park Service, the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA), and Appalachian Dirt worked alongside other partners to design and construct the new trails.



Patapsco Valley State Park

The Friends of Patapsco Valley State Park (FPVSP) recently expanded the adaptive trail network in the McKeldin Area of Patapsco Valley State Park. This expansion is part of FPVSP's broader initiative to increase access for all visitors, especially those with disabilities. This project reflects FPVSP's ongoing commitment to enhancing outdoor experiences for everyone, ensuring that visitors of all abilities can enjoy the beauty and adventure that Patapsco Valley State Park has to offer.

The new adaptive trail expansion features several upgrades designed to accommodate adaptive mountain bikes and handcycles. These improvements are being made with input from the adaptive sports community, and being built to leading industry standards to ensure they meet the needs of users with diverse physical abilities.

Key features of the project include:

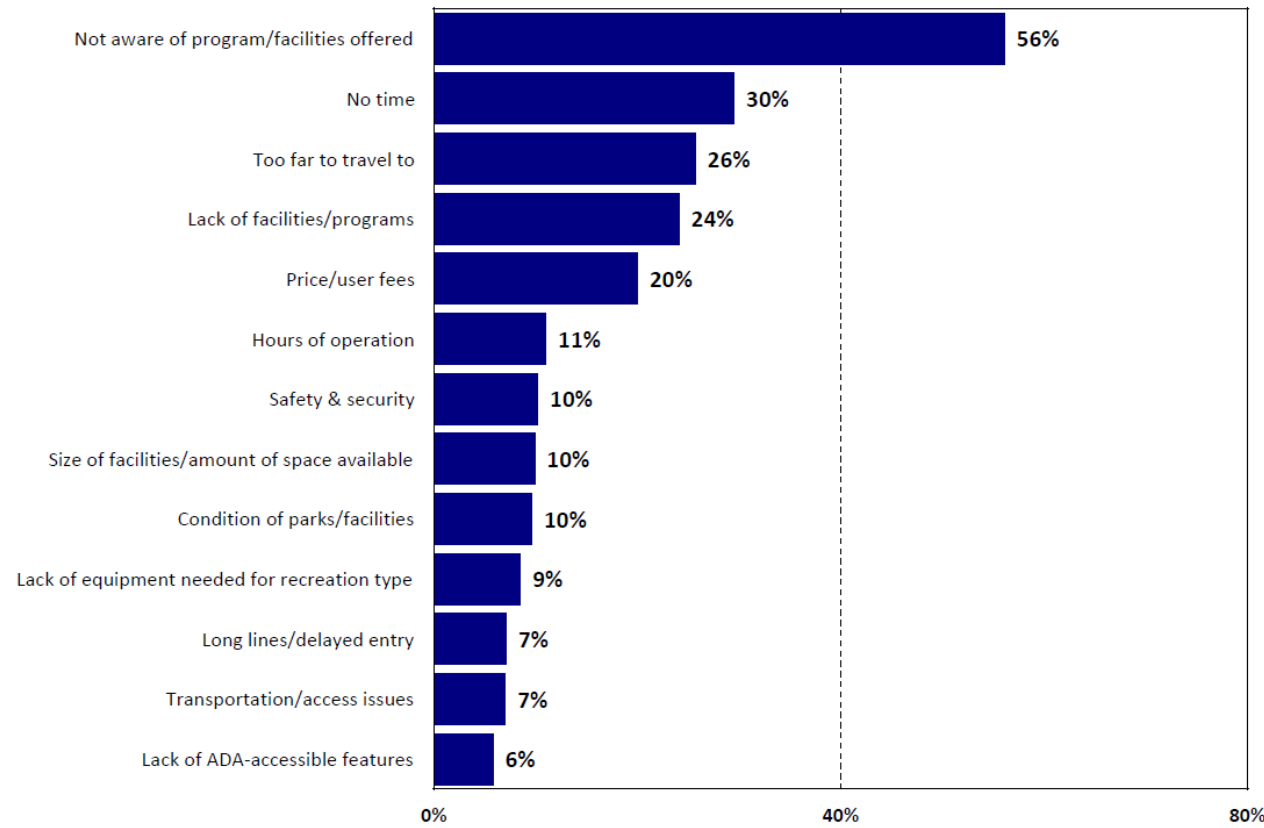
- Wider and smoother trail surfaces to accommodate a variety of adaptive equipment and users of all physical abilities.
- Improved trail signage to enhance navigation and safety for all users.
- Accessible parking and trailhead facilities to provide easier access to the trail network.



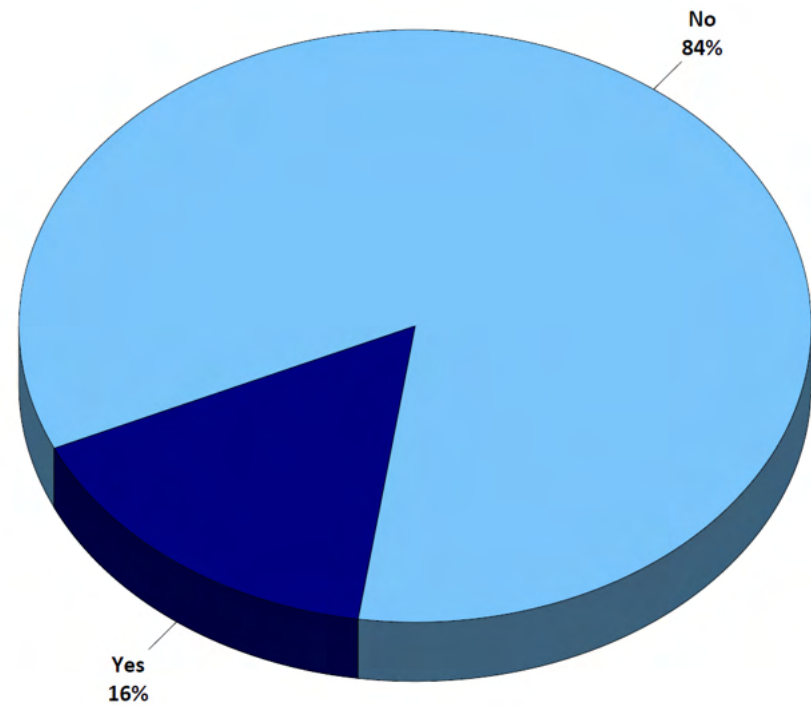
STRATEGY HIGHLIGHT

Survey results showing lack of awareness as a large barrier to park use

Reasons why respondents* don't participate more often in outdoor activities.

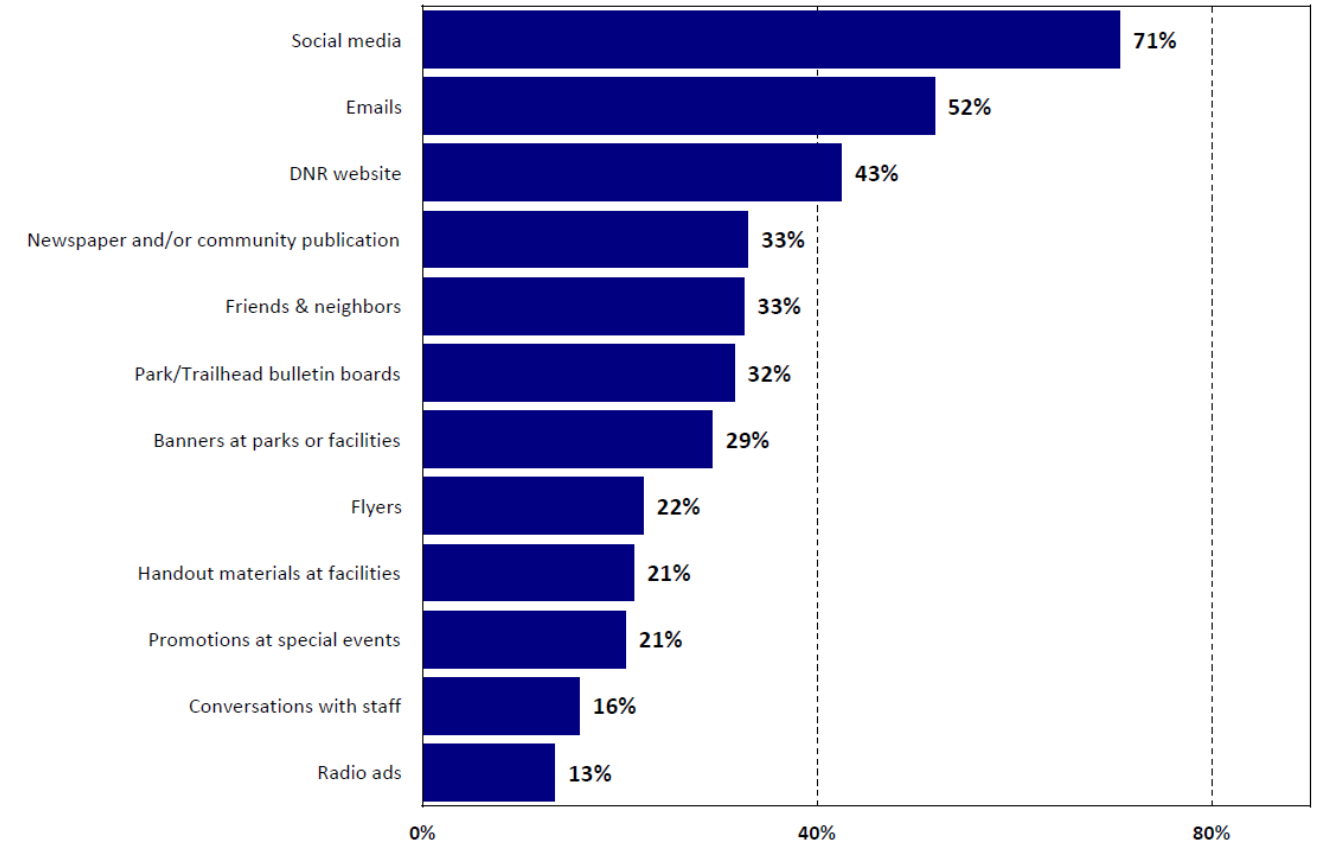


Percentage of survey respondents* with disabilities that require accessible facilities or services.

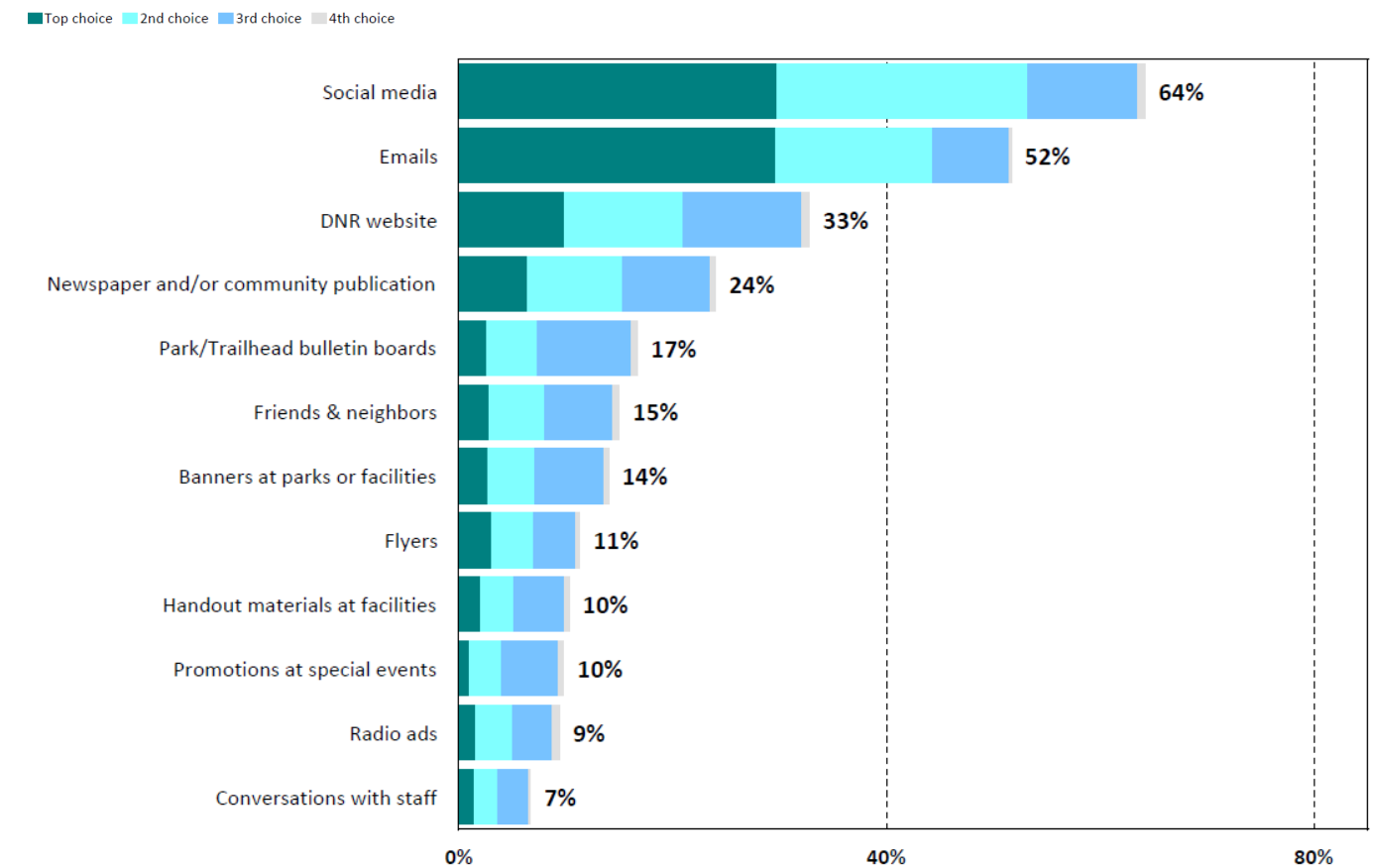


*includes all respondents to the statistically valid survey, including low income communities

Ways respondents* currently learn about the State of Maryland recreation programs, activities, and events.



Sources of communication preferred to get information about State of Maryland programs, activities, and events.



Reinvest in Parks, Reinvest in People

PRIORITY #4

Interpretation and Programs

Support interpretation and programs to improve park experiences, stewardship, and recreation outcomes.

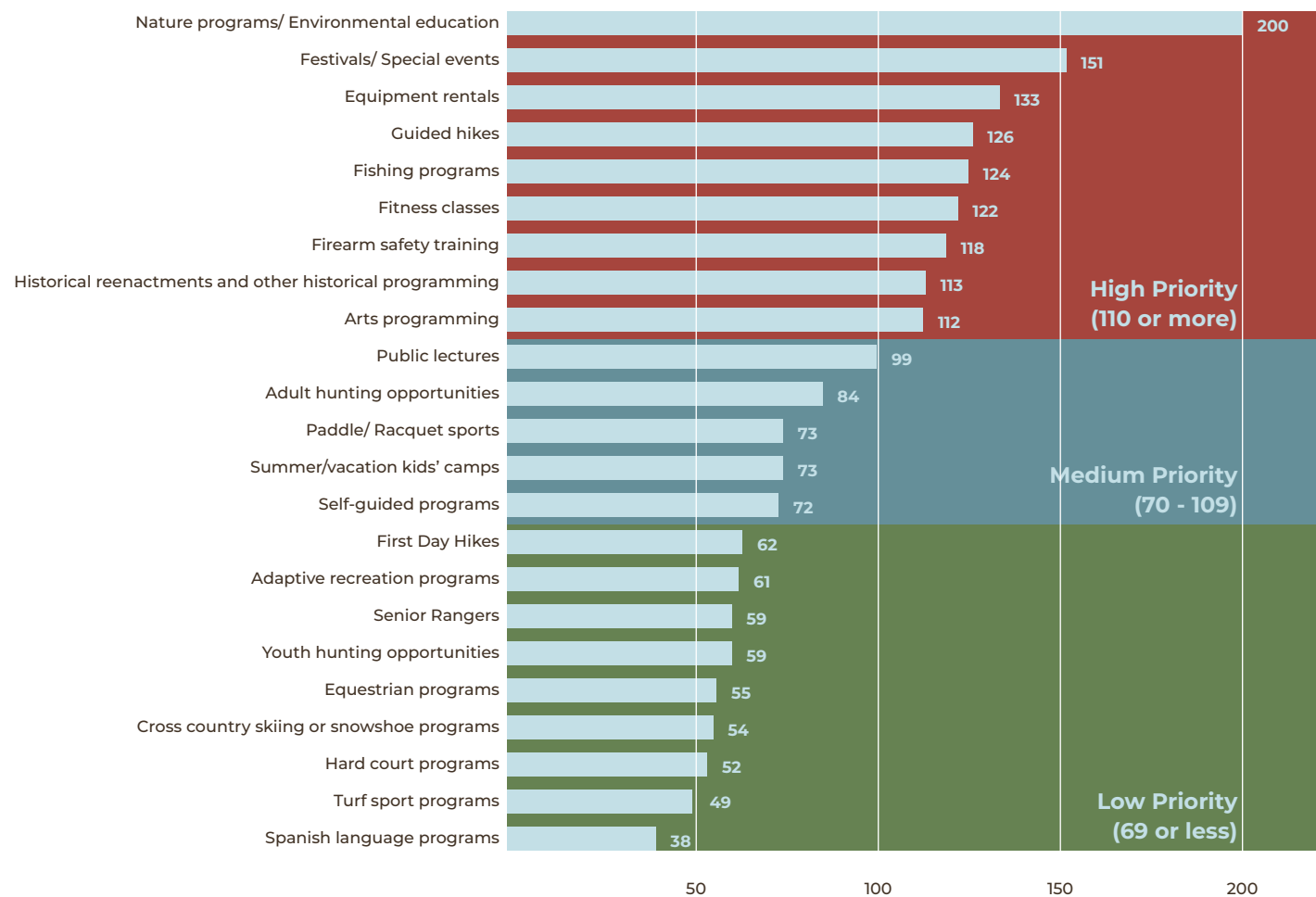
The top priorities for program investments are centered on nature-based experiences and togetherness. Residents shared that they would like more opportunities to be outdoors and the outcomes of the community survey reflect a desire to focus future program and events on nature programs, opportunities for learning, and large and small events. The actions within this priority emphasize opportunities to enhance funding and staffing for interpretive services and to strengthen the ranger-visitor relationship.

Facilities that ranked most important to residents

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1
Nature programs / environmental education</p> <p>3
Fishing programs</p> | <p>2
Festivals / special events</p> <p>4
Firearm safety training</p> |
|--|--|

SOURCE: Statistically Valid Survey

PROGRAMS MARYLANDERS VALUE AND PRIORITIZE FOR INVESTMENT



The Priority Investment Rating was developed by ETC Institute to identify the facilities/programs residents think should receive the highest priority for investment. The Priority Investment Rating (PIR) equally weighs (1) the importance that residents place on facilities and (2) how many residents have unmet needs for the facilities.

EXISTING STRENGTHS

- ▶ Broad public interest in diverse recreational and educational program offerings.
- ▶ Rich cultural and historical resources available across the State.

EMERGING CHALLENGES

- ▶ Limited resources require prioritization among many competing program areas.
- ▶ Interpretive program funding is variable and highly dependent on grants and capital project support.
- ▶ High maintenance costs and language barriers reduce long-term effectiveness of interpretive facility investments for physical interpretive elements.
- ▶ Public awareness and visibility of communities with limited park access and/or which experience adverse health, environmental, economic, and social stressors histories remain low.
- ▶ Current staffing and funding levels limit program capacity and ranger engagement.

STRATEGIES

The State and Partners should continue to...

- ▶ Align program priorities with those determined of highest importance by Marylanders according to the 2025 statistically valid survey including nature programs/environmental education, festivals/special events, equipment rentals, guided hikes, fishing programs, fitness classes, firearm safety training, historical programming, and arts programs.
- ▶ Create low-maintenance, multi-lingual interpretive exhibits to increase self-guided learning opportunities. Link to digital content to provide greater flexibility in updating content and increase ability to use technology to make information accessible to more audiences.
- ▶ Increase research, educational programs, and interpretive signage to expand awareness of lesser-known Maryland histories.
- ▶ Engage with local outfitters to offer and promote recreation opportunities.
- ▶ See also strategy 3.1 about expanding inclusive and specialized recreation programs.

New or expanded actions for the State and partners...

- ▶ Consider enhancing funding and staffing for interpretive services to advance outdoor education and strengthen the ranger-visitor relationship.

Reinvest in Parks, Reinvest in People

PRIORITY #5

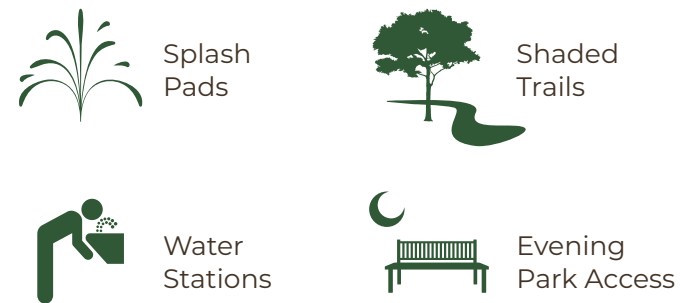
Heat Resilience

Create cooler parks and improve heat safety for park visitors and staff.

As the State grows, new development increases the impacts of urban heat island through tree removal, paving new roads and parking lots, and building new businesses and homes. This priority includes opportunities to continue supporting health and safety of residents by making parks places of respite on hot days.

Actions range from planting more trees and building splash pads and swimming facilities to creating a heat warning system for visitors and tracking heat-related health issues to take action in parks affected by heat waves.

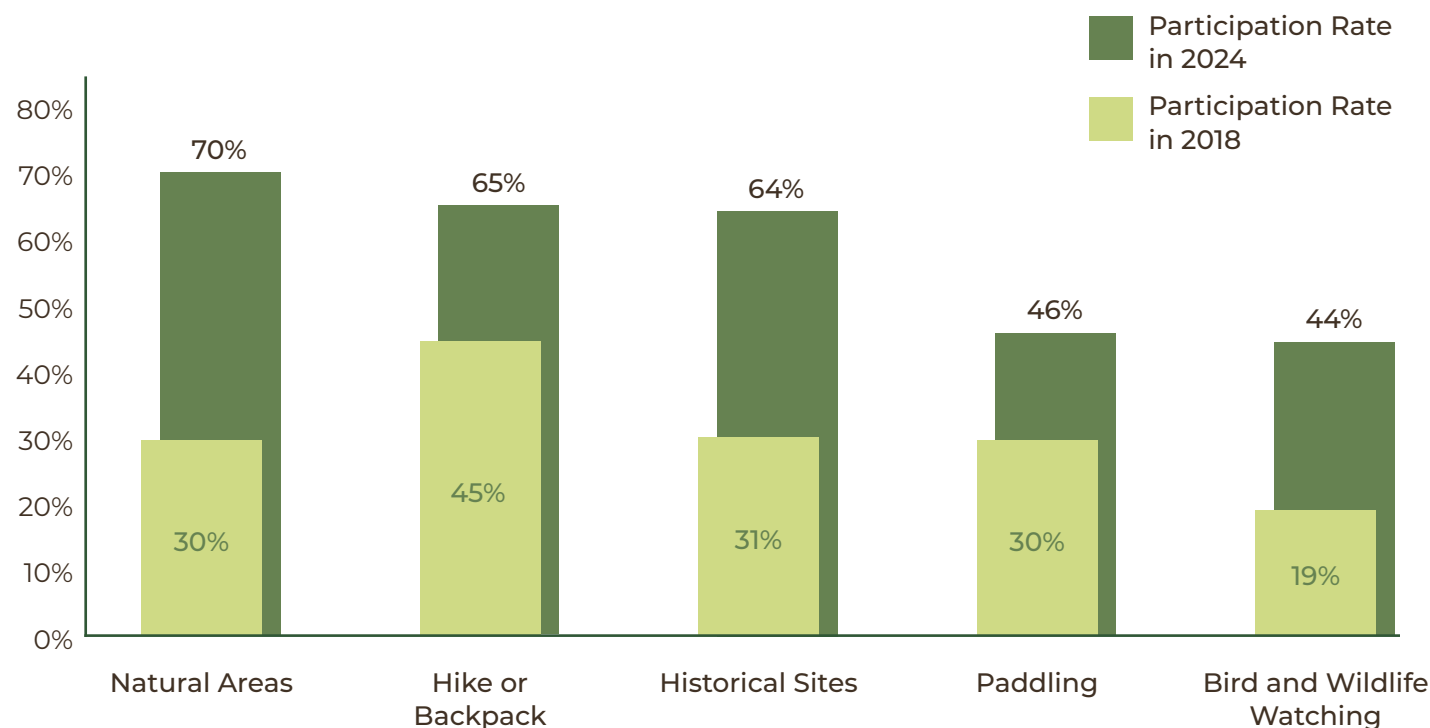
Top features that the community wanted to cool off in the heat



SOURCE: Community Feedback Survey

MARYLANDERS ARE SPENDING TIME IN NATURE IN INCREASING NUMBERS

SOURCE: Community Feedback Survey



EXISTING STRENGTHS

- ▶ Parks provide cool spaces, especially in areas with an urban heat island.

STRATEGIES

The State and Partners should continue to...

- ▶ Support health and safety by adding shade, water fountains, and other cooling infrastructure to parks. Implement heat safety signage to increase awareness of the risks of heat and symptoms of heat-related illnesses.
- ▶ Implement heat safety training to increase awareness of the risks of hot weather, symptoms of heat-related health illnesses, and actions for improving heat safety. Prioritize training for staff who work outdoors and front-line staff who work directly with park visitors, especially youth or older adults.

EMERGING CHALLENGES

- ▶ Climate change: Maryland is getting hotter.

New or expanded actions for the State and partners...

- ▶ Develop operational plans and cross-departmental Heat Teams to improve preparedness for high-heat days. Develop a heat warning system to alert park visitors to high-heat days.
- ▶ Track heat-related health issues and take action in parks with frequent problems.
- ▶ See also Strategy 2.4 under Steward related to increasing urban tree canopy on public lands in areas with higher temperatures.

STRATEGY HIGHLIGHT

The Board of Public Works approves splash-pad in Baltimore County

The Board of Public Works approved more than \$4.7 million in grants to local governments from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources to construct park facilities in Baltimore, Frederick, Garrett, Prince George’s, and Washington Counties.

Funding through Program Open Space – Local was approved for nine projects including three construction projects worth \$2.8 million in Baltimore County. These include a **mobility-friendly splash pad at Northwest Regional Park**, an exercise pavilion with fitness stations at Fields at Renaissance Park, and a shore path and canoe launch at Fort Howard Veterans Park.



STRATEGY HIGHLIGHT

COMAR 09.12.32 Regulations

Maryland’s heat stress standard, COMAR 09.12.32 went into effect September 30, 2024. The standard applies to all workplaces where the heat index is 80° F or higher. Heat-related illness has been acknowledged as a workplace hazard for many years. Understanding heat stress can help maintain safety when working in hot conditions. Workers exposed to extreme heat or hot environments face risks of heat stress, leading to various occupational illnesses and injuries such as heat stroke, exhaustion, cramps, and rashes.

Heat also heightens the risk of accidents due to sweaty palms, fogged safety glasses, and dizziness, while burns can result from contact with hot surfaces or steam. Those particularly vulnerable to heat stress include outdoor laborers and workers in occupations like firefighting, baking, farming, construction, mining, boiler operation, and manufacturing. Workers over 65, overweight individuals, those with heart disease or high blood pressure, and those on medications sensitive to heat are at greater risk. Preventing heat stress is vital. Employers should train workers on recognizing, preventing, and managing heat stress to safeguard their health and safety.

PRINCIPLE FOUR

Blue and Green Connections

This principle focuses on expanding Maryland's trail networks and waterway access to better connect people, places, and ecosystems across the State. Currently, 96% of Marylanders rely on personal vehicles to visit parks and outdoor areas, while only 2% walk and less than 1% bike. The strategies below aim to expand the multi-use trail network, improve trail experiences, promote ecosystem health along trails, increase water access, and enhance Maryland's water trails.



Blue and Green Connections

PRIORITY #1

Expanded Multi-use Trail Network

Continue to expand Maryland’s multi-use trail network to connect communities, public lands, and outdoor experiences.

Maryland has made strides in repurposing some of its old railways and other transportation infrastructure (like the CandO Canal) into mobility corridors for visitors, residents, and even some native wildlife.

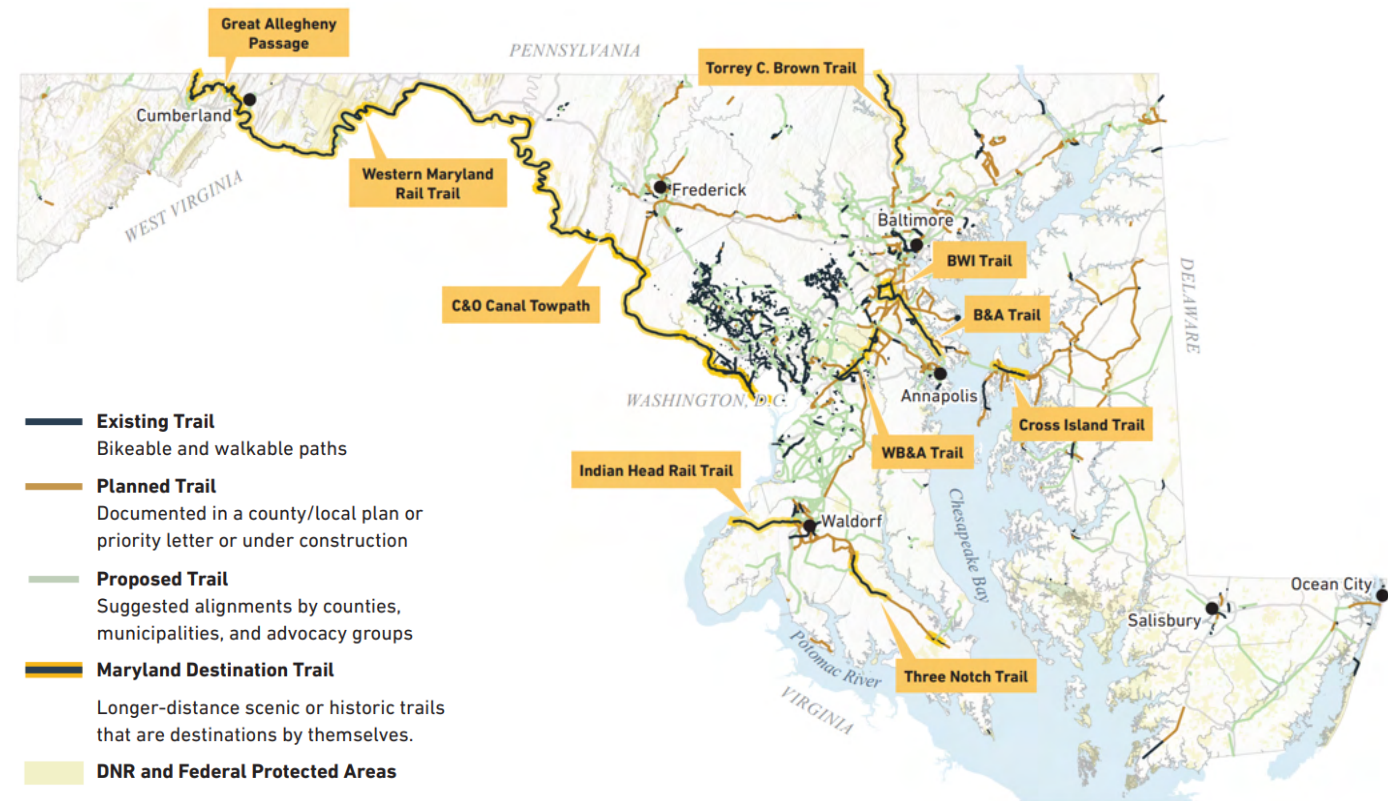
The focus of future trail investment should include connecting communities with limited park access and/or which experience adverse health, environmental, economic, and social stressors areas to trail networks and expanding the definition of these corridors for use as vital commuting routes.

Top reasons why people use trails

- Outdoor Activities
- Exercise and Fitness
- Mental Health
- Accessibility

SOURCE: Community Feedback Survey

MAP OF EXISTING SHARED-USE TRAILS IN MARYLAND



SOURCE: Maryland State Transportation Trails Strategic Plan, 2025

EXISTING STRENGTHS

- ▶ Trail networks connect along former railways and along waterways.
- ▶ The majority of Maryland’s trail system exists within State and local parks.
- ▶ Recently completed 2050 State Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan.

STRATEGIES

The State and Partners should continue to...

- ▶ Develop continuous long-distance routes by connecting to National Trails and National Scenic Rivers, and extend regional trails to link more communities with parks, towns, and transportation networks.
- ▶ Strengthen connectivity between local, State and federal protected lands and waterways through coordinated trail development, signage, and mapping.
- ▶ Enhance safety where multiuse trails cross roads, utilizing best practices for at-grade crossings and creating grade-separated crossings where possible.
- ▶ Integrate trail expansions and improvements into planned infrastructure projects.
- ▶ Plan trail locations to avoid impacts to wildlands and other sensitive ecosystems, wetlands, and habitats of rare species.

New or expanded actions for the State and partners...

- ▶ Prioritize adding new trail connections in communities with limited park access and/or which experience adverse health, environmental, economic, and social stressors, high-need areas, especially those highlighted in the 2050 State Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan. Prioritize funding allocations that increase access in high-need communities and that close priority gaps identified in the Statewide map.
- ▶ Use power line corridors, easements, and other rights-of-way to add new trail routes

EMERGING CHALLENGES

- ▶ Trails are typically confined to publicly owned lands (more focused on recreation).
- ▶ Limited regional trails exist.
- ▶ Regional trail investments have unique maintenance needs, infrastructure investments, and staff engagement.
- ▶ Utility easements are highly connected, yet are privately owned.

where possible.

- ▶ Work with developers to build new trail connections in growing communities.
- ▶ Measure trail use and economic impact, and promote the benefits of trails to advocate for future funding/management.
- ▶ Monitor trail use ecological impacts and develop systems to track populations of invasive species and actions to control them.
- ▶ Incorporate long-term maintenance planning and future climate projections in the design of new trails. Emphasize resilient, durable materials and site trails to reduce the risk of flooding affecting use.
- ▶ Consider developing a State toolkit of resources to increase partnerships to support trail funding and maintenance. The resource toolkit could help establish effective division of responsibilities (e.g. MOU resources), share best practices, act as a central point of information, provide resources about working with developers, and increase public-private collaborations. It could support the formation of non-profit organizations/Friends Groups and encourage interjurisdictional partnerships.
- ▶ When planning for new trails, consider interjurisdictional or other partnerships that could provide increased support for construction or more sustainable long-term operational and maintenance models. (See also Strategy 2.5 about partnerships after trails are completed.)
- ▶ See also Funding section below about a Statewide foundation, which could support trails/greenways.

STRATEGY HIGHLIGHT

Trail Priorities for MD State Transportation Trails Strategic Plan

ID	Name	Description	Location
1	Jones Falls Trail to Torrey C. Brown Rail Trail	8.4-mile connection between the northern terminus of the Jones Falls Trail near Lake Roland Park and the Southern terminus of the Torrey C. Brown Rail Trail in Ashland east of Hunt Valley. This would upgrade an on-road segment of the East Coast Greenway.	Baltimore County
2	WBandA Trail towards DC	6.5-mile connection between the current Southern terminus of the WBandA Trail near MD 450 in Prince George's County along MD 704 to the Washington, DC city limits.	Prince George's County
3	BWI Trail to Patapsco Regional Greenway	7-mile connection between the BWI Hiker-Biker Trail to the proposed Patapsco Regional Greenway via the Stony Run Trail. This connection includes the following Patapsco Greenway segments: Ridge Road, Stony Run, Stony Run Crossing, I-95.	Anne Arundel County
4	Three Notch Trail in Charles and St. Mary's	10.5-mile connection (Phase VII, VIII and IX) between FDR Boulevard in the south and Baggett Park in the north. Approximately 2-mile connection (Phase IVB) between MD 237/Chancellors Run Road in the north and MD 235/Three Notch Road in the south (future Southern terminus). 2.5-mile connection between the current northern terminus of Three Notch Trail at Deborah Drive/ the Charles County line through Hughesville to the intersection of MD 5 and Leonardtown Road (future northern terminus).	Charles County St. Mary's County
5	Lower Susquehanna Greenway across Susquehanna River	A bridge over the Susquehanna River between Havre de Grace and Perryville.	Harford County Cecil County



STRATEGY HIGHLIGHT

Toolkits from MD State Transportation Trails Strategic Plan

As part of the Maryland State Transportation Trails Strategic Plan, Trail Toolkits are included to highlight some common trail challenges. The toolkits provide trail practitioners with guidance on trail implementation and operations topics. A transportation trail project requires collaboration across agencies, organizations, and special interest groups, and building support is the first step to start a trail project. Trails need support throughout their lifespan, including resurgences of support at fundraising or unexpected maintenance challenges. Establishing a strong network of support early in the process can help set the project up for success.

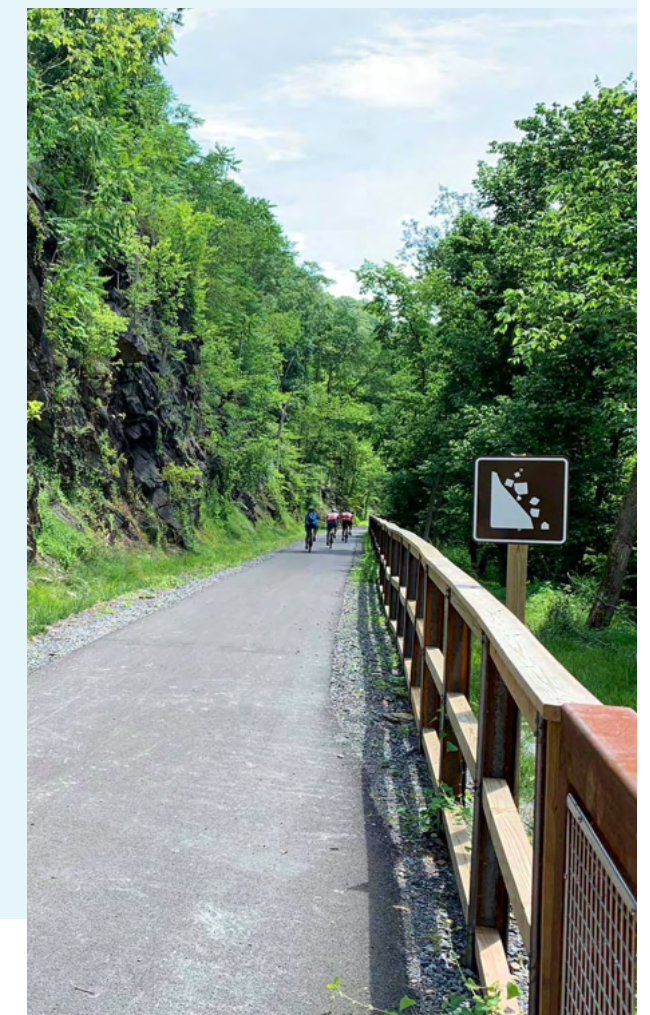
Building Support for Trails

Making the case for transportation trail projects often requires collaboration across agencies, organizations, and special interest groups. Public officials and decision makers typically want to have a clear understanding of the benefits of trails and what they will offer the community before committing funds and resources to the project.

Funding Transportation

Maintenance is the key component to keeping a trail functioning and meeting the needs and expectations of the public. The safety of trail users and the overall function of a trail can be directly impacted by how well a trail is maintained. Neglected trails with overgrown vegetation or potholes can present a safety hazard, reducing the number of people who use the trail and effectively creating a gap in the trail network. Keeping trails in a State of good repair improves trail usage, public satisfaction with the trail, and support for future trail network expansions. The full scope of maintenance needs can be hard to grasp and costs vary widely from trail to trail. A 2022 Rails-to-Trails Conservancy study found that maintenance costs varied from \$679-2,377 per mile per year for low amenity trails, while high amenity trails saw maintenance costs of \$7,800 per mile per year or more.

Maintenance cost can seem small or secondary compared to the overall cost of trail construction, however, these costs require ongoing consideration and support. The cost of maintaining successful and well-loved trails will likely exceed the cost of constructing it over the lifetime of the trail. Therefore, planning for trail maintenance and state of good repair early on can reduce maintenance costs over time, use resources and funding more effectively, and improve coordination within and across jurisdictions, departments, and agencies.



Blue and Green Connections

PRIORITY #2

Trail Experiences

Improve the quality, comfort, and safety of trail experiences.

Trails are beloved by Maryland residents whether they serve as loop paths around a park for parents and their children testing out their new bikes or regional connectors for avid bikers and climate conscious commuters.

This priority includes actions to help improve the safety, comfort and user experience on the many trails that traverse the State, for the many people that have come to enjoy them. Actions in this priority range from new maps that communicate trail alignments to actions that foster partnerships with non-profits and local jurisdictions to help maintain and maintain and provide positive experiences of our trails.

Top trail improvements

- “More wheelchair access to trails”*
- “Allow for more preservation of trails for education”*
- “More staff patrol on hiking trails for safety”*

SOURCE: Community Feedback Survey

HIGHER VALUED WATER ACCESS OR TRAILS PROGRAMS AND AMENITIES

- Hiking Trails and Guided Hikes
- Paved Multi-use Trails
- Fishing Access and Programs
- Water Access (non-motor)
- Outdoor Swimming

LOWER VALUED WATER ACCESS OR TRAILS PROGRAMS AND AMENITIES

- Mountain Biking Trails
- Equestrian Trails and Programs
- Cross Country Skiing or Snowshoe Programs
- First Day Hikes
- Water Access (motor)

EXISTING STRENGTHS

- ▶ Trails in State and local parks offer a range of experiences for different ages and abilities.
- ▶ Clear delineations of ownership and trail management and maintenance.
- ▶ Highest public priority for new investment.

STRATEGIES

The State and Partners should continue to...

- ▶ Determine and promote shared trail use guidelines for walkers, bikers, equestrians (where relevant), and users of electric bikes. Monitor the use and effects of ebikes and make any adjustments to State policy to promote safer shared use and ensure the health of wildlife populations and natural habitats.
- ▶ Promote safety for trail users through environmental design, trail safety volunteers/ambassadors, signage, and other strategies.
- ▶ Add trailheads to improve access to communities with limited existing connections to parks. Design trailheads to include clear signage, information, maps, and parking. Where possible, locate trailheads to be accessed by public transit routes. Provide trail signage with information, emergency contact information, and ways to report issues.
- ▶ Improve user experience by increasing shade along multiuse trails, especially on high-use segments in urban areas with less tree canopy, and add amenities like benches, water fountains, and restrooms where possible.

EMERGING CHALLENGES

- ▶ Publicly accessible mapping does not always communicate any changes to trail routes.
- ▶ Consolidated, up to date GIS mapping.
- ▶ Inconsistent standards for care of trails depending on the resources available to State and local departments.
- ▶ Impacts of climate change include trail erosion and degradation, and trail closures due to flooding.
- ▶ Unclear policies regarding allowed and prohibited users.

- ▶ Identify and implement trail experiences that are welcoming and accessible to all, including children, older adults, and people with disabilities.
- ▶ Foster partnerships between nonprofit organizations, local businesses (like bike shops), and local jurisdictions to enhance trail safety, monitor conditions, support fundraising, and assist with maintenance. Establish systems to encourage volunteer involvement and partnerships in supporting Maryland’s trail network.

New or expanded actions for the State and partners...

- ▶ Encourage trail-friendly development where trails pass through communities; design buildings and public spaces to face trails and support trail users.
- ▶ Partner with local businesses and tourism offices to highlight trail opportunities.

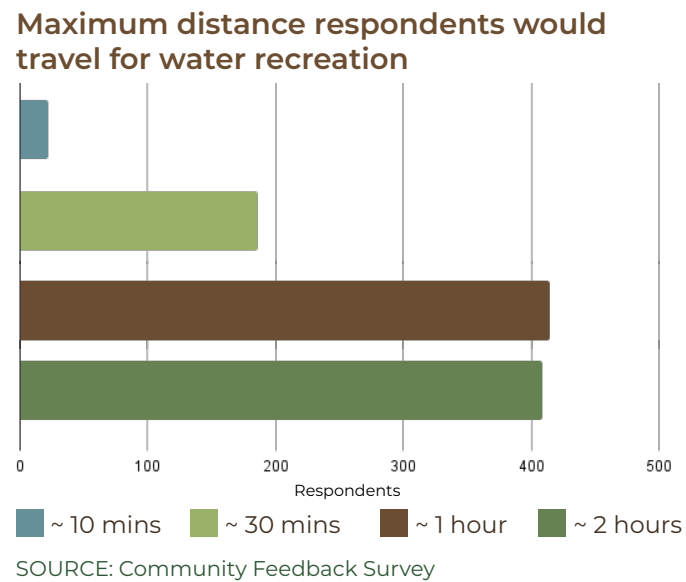
Blue and Green Connections

PRIORITY #3

Water Access

Grow water access and waterside recreation opportunities, a high Statewide priority based on survey results.

Water is an important part of the State's identity. It defines the State's geography and is a regular sight for people who live close to the Chesapeake Bay and its many tributaries. It is no surprise that many residents flock to the State's waterfronts for views of the water, boating, and swimming. Within this priority, actions focus on steps to expand water safety and provide more opportunities for people to relate to the lifeblood of their State.



WATER ACCESS IN MARYLAND



Over 74% of Maryland has water access within a 10-mile drive. However, access remains limited in Carroll and parts of Allegany, Prince George's, and Charles counties.

Water Access in Maryland

- 5-mile drive areas
- 10-mile drive areas
- State Parks with water access
- Public parks and open spaces with water access
- Waterbodies

EXISTING STRENGTHS

- ▶ Increasing water access is among the top public priorities for Maryland residents.

EMERGING CHALLENGES

- ▶ Capacity issues during peak summer months.
- ▶ Water quality variability and communication (including algal blooms).
- ▶ Staffing to keep water users safe.

STRATEGIES

The State and Partners should continue to...

- ▶ Expand opportunities for swimming, paddling, fishing, and relaxing by the water through acquisition and development, particularly in areas with limited current access. These activities were identified as high priority in the Statewide outdoor recreation needs survey.
- ▶ Add shaded picnic areas, benches, and picnic shelters near lakes, beaches, and other water bodies.
- ▶ Monitor usage across park systems and implement strategies to address overcrowding and distributed use of parks. Promote lesser-known parks and water sites to reduce pressure on overcrowded areas.
- ▶ Prioritize monitoring and restoration projects that increase the health and swimmability of the State's rivers and Bay, especially in places where water access occurs.
- ▶ Expand and enhance Maryland's water trail network.
- ▶ Strategies to enhance water trails include:
 - ▶ Identify and map new water trails.
 - ▶ Install signage at water trail access points with maps, safety tips, nearby watercraft rental locations, and route suggestions.
 - ▶ Develop new water trail trailheads with parking, launch areas, benches, and shaded picnic spots. Locate and design access points to protect waterway health, with a focus on reducing erosion, protecting wildlife and rare species habitats, controlling invasive species, protecting water quality, using sustainable materials, and implementing environmentally friendly site layouts.

New or expanded actions for the State and partners...

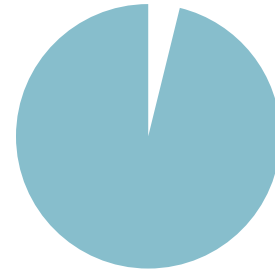
- ▶ Expand water safety education, including free or low-cost swim lessons and water safety programs, with a focus on communities with limited park access and/or which experience adverse health, environmental, economic, and social stressors communities.
- ▶ Partner with businesses to offer boat rental, fishing gear, and other equipment at or near public parks, water bodies, and water trail trailheads. Promote watercraft rental services including businesses that deliver kayaks or canoes to parks or campsites.
- ▶ Advocate for support and protection of the State's Waterway Improvement Fund.
- ▶ Partner with local businesses and destination marketing organizations (DMOs) to highlight trail recreation opportunities, including water trails.

PRIORITY #4

More Transportation Options

Make it easier for everyone to reach parks and trails without a car.

While the State’s network of trails were originally created as local recreational routes, many of the States long, regional trails connect communities to important job hubs, like the Baltimore and Annapolis (BandA) Trail, connecting several communities between BandA. Trails can also be safe, off-road connectors between home and school, work, or a favorite community open space. This priority includes actions to make it easier to reach parks and other destinations, without a car, by supporting multimodal travel with bike racks, bus stops, and ride-sharing programs, along with increasing public transit service to parks and trailheads through transit-to-trails programs.



96%
of the community
Typically use personal automobiles (car, truck, van, SUV, etc.) to travel to parks and facilities

SOURCE: Community Feedback Survey

HOW MARYLANDERS USED TRAILS IN 2023 (OVER THE LAST 12 MONTHS)



24.6%
Went hiking/
backpacking



36.4%
Went walking
for exercise



12.8%
Went overnight
camping

Source: ESRI (2023), “Sports and Leisure Market Potential - Maryland”

EXISTING STRENGTHS

- ▶ Proactive policymaking to diversify ways residents get around.
- ▶ Urban transit network.
- ▶ Collaboration with MDOT.

STRATEGIES

The State and Partners should continue to...

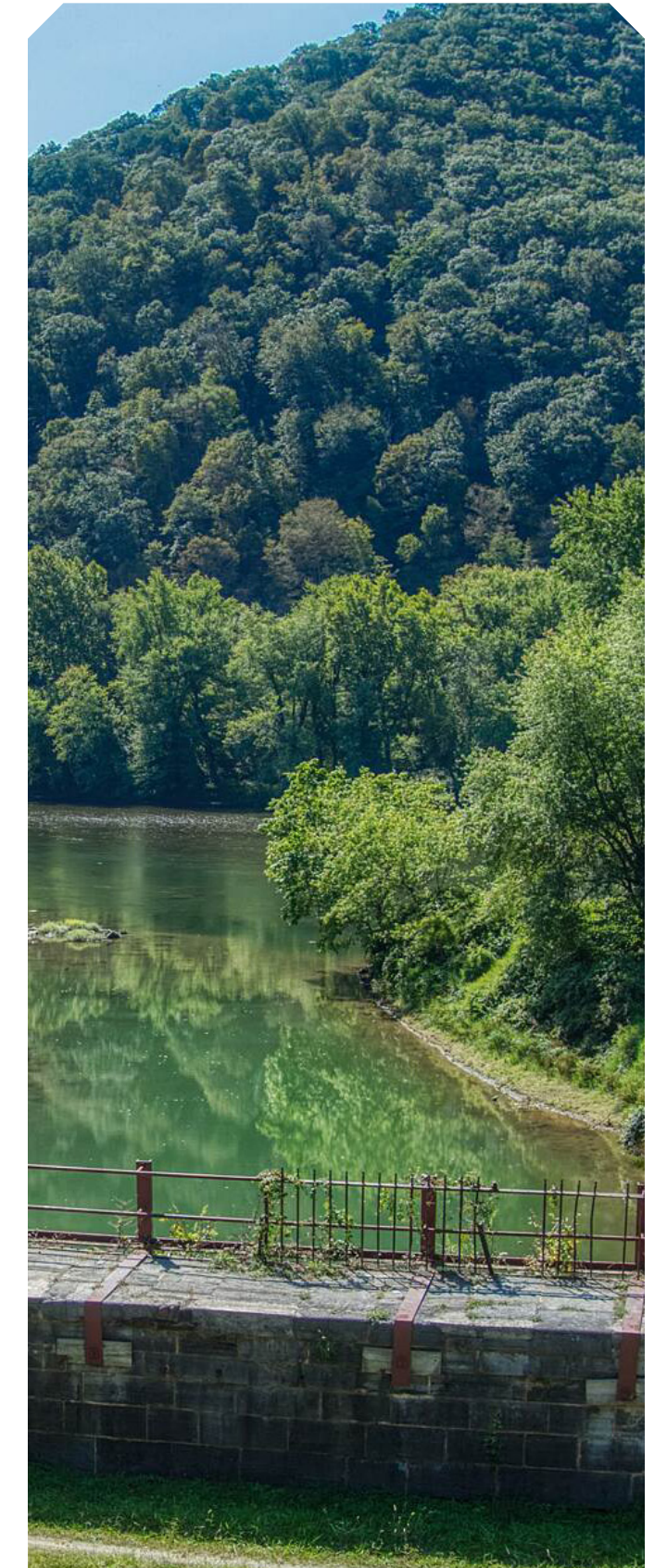
- ▶ Implement strategies to mitigate the impact of State park traffic on local communities.
- ▶ Expand safe bike and pedestrian connections between communities and nearby outdoor spaces. For example, collaborate with State and local transportation authorities to provide safety improvements—such as lighting, sidewalks, intersection improvements for pedestrian/ bicyclist safety, and wayfinding signage—on major routes to parks.

New or expanded actions for the State and partners...

- ▶ Support multimodal travel through programs and park infrastructure. Design parking areas to support multimodal access, including bike racks, bus stops and shelters, and drop-off zones. Encourage carpooling and ride-sharing programs to reduce traffic congestion and minimize parking demand at parks and trailheads.
- ▶ Increase public transit service to parks, trailheads, and other outdoor destinations. For example, work with local transit agencies to add parks and trailheads on existing bus or rail lines. Promote transit-to-trails programs with user-friendly maps and schedules.
- ▶ Collaborate on shuttle services from transit hubs during peak periods or in connection with special events, and evaluate opportunities for seasonal last-mile shuttle programs to connect from public transit with parks.
- ▶ Encourage partnerships that provide transportation for youth, families, and older adults in communities with limited park access and/or which experience adverse health, environmental, economic, and social stressors areas to connect them to outdoor experiences.

EMERGING CHALLENGES

- ▶ Limited State park connections to bus and light rail stops.
- ▶ Misalignment of park entries and existing and planned transit routes.



IV.

Region Snapshots

Defining Land Preservation Priorities by Region

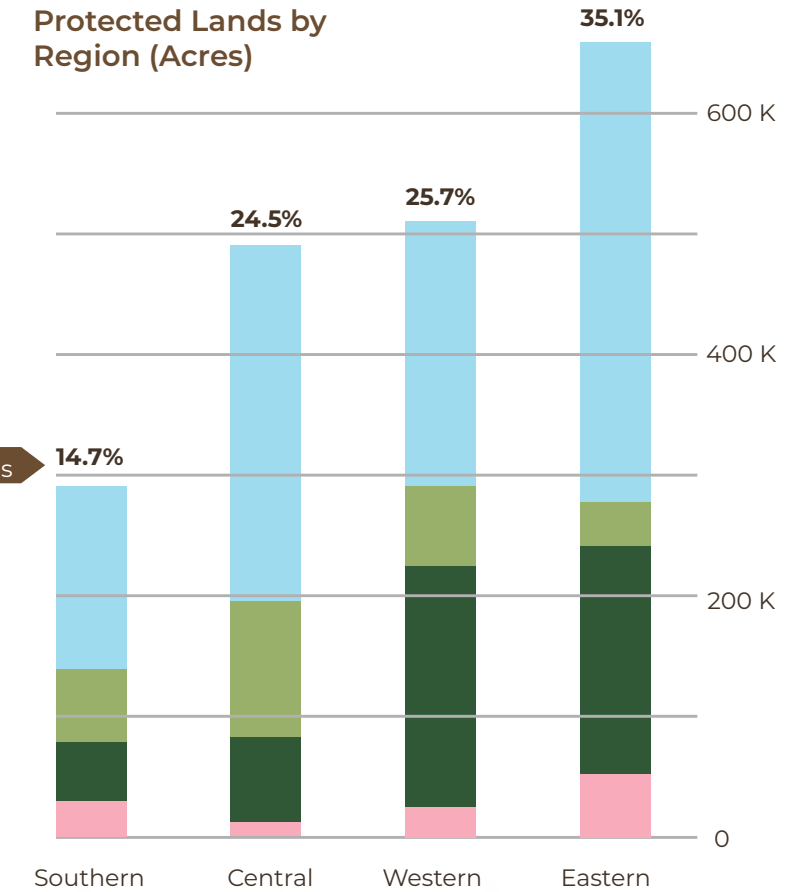
This chapter describes the land preservation priorities and investments that are tailored to the diverse geography, land use patterns, and conservation challenges across Maryland's four major regions: Eastern, Central, Southern, and Western. Key experiences are mapped and community priorities are defined to help guide investment decisions by the State, counties, City of Baltimore, and partners, as well as give planning guidance for the next round of Land Preservation, Park and Recreation Plan efforts at the local level.

Protected Lands by Region (Acres)

Share of Maryland's Protected Lands

Protected Lands

- Federal Park and Conservation Lands
- DNR State Lands
- Local Parks and Recreation (include Local Side POS)
- Preservation Easements (include Local PDR/TDR, Cluster/subdivision Remainder, MALPF, MET, Rural Legacy, POS Stateside Conservation Easements, MARBIDCO, ISTE/Forest Legacy/CREP/FRPP-ACEP)



Protected Lands

Central Region

The Central Region sits in Maryland's mid-State corridor around Baltimore and the Washington-area suburbs. It blends dense city neighborhoods, broad suburban areas, and working industrial and port zones. Rivers, reservoirs, and urban green corridors shape parts of the landscape and connect pockets of open space across the region.

The Central Region is densely populated. It has the largest population in Maryland, with about 3.3 million residents according to the 2023 ACS 5-year data.

High housing density and expanding suburbs put pressure on remaining open space and riparian buffers, making access to parks and urban greenways especially important for residents' health and well-being.

Major protected land types include State parks and lands held under conservation easement. These areas conserve rivers and riparian buffers, reservoir watersheds, mature forests, stream valley parks, and working farmland under easement. These lands give nearby residents daily places to recreate. They also perform key ecological functions.

Although the Central Region is Maryland's most densely populated, the state, local jurisdictions and private landowners have managed to protect a significant share of the total land area in the region, providing a significant contribution to the state's 30% protection goal for 2030.

1.4M acres

Land Area

3,359,478

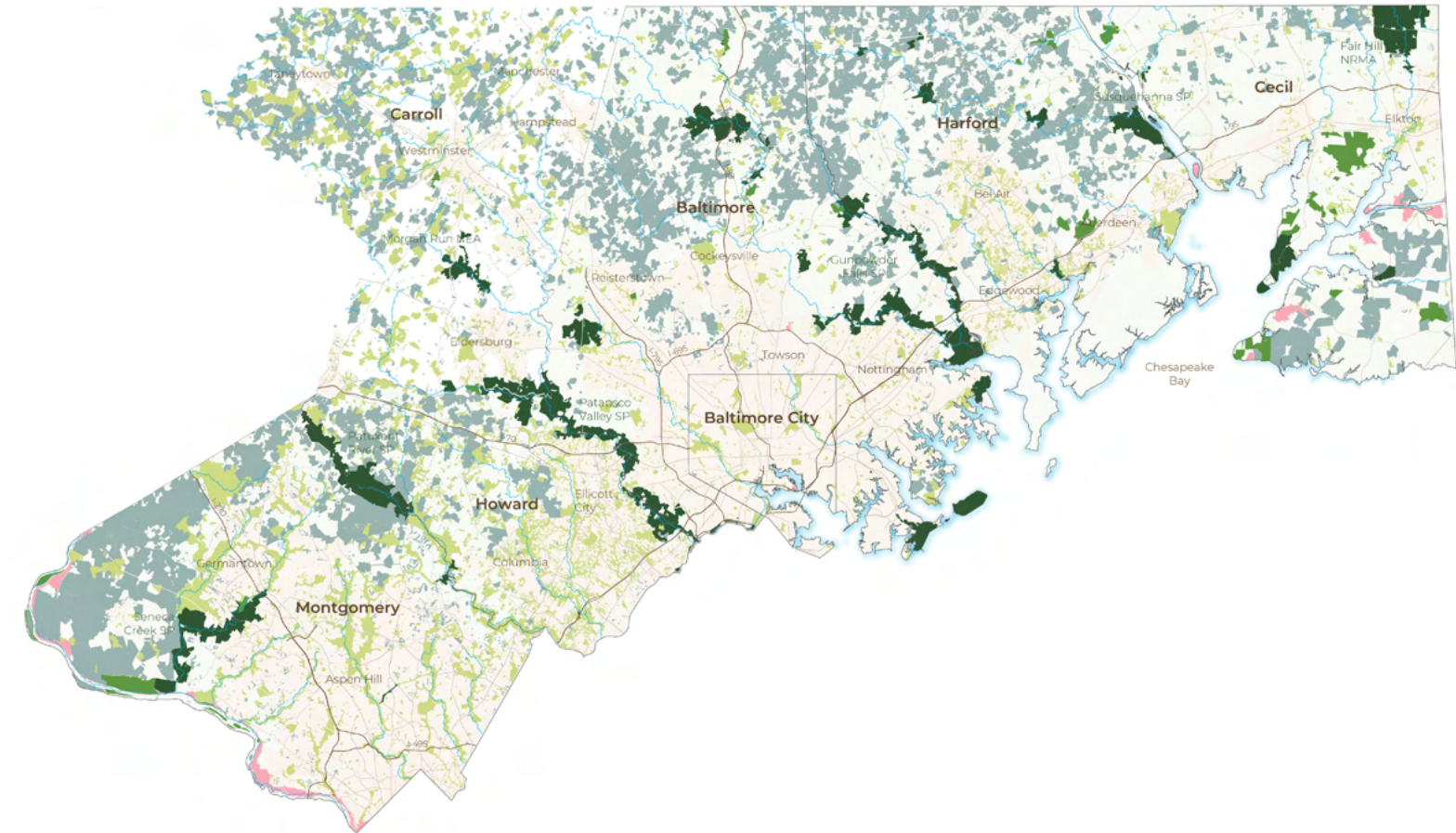
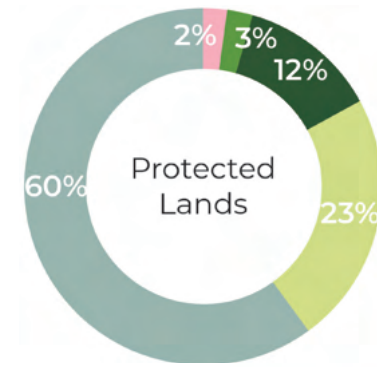
Population (2023)

0.49M acres

Protected Area

34.7%

Protected Lands Coverage



Existing Conserved Lands

- Federal Protected Lands
- DNR Parks
- DNR Owned Lands
- County Rec and Parks
- Easement Lands
- Urban Area
- Roads



Patapsco Valley State Park, Avalon Area, Howard County

Central Region

Participation in Camping Activities

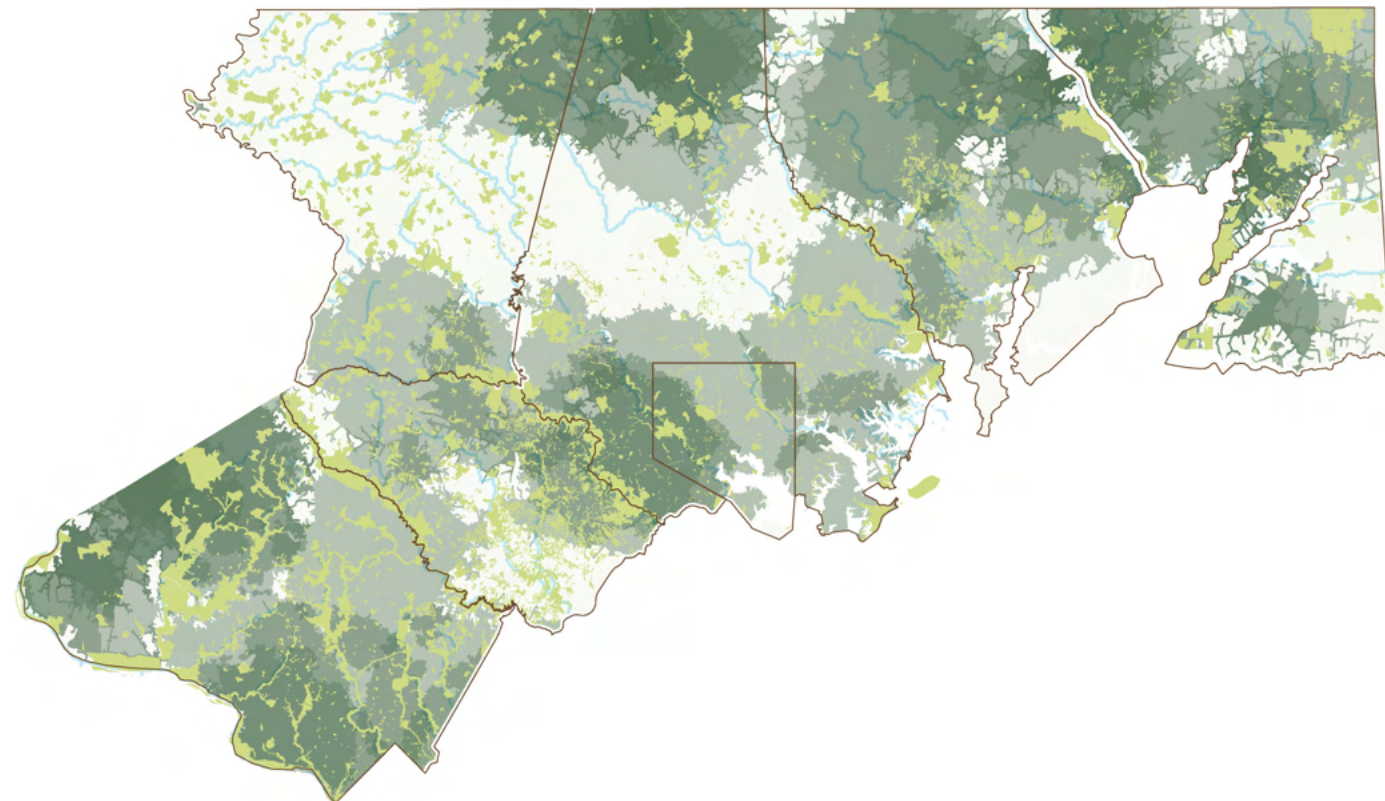
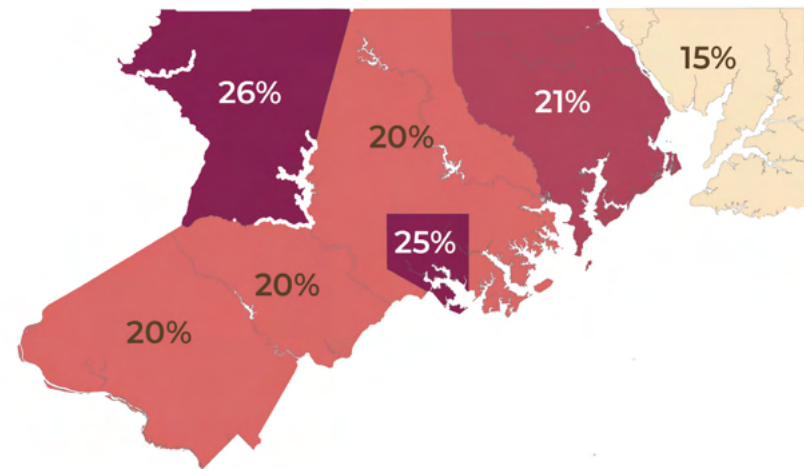
Camping in all of its forms has become more popular among residents across the State since the last LPRP in 2018. The Statewide average for participation in camping, which includes cabin use, RV camping, glamping, and tent camping, hovered around **20% Statewide** in the 2024 community survey. With the exception of Cecil County, with less camping participation than the Statewide average, and Baltimore City, with higher camping participation than the Statewide average, the Central Region has similar levels of participation and medium interest in future investments in camping opportunities across the State.

Participation Rates (20% statewide average)

- County resident use far exceeds State average
- County resident use exceeds State average
- County resident use aligns with State average
- County resident use is less than State average
- County resident use is far less than State average

10-Mile Proximity to Camping

- Access to two or more amenities within 10 miles
- Access to at least one amenity within 10 miles
- No access within 10 miles
- Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
- Waterbodies



Central Region

Participation in Hunting Activities

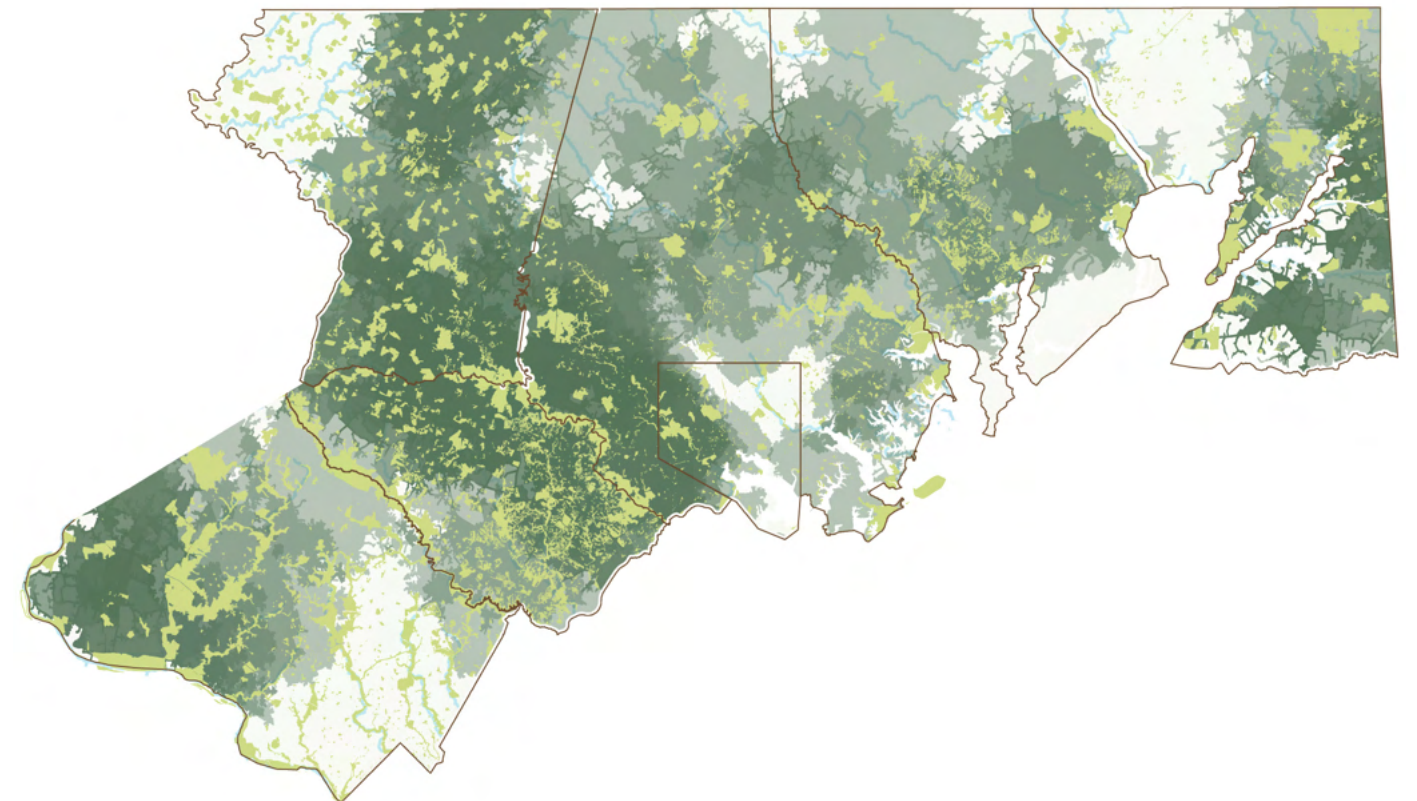
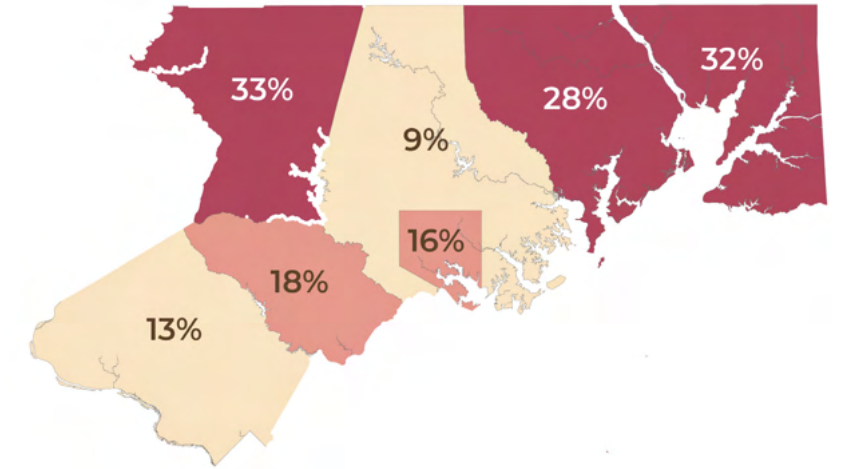
Hunting participation in the Central region is greater in counties that are less densely populated and have more access to preserved land, like Cecil County and Harford County, which far exceed the Statewide **average of 21%**. Baltimore County has one of the lowest hunting participation rates in the State.

Participation Rates (21% statewide average)

- County resident use far exceeds State average
- County resident use exceeds State average
- County resident use aligns with State average
- County resident use is less than State average
- County resident use is far less than State average

10-Mile Proximity to Hunting

- Access to two or more amenities within 10 miles
- Access to at least one amenity within 10 miles
- No access within 10 miles
- Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
- Waterbodies



Central Region

Participation in Water Activities

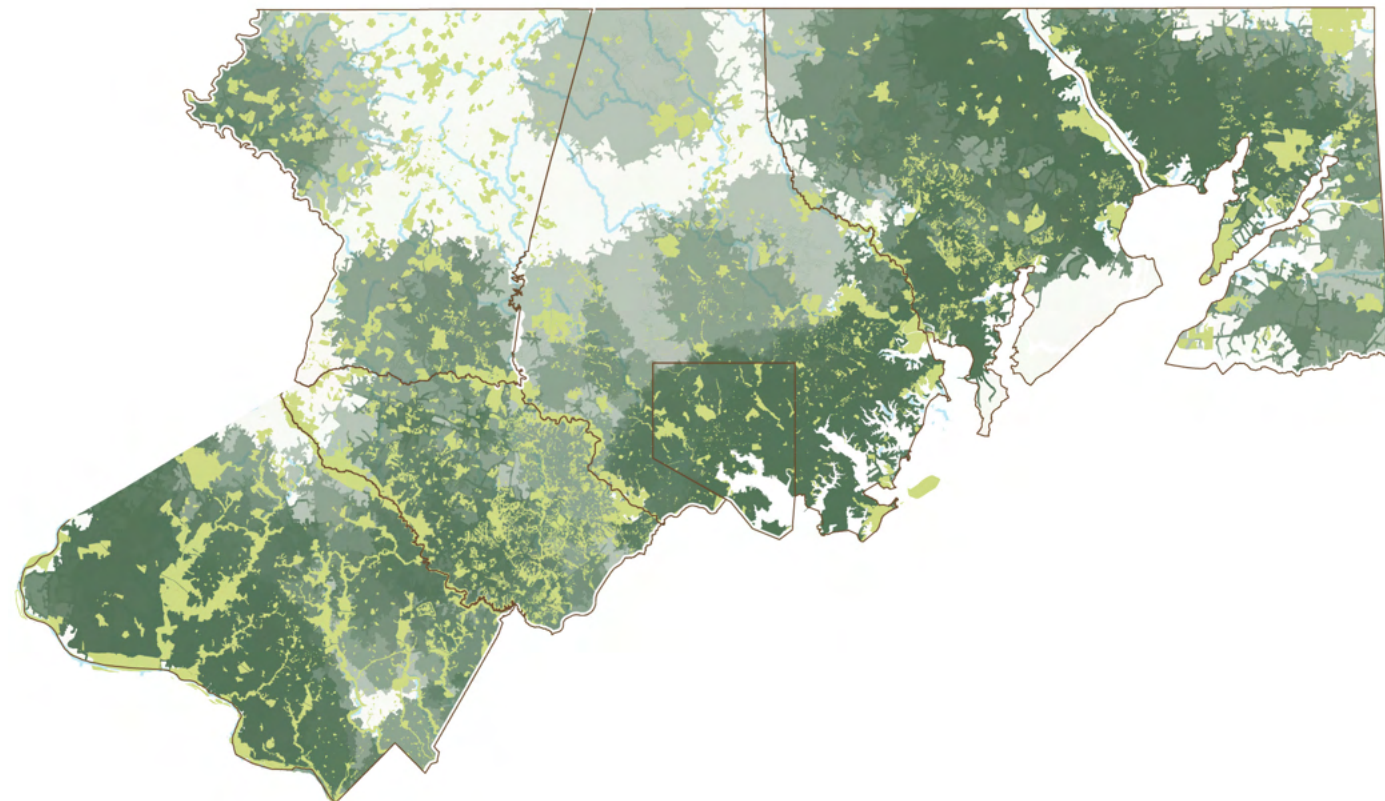
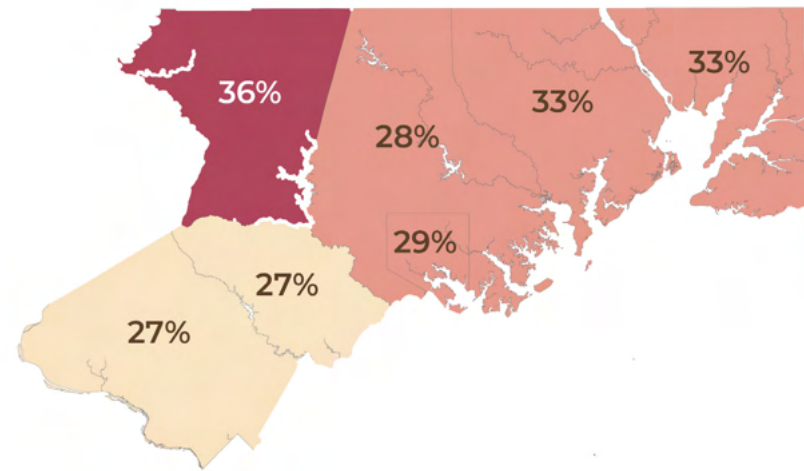
Statewide participation in activities that require water access, like swimming, paddling, motorboat use, and sailing vary from activity to activity and region to region. While Statewide participation in water activities is **34%**, the Central Region has lower rates of participation, especially in places that have limited water access to a variety of water access opportunities, like Montgomery County and Howard County. In the Central Region, outdoor swimming opportunities ranked as the third most important unmet facility need among residents and equipment rentals for items like kayaks and canoes was the second highest unmet need.

Participation Rates (34% statewide average)

- County resident use far exceeds State average
- County resident use exceeds State average
- County resident use aligns with State average
- County resident use is less than State average
- County resident use is far less than State average

10-Mile Proximity to Water Access

- Access to two or more amenities within 10 miles
- Access to at least one amenity within 10 miles
- No access within 10 miles
- Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
- Waterbodies



Central Region

Participation in Fishing Activities

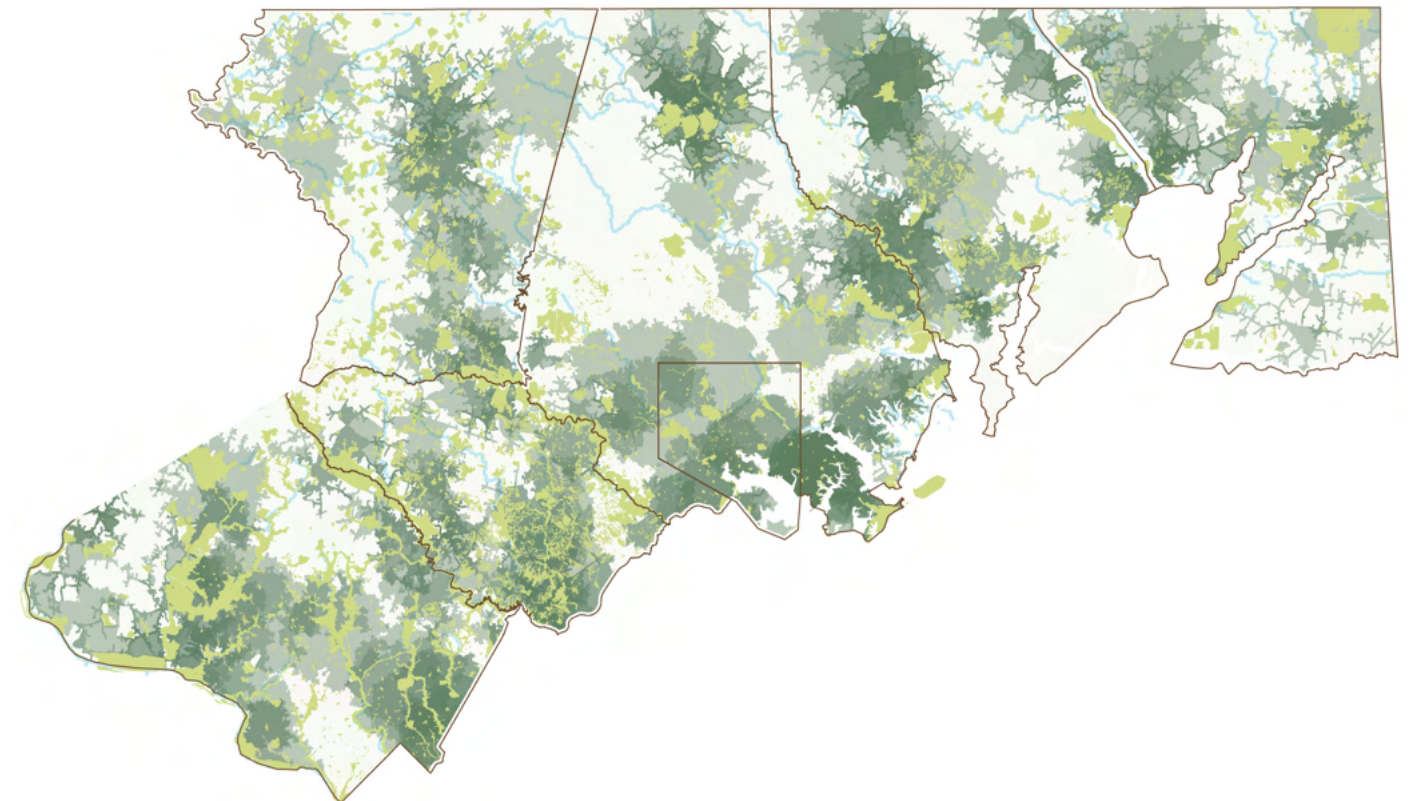
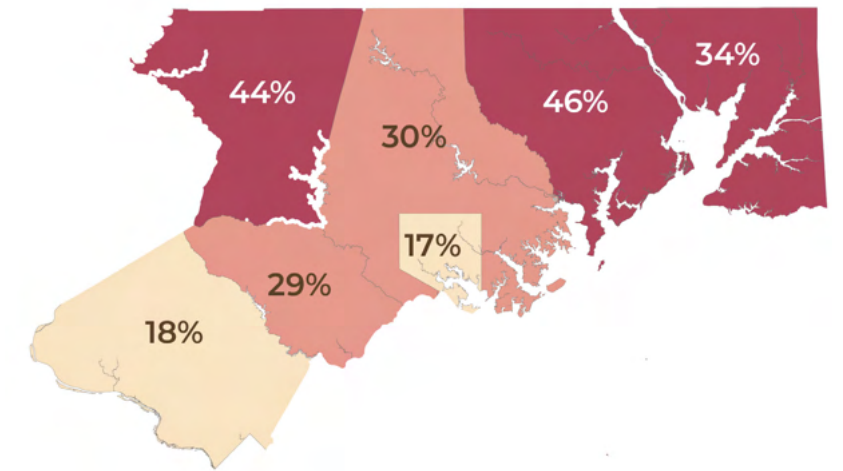
Statewide participation fishing related activities and spaces vary across the region. While Statewide participation in fishing is **31%**, the Central Region has lower rates of participation, especially in places that have limited access to a variety of water-based activities and opportunities, like Montgomery County and Howard County. In the Central Region, equipment rentals for items like fishing equipment ranked as the second most important program need, signaling a desire for more fishing opportunities among residents who have limited access or resources to fish today.

Participation Rates (31% statewide average)

- County resident use far exceeds State average
- County resident use exceeds State average
- County resident use aligns with State average
- County resident use is less than State average
- County resident use is far less than State average

5-Mile Proximity to Fishing

- Access to two or more amenities within 5 miles
- Access to at least one amenity within 5 miles
- No access within 10 miles
- Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
- Waterbodies



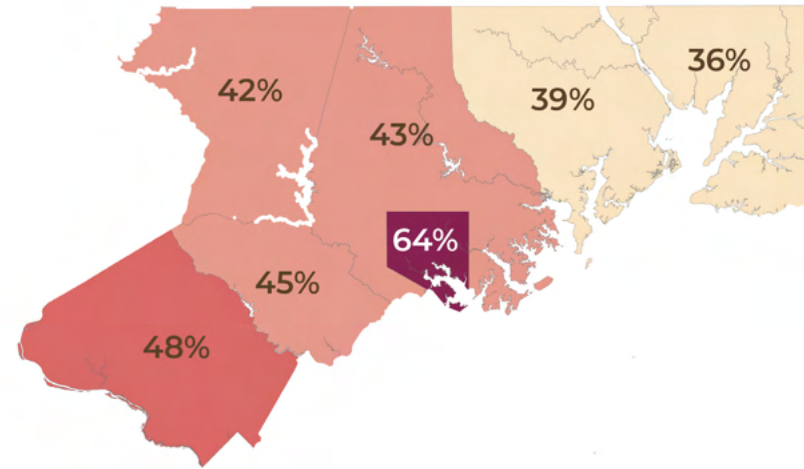
Central Region

Participation in Picnicking Activities

Maryland resident participation increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic as people found new ways to gather without being indoors. According to the community survey, that trend continues, with over **48%** of Marylanders sharing that they or members of their household participate in picnicking. The Central region both has many opportunities for residents to get outdoors for a park gathering or barbecue and has many residents who enjoy the activity! Baltimore City has one of the highest rates of picnicking participation in the State, followed by Montgomery County.

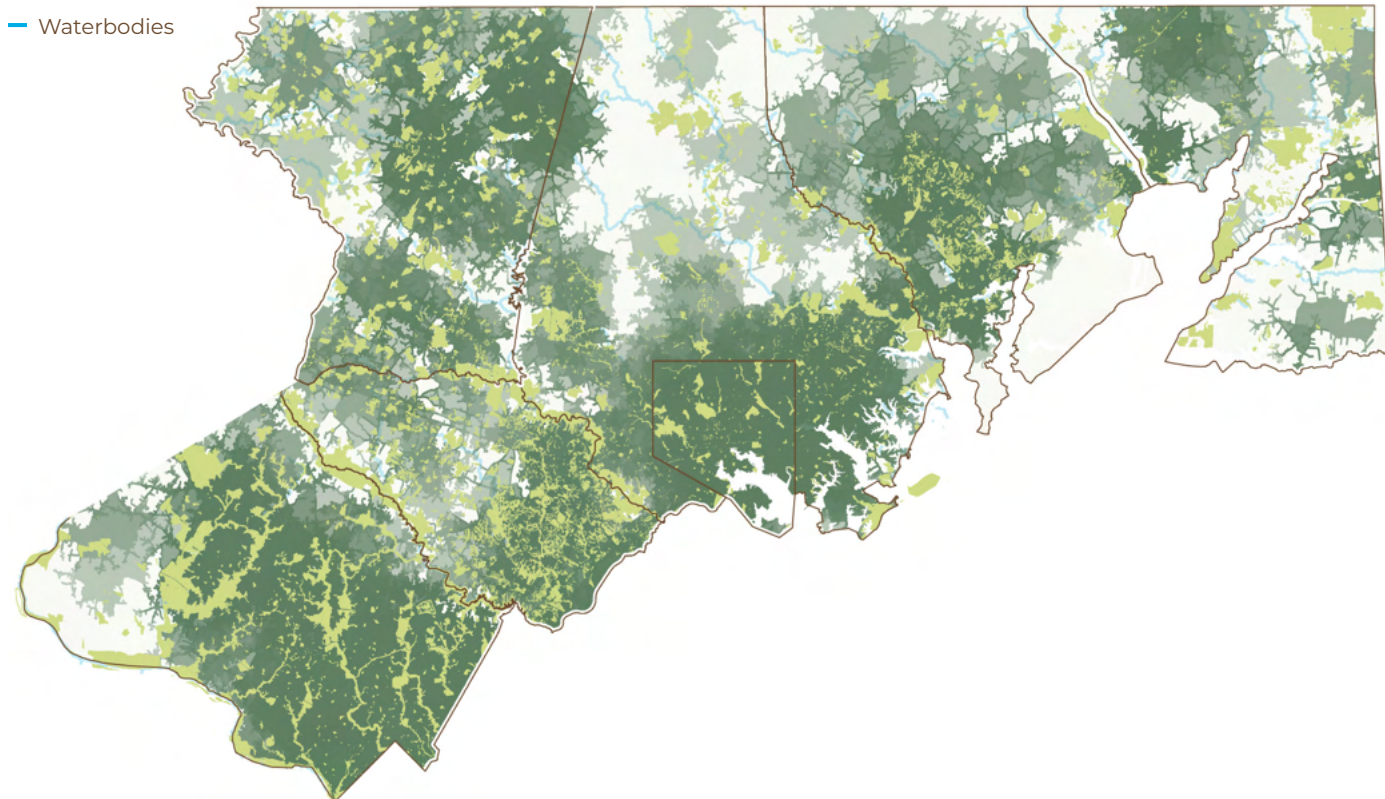
Participation Rates (48% statewide average)

- County resident use far exceeds State average
- County resident use exceeds State average
- County resident use aligns with State average
- County resident use is less than State average
- County resident use is far less than State average



5-Mile Proximity to Picnicking

- Access to two or more amenities within 5 miles
- Access to at least one amenity within 5 miles
- No access within 10 miles
- Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
- Waterbodies



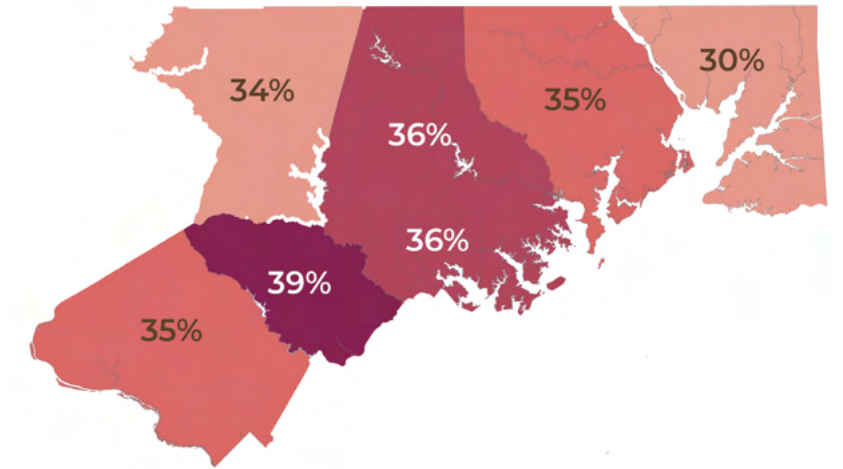
Central Region

Participation in Trail Activities

The Statewide average participation rate in trail use in 2024 was **35%**. Within the Central Region, residents more or less aligned with the Statewide average, though Howard County residents are more likely to use trails than their neighboring counties. Aligned with Statewide articulated needs for future investments, the Central region identified hiking and backpacking trails as the second highest priority for the future with a desire for more paved trails as fourth in the list of priorities.

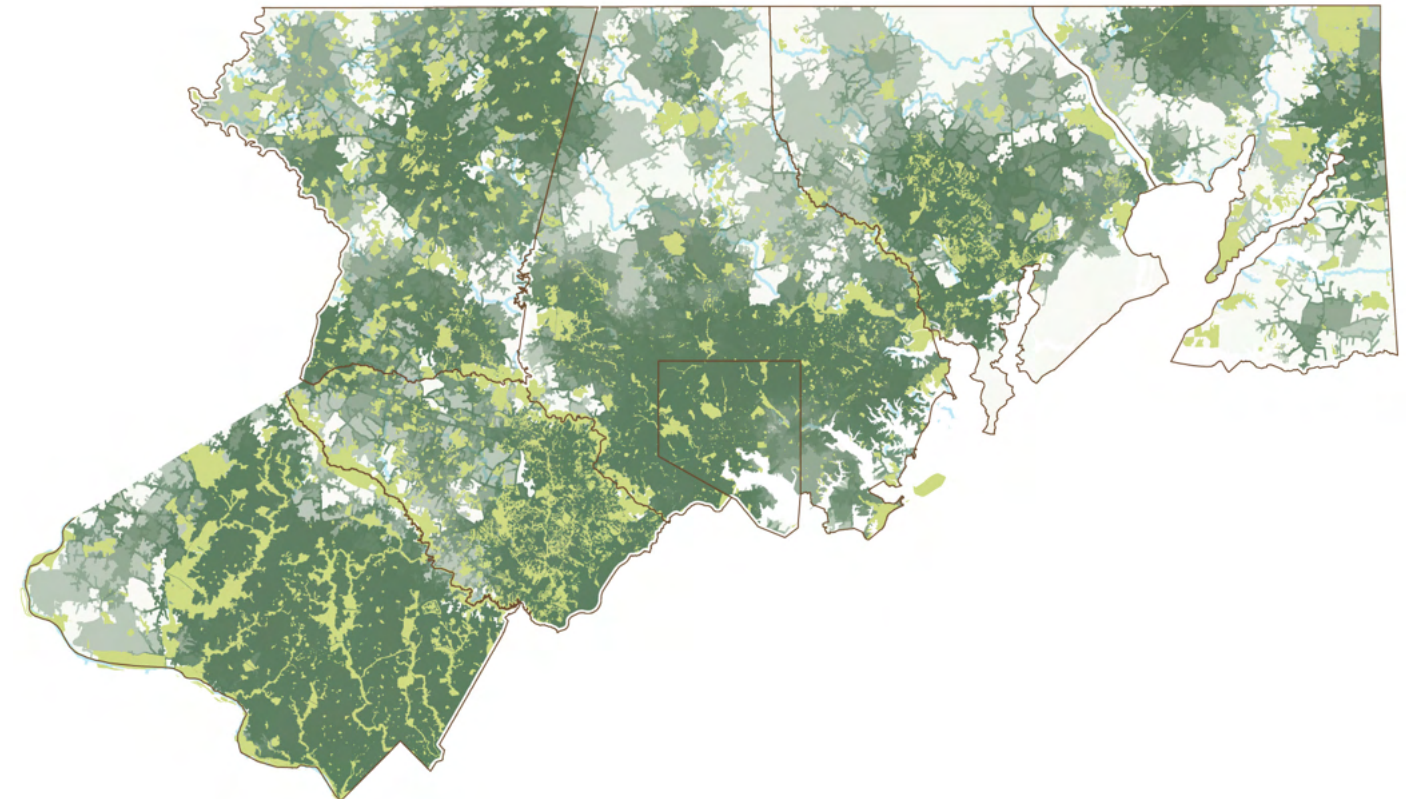
Participation Rates (35% statewide average)

- County resident use far exceeds State average
- County resident use exceeds State average
- County resident use aligns with State average
- County resident use is less than State average
- County resident use is far less than State average



5-Mile Proximity to Trails

- Access to two or more amenities within 5 miles
- Access to at least one amenity within 5 miles
- No access within 10 miles
- Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
- Waterbodies



Central Region

Participation in Nature-based Activities

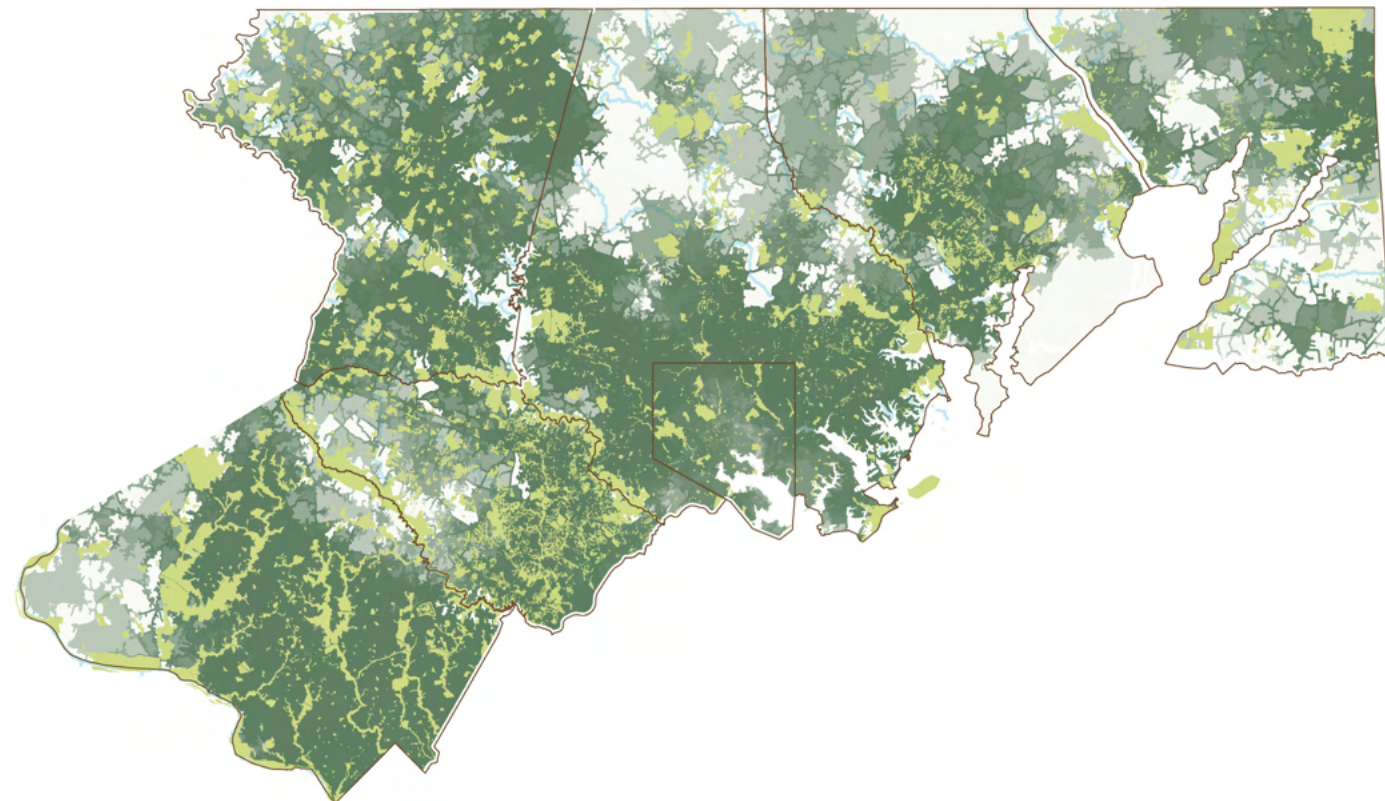
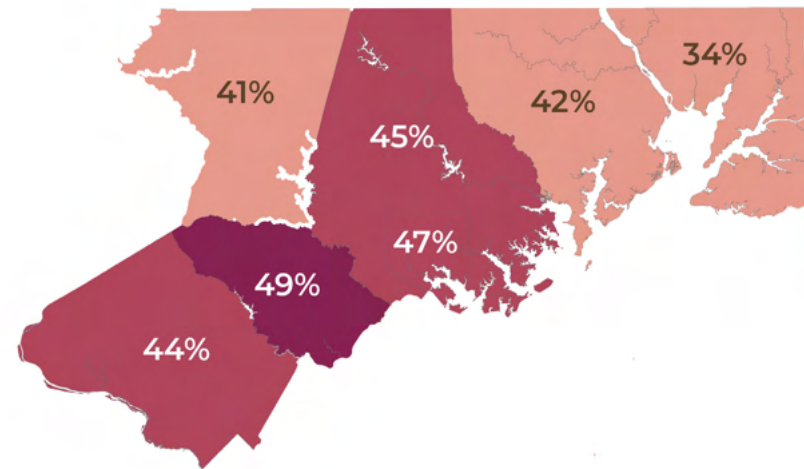
Statewide average participation rate in nature-based activities, which include birding, wildlife viewing, visiting natural areas and participating in nature programs or photography continues to grow Statewide, jumping from about 30% in 2018 to **43%** in 2024. More urban areas of the Central Region were aligned with the Statewide average and further north counties with more rural character and regular access to nature were a bit lower than the Statewide average.

Participation Rates (43% statewide average)

- County resident use far exceeds State average
- County resident use exceeds State average
- County resident use aligns with State average
- County resident use is less than State average
- County resident use is far less than State average

5-Mile Proximity to Nature-based Activities

- Access to two or more amenities within 5 miles
- Access to at least one amenity within 5 miles
- No access within 10 miles
- Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
- Waterbodies



Central Region

Needs

FACILITY NEEDS:

Top 5 Needs:

1. Natural areas/open space
2. Hiking/Backpacking trails
3. Outdoor swimming opportunities (beaches, outdoor pools, etc.)
4. Paved multi-use trails
5. Bird watching/wildlife viewing areas

Other High Priority Needs:

- ▶ Water access for non-motorized watercraft (canoeing, kayaking, paddleboard, sailing, etc.)
- ▶ Historical sites/museums
- ▶ Indoor recreation facilities (community centers, recreation centers, etc.)
- ▶ Fishing access (marine, saltwater, freshwater, etc.)
- ▶ Non-motorized watercraft rental location (paddleboards, kayaks, canoes)

OTHER PRIORITY NEEDS

Increase public access and water access options

The region needs more ways for people to reach public lands and water. Add and diversify access so different user groups can get to parks and rivers without crowding a few sites.

Manage overcrowding and over-use

Popular sites face heavy weekend and summer use that leads to crowding and degradation. Track peak use and spread use through communications about other options, wayfinding, and more formal access points, where appropriate, so places stay safe and in good condition.

Improve visitor information and outreach

Many people, especially out-of-town users do not know where recreation opportunities are or how to use them. Clear maps, signage, and advance information help visitors find alternatives and follow site rules.

PROGRAM NEEDS

Top 5 Needs:

1. Nature programs/environmental education
2. Equipment rentals (kayak/canoe, bicycle, fishing)
3. Festivals/ special events
4. Guided hikes
5. Fishing programs (freshwater/saltwater)

Other High Priority Needs:

- ▶ Fitness classes (yoga, aerobics, etc)
- ▶ Historical reenactments and other historical programming
- ▶ Firearm safety training
- ▶ Public lectures
- ▶ Arts programming (visual and performance)

Expand public and visitor environmental education

Visitors need basic guidance on safe, low-impact recreation. Short, simple education at entry points and online can reduce harmful behaviors and improve stewardship.

Strengthen partnerships and volunteer programs

Local groups and volunteers can support site care and outreach. Formal partnerships help scale stewardship, monitoring, and visitor services across many sites.

Protected Lands

Southern Region

The Southern Region lies on Maryland's coastal plain between the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay. It includes Anne Arundel, Prince George's, Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's counties.

Tidal creeks, riverfront towns, shoreline forests, and scattered farms shape the land and the local townscape.

The region covers about 1.2 million acres. Its population is roughly 2 million (2023 ACS 5-year). Much of the land is rural, with long shoreline stretches and broad tracts of farmland.

About 0.29 million acres, roughly 23.6% of the region are protected. Major protected land types include federal protected lands, State DNR parks and owned lands, and lands held under preservation easements. Notable public sites include St. Mary's River State Park, Cedarville State Forest, and Kings Landing NRMA.

The Southern Region's protected land covers about 23.6% of the region, which is below Maryland's 30% by-2030 target.

1.2M acres

Land Area

1,923,390

Population (2023)

0.29M acres

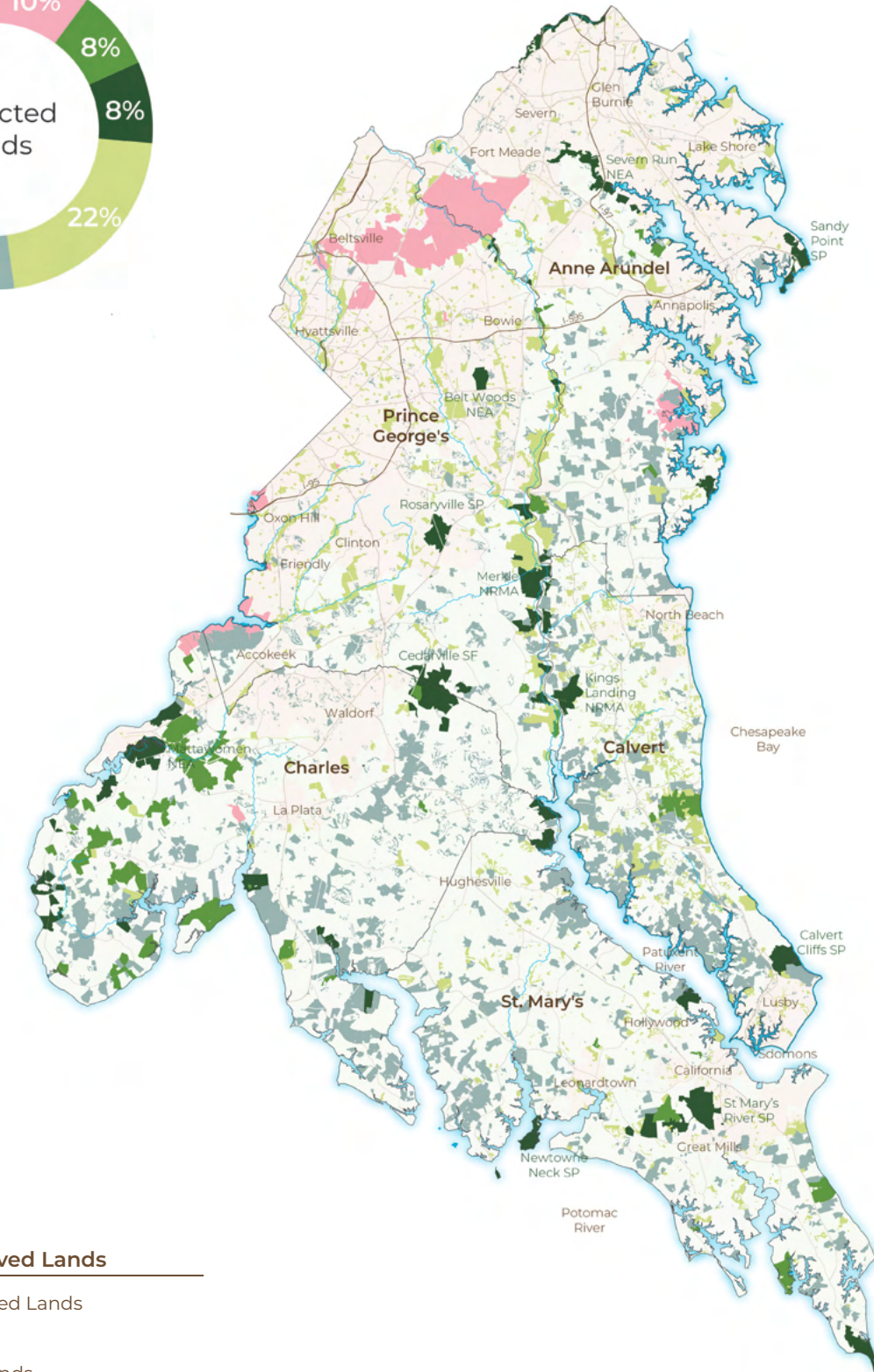
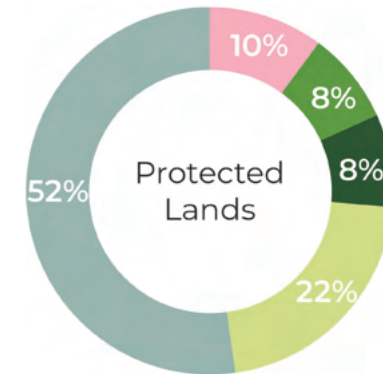
Protected Area

23.6%

Protected Lands Coverage



Calvert Cliffs State Park



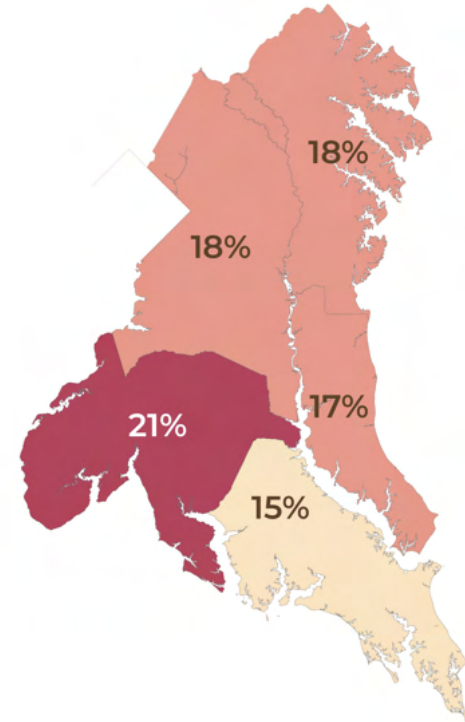
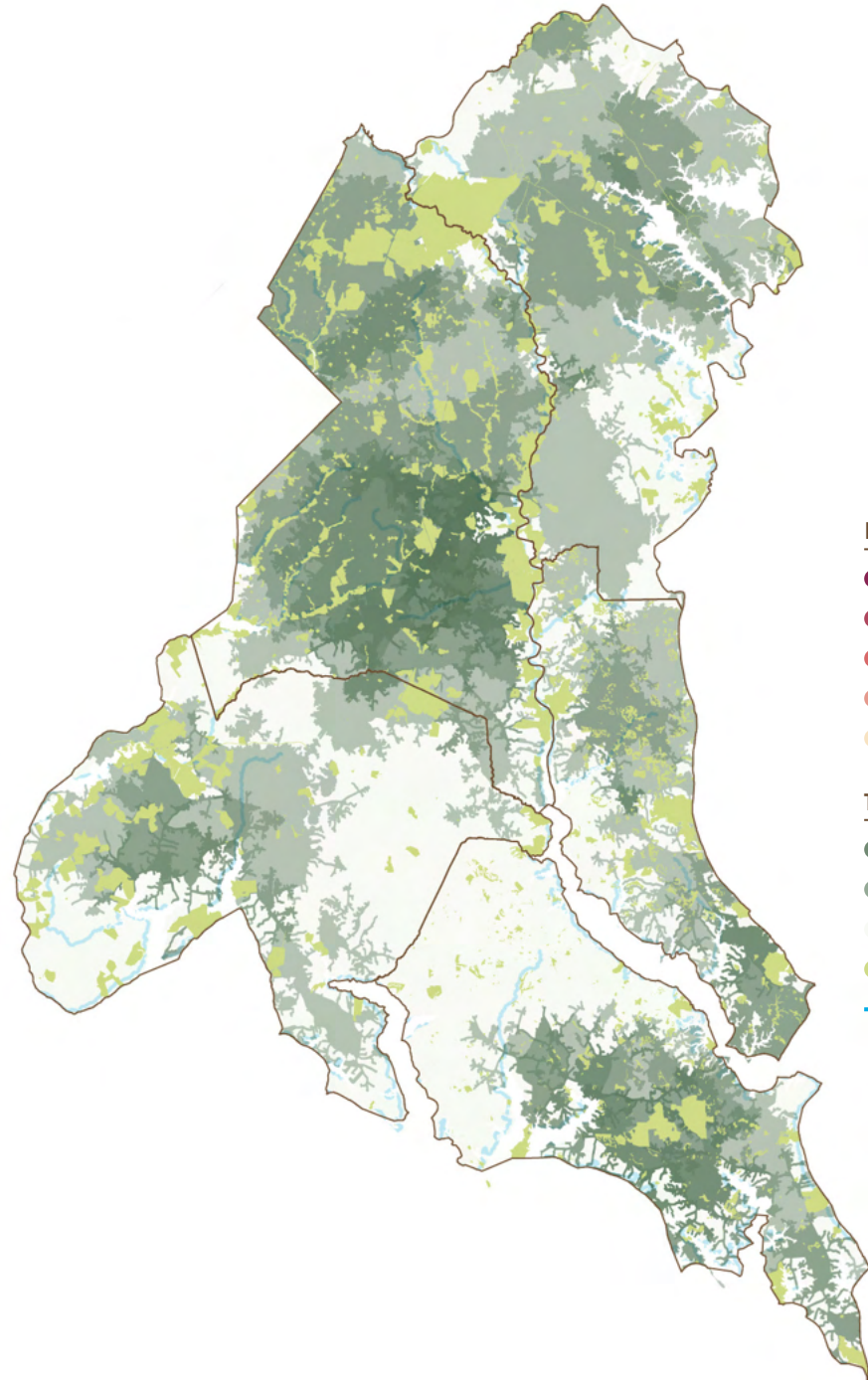
Existing Conserved Lands

- Federal Protected Lands
- DNR Parks
- DNR Owned Lands
- County Rec and Parks
- Easement Lands
- Urban Area
- Roads
- Waterbodies

Southern Region

Participation in Camping Activities

Tent camping has become more popular among residents across the State since the last LPRP in 2018. Unlike the Statewide average, participation in camping in the Southern region remained steady, with many county residents expressing similar rates of camping participation in 2024 as in 2018. Residents believe their needs are generally met with the camping facilities provided, though reinvestment in existing camping facilities with deferred maintenance needs should be prioritized.



Participation Rates (20% statewide average)

- County resident use far exceeds State average
- County resident use exceeds State average
- County resident use aligns with State average
- County resident use is less than State average
- County resident use is far less than State average

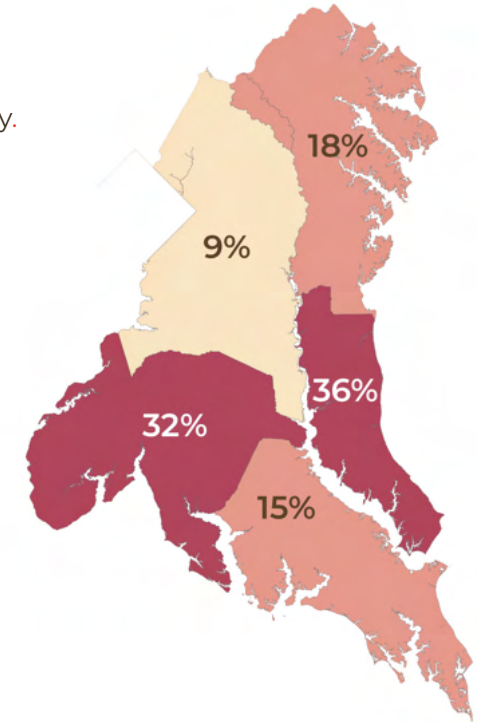
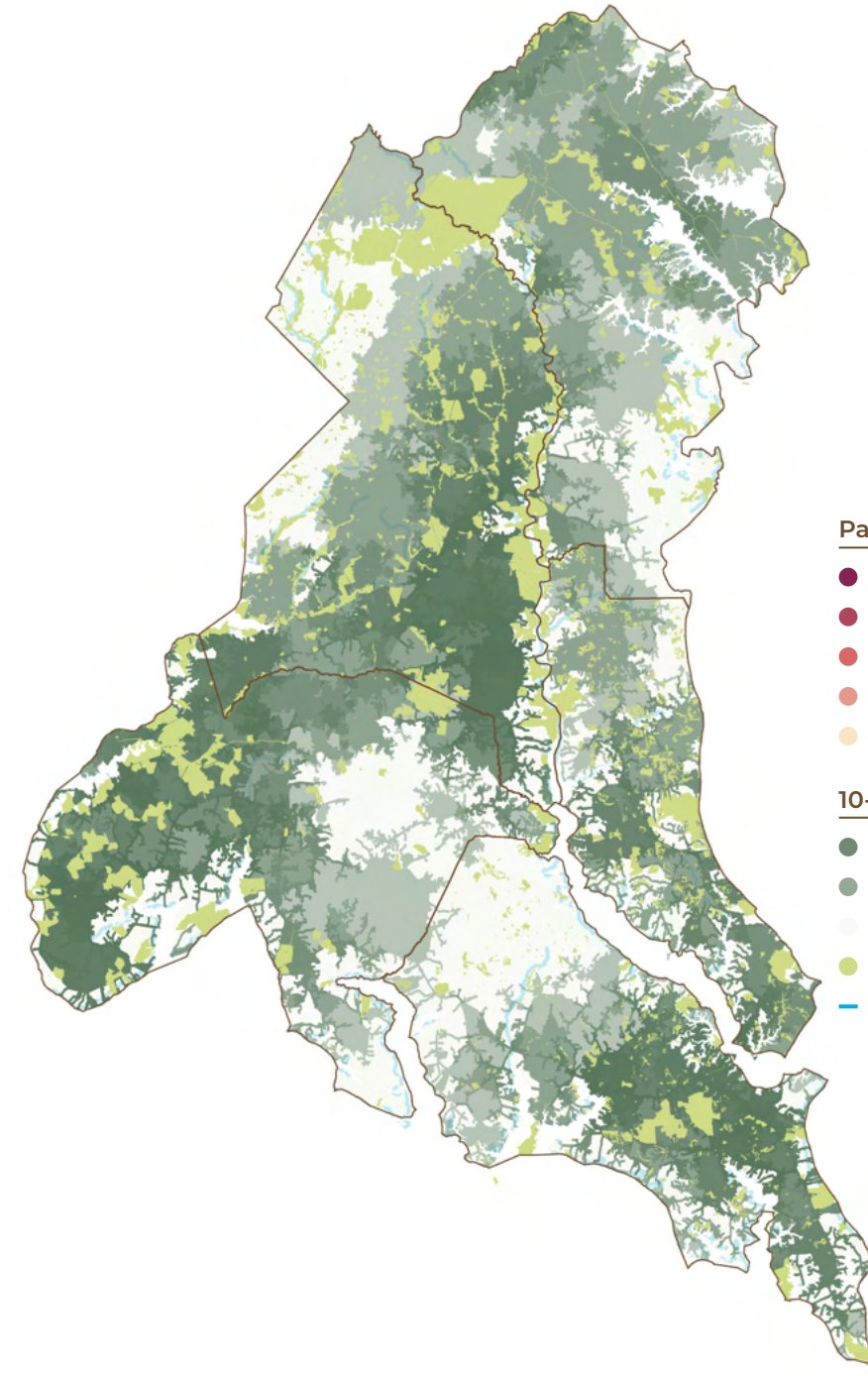
10-Mile Proximity to Camping

- Access to two or more amenities within 10 miles
- Access to at least one amenity within 10 miles
- No access within 10 miles
- Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
- Waterbodies

Southern Region

Participation in Hunting Activities

Hunting has become more popular among residents across the State since the last LPRP in 2018. In the Southern region participation in hunting is quite different county to county, and appears to be tied closely to the residential density of each county. Calvert County and Charles County both have much higher participation rates in hunting (36 and 32%, respectively), than the Statewide average of 21%.



Participation Rates (21% statewide average)

- County resident use far exceeds State average
- County resident use exceeds State average
- County resident use aligns with State average
- County resident use is less than State average
- County resident use is far less than State average

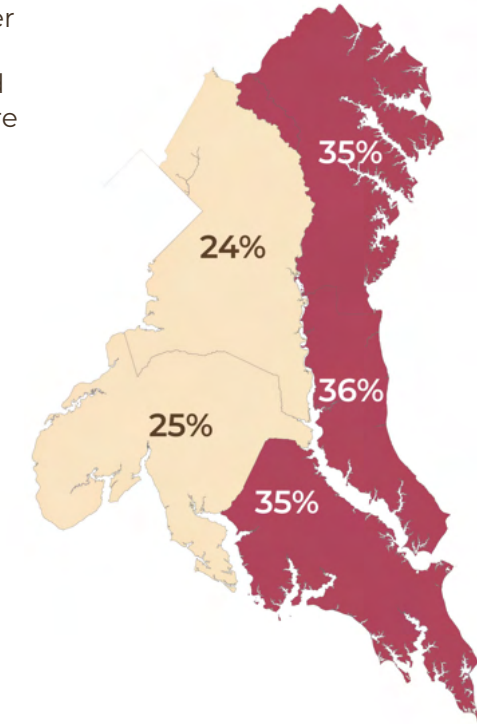
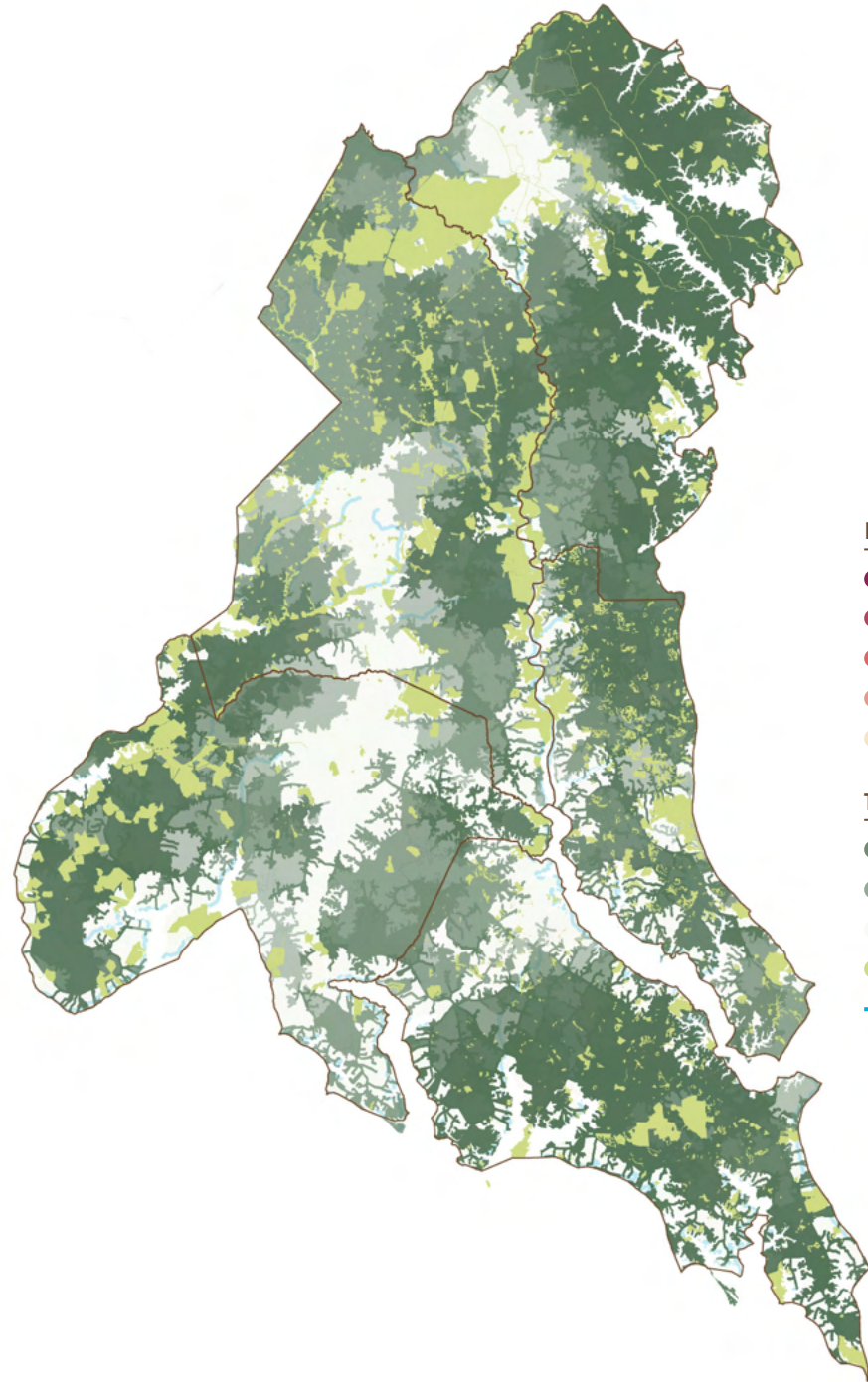
10-Mile Proximity to Hunting

- Access to two or more amenities within 10 miles
- Access to at least one amenity within 10 miles
- No access within 10 miles
- Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
- Waterbodies

Southern Region

Participation in Water Activities

Just like the Central Region, counties with greater access to water for boating and swimming have higher levels of participation in water-based activities. Anne Arundel County, Calvert County, and St Mary's County all have water activity participation rates that are similar to the State average of 34%.



Participation Rates (34% statewide average)

- County resident use far exceeds State average
- County resident use exceeds State average
- County resident use aligns with State average
- County resident use is less than State average
- County resident use is far less than State average

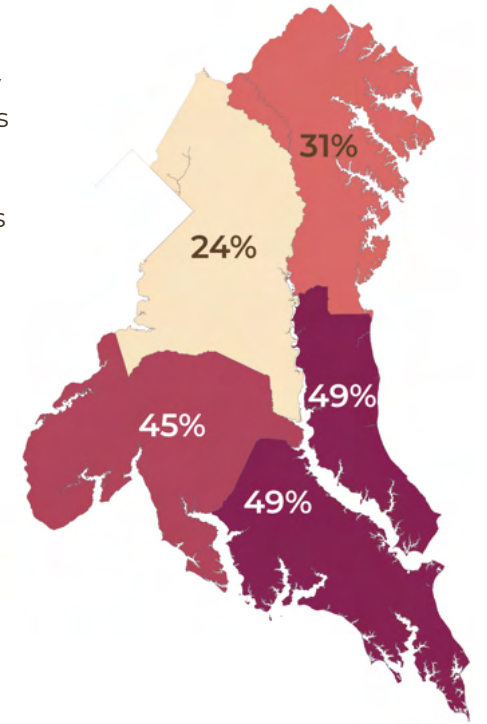
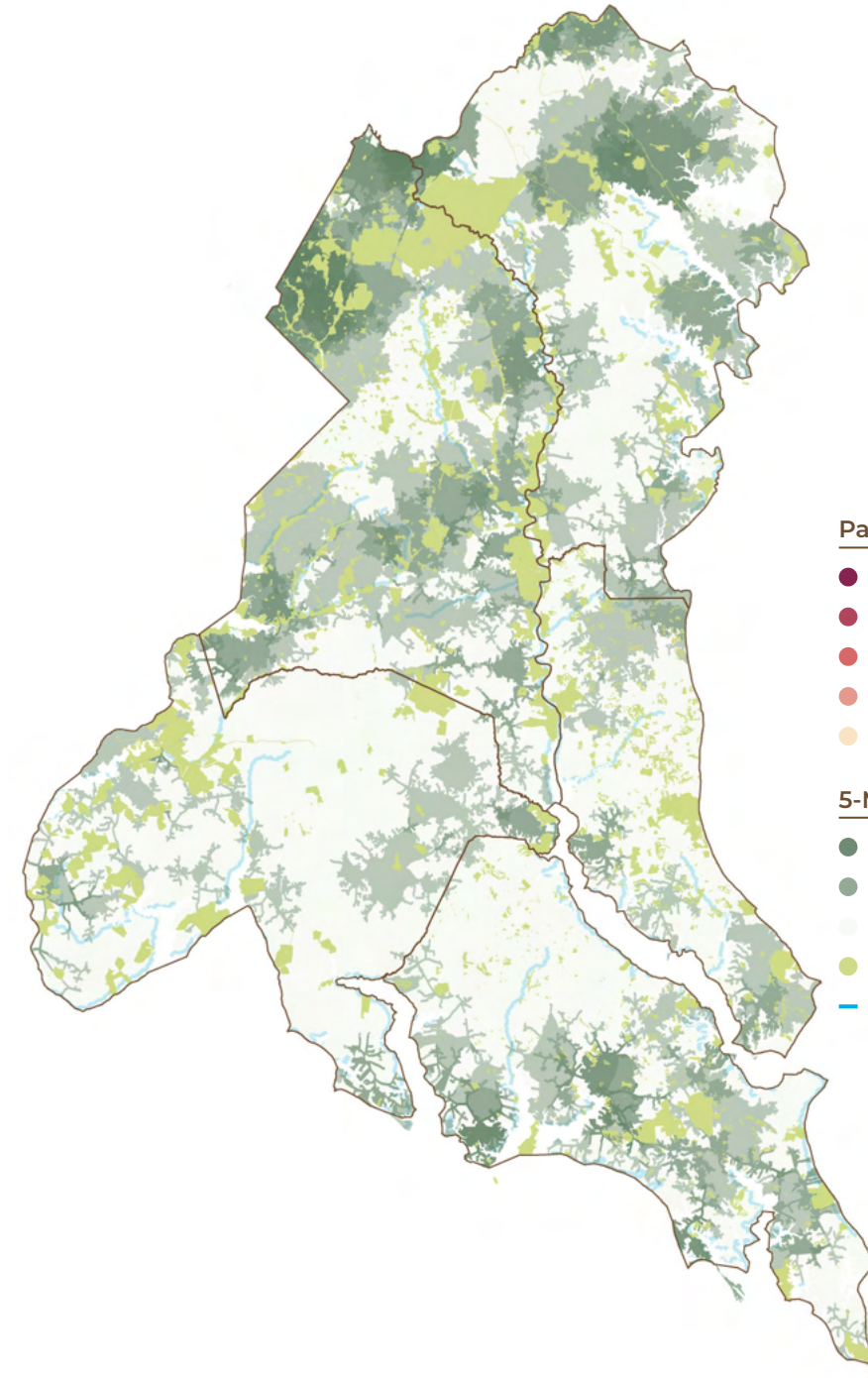
10-Mile Proximity to Water Access

- Access to two or more amenities within 10 miles
- Access to at least one amenity within 10 miles
- No access within 10 miles
- Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
- Waterbodies

Southern Region

Participation in Fishing Activities

Statewide participation fishing related activities and spaces vary across the region. While Statewide participation in fishing is 31%, the Southern Region has variable rates of participation, especially in Prince George's County. Calvert, Charles, and St Mary's Counties have very high participation rates in fishing, attributable to the greater linear miles of shorelines along fresh and brackish waterbodies - providing significantly different fishing experiences in short distances from home.



Participation Rates (31% statewide average)

- County resident use far exceeds State average
- County resident use exceeds State average
- County resident use aligns with State average
- County resident use is less than State average
- County resident use is far less than State average

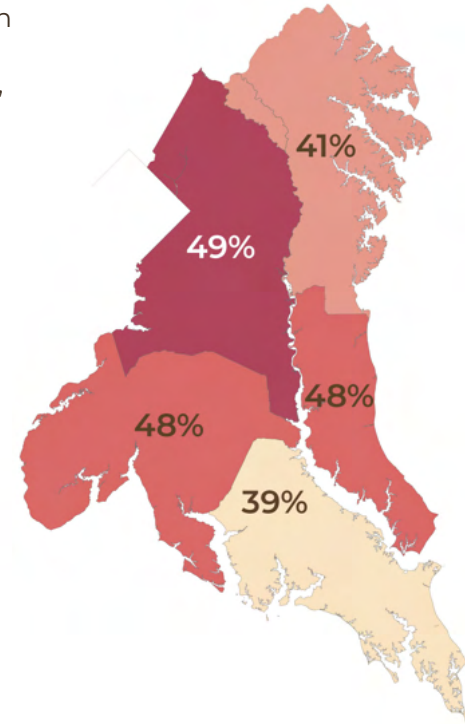
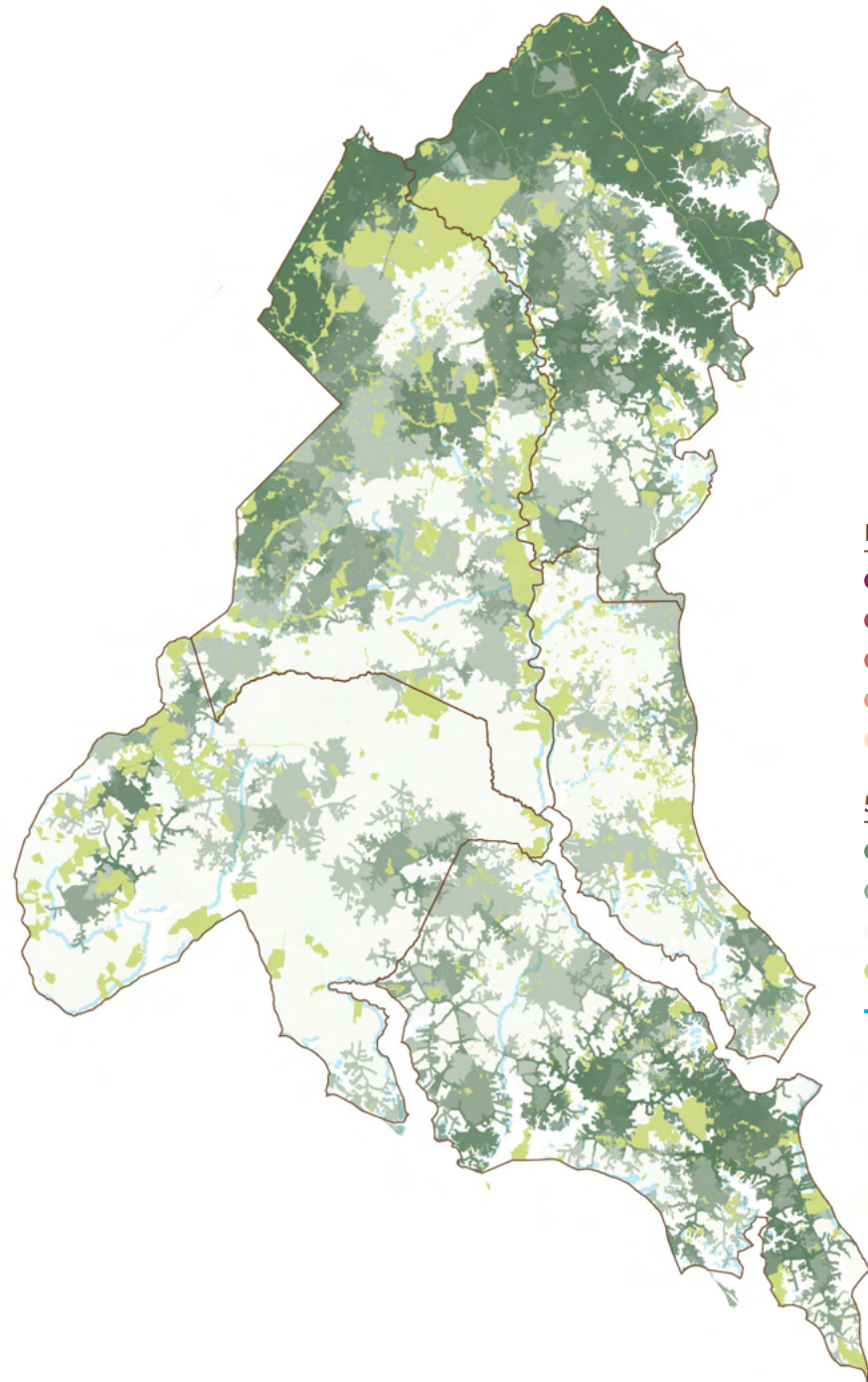
5-Mile Proximity to Fishing

- Access to two or more amenities within 5 miles
- Access to at least one amenity within 5 miles
- No access within 10 miles
- Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
- Waterbodies

Southern Region

Participation in Picnicking Activities

Over 48% of Marylanders participate in picnicking. In the Southern Region, Prince George's County, Calvert County, and Charles County all have participation rates aligned with the State average, even though Anne Arundel County and St. Mary's County have more amenities that support picnic gatherings, like pavilions, shelters, and barbecue infrastructure.



Participation Rates (48% statewide average)

- County resident use far exceeds State average
- County resident use exceeds State average
- County resident use aligns with State average
- County resident use is less than State average
- County resident use is far less than State average

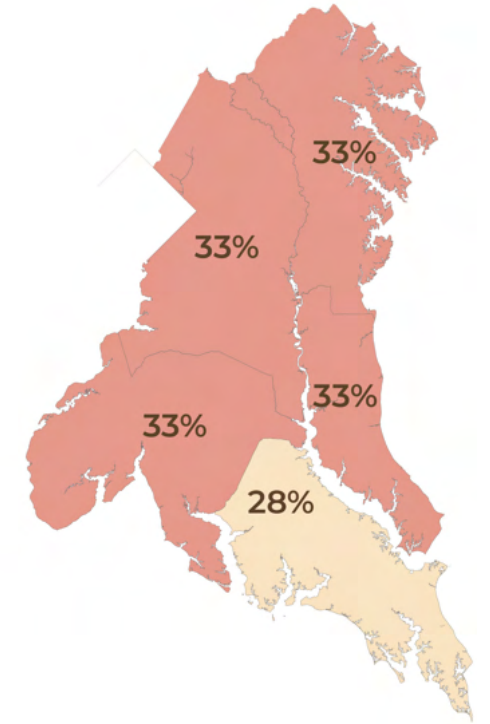
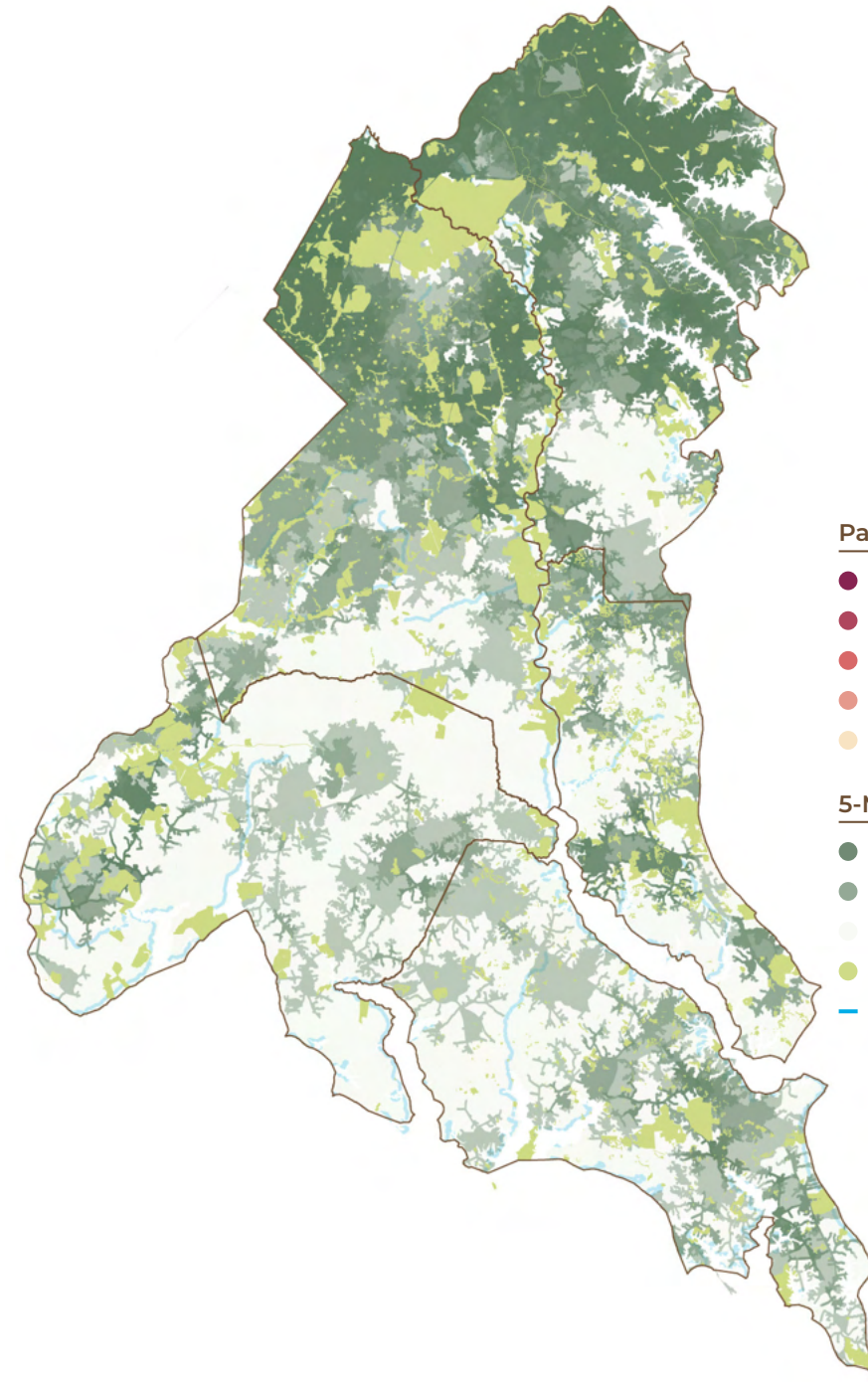
5-Mile Proximity to Picnicking

- Access to two or more amenities within 5 miles
- Access to at least one amenity within 5 miles
- No access within 10 miles
- Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
- Waterbodies

Southern Region

Participation in Trail Activities

The Statewide average participation rate in trail use in 2024 was 35%. Within the Southern Region, residents more or less aligned with the Statewide average, though St Mary's County residents are less likely to go hiking than their neighboring counties.



Participation Rates (35% statewide average)

- County resident use far exceeds State average
- County resident use exceeds State average
- County resident use aligns with State average
- County resident use is less than State average
- County resident use is far less than State average

5-Mile Proximity to Trails

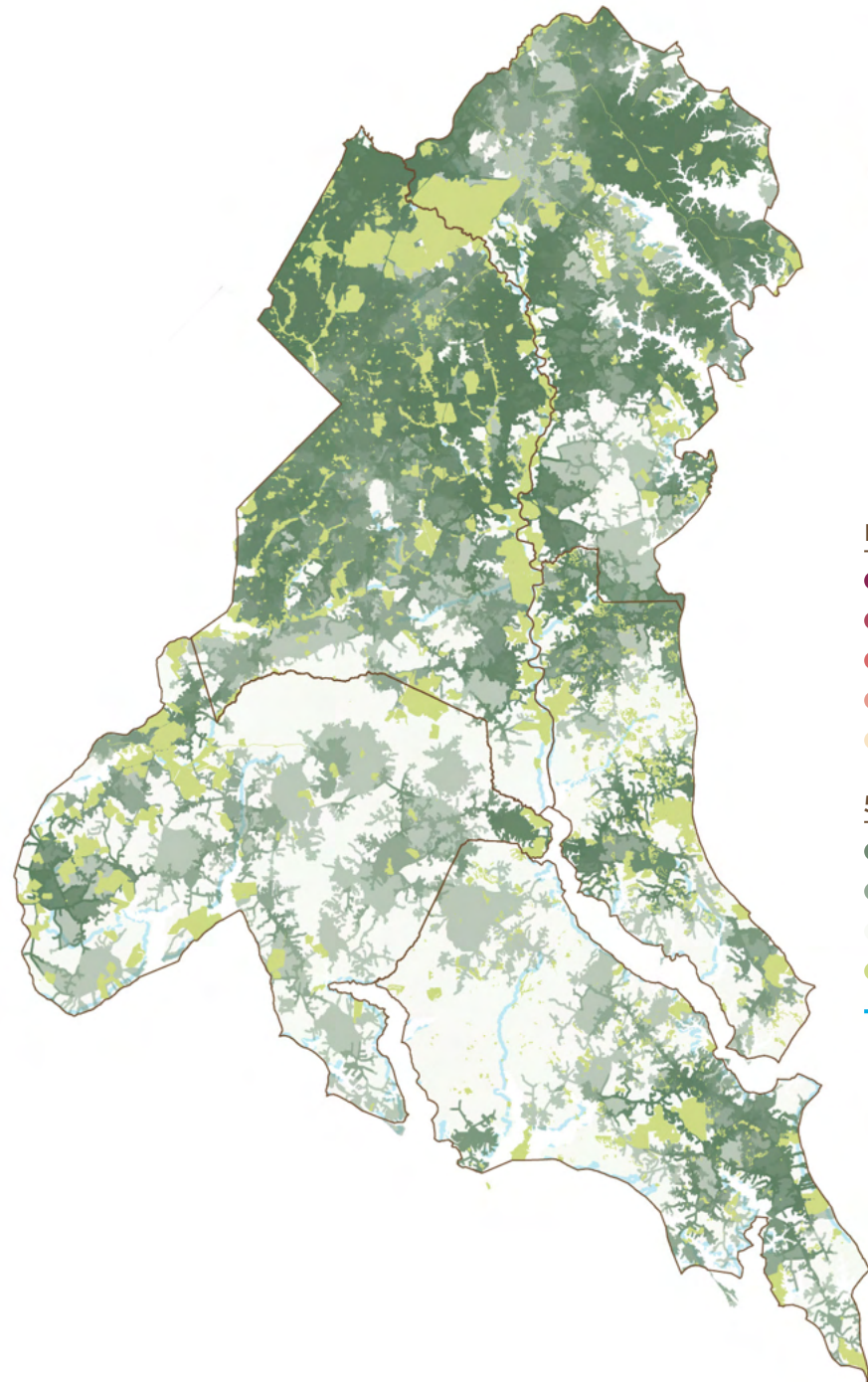
- Access to two or more amenities within 5 miles
- Access to at least one amenity within 5 miles
- No access within 10 miles
- Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
- Waterbodies

5-Mile Proximity to Fishing

Southern Region

Participation in Nature-based Activities

Statewide average participation rate in nature-based activities, which include birding, wildlife viewing, visiting natural areas and participating in nature programs or photography continues to grow Statewide, jumping from about 30% in 2018 to 43% in 2024. Interest and participation in nature-based programs and activities was highest in St. Mary's County.

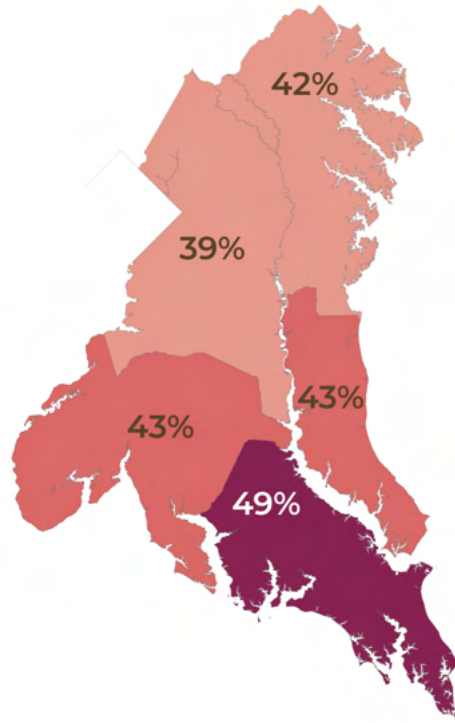


Participation Rates (43% statewide average)

- County resident use far exceeds State average
- County resident use exceeds State average
- County resident use aligns with State average
- County resident use is less than State average
- County resident use is far less than State average

5-Mile Proximity to Nature-based Activities

- Access to two or more amenities within 5 miles
- Access to at least one amenity within 5 miles
- No access within 10 miles
- Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
- Waterbodies



Southern Region

Needs

FACILITY NEEDS:

Top 5 Needs:

1. Natural areas/open space
2. Hiking/ backpacking trails
3. Outdoor swimming opportunities (beaches, outdoor pools, etc.)
4. Paved multi-use trails
5. Water access for non-motorized watercraft (canoeing, kayaking, paddleboard, sailing, etc.)

Other High Priority Needs:

- ▶ Bird watching/wildlife viewing areas
- ▶ Fishing access (marine, saltwater, freshwater, etc.)
- ▶ Indoor recreation facilities (community centers, recreation centers, etc.)
- ▶ Historical sites/museums

OTHER PRIORITY NEEDS

Manage visitor demand and water access

Crowding and temporary closures come from too many visitors using a few sites. Manage where people go and add more, different access points so use is spread out.

Improve visitor information and site operations

Out-of-town users often do not know where to go or what rules to follow. Better signage, maps, real-time capacity info, and site rules help visitors find alternatives and follow protections.

Build a connected network of parks, trails, and water access

Linking shoreline parks, inland preserves, and trails creates movement corridors for people and wildlife. Connected systems give visitors more choices and reduce pressure on single sites.

Protect and adapt shoreline habitats for climate impacts

Warmer water and stronger storms change where people go and how sites perform.

PROGRAM NEEDS:

Top 5 Needs:

1. Nature programs/environmental education
2. Festivals/Special events
3. Fitness classes (yoga, aerobics, etc)
4. Firearm safety training
5. Guided hikes

Other High Priority Needs:

- ▶ Arts programming (visual and performance)
- ▶ Fishing programs (freshwater/saltwater)
- ▶ Historical reenactments and other historical programming
- ▶ Equipment rentals (kayak/canoe, bicycle, fishing)

Combine shoreline protection, marsh restoration, and climate-aware design so habitats and access work together as conditions change.

Protect and interpret the region's geology and history

Important places like Calvert Cliffs and historic sites are both vulnerable and valuable. Protect these places and provide clear, place-based interpretation so visitors learn the landscape and respect it.

Shoreline and Riparian Protection

Long stretches of shoreline make it possible to link protected areas and connect parks, trails, and water access. Prioritizing high-value parcels near marsh edges and creek mouths can deliver large benefits for water quality and habitat. At the same time, many shoreline parcels are small and fragmented, which makes it hard to assemble large, contiguous protected blocks. Sea-level rise and shoreline migration change which parcels will keep their ecological value over time.

Protected Lands

Eastern Region

The Eastern Region sits between the Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Ocean. The Chesapeake Bay is the region's main natural feature and shapes its landscape and livelihoods.

Eastern Region, the largest region in Maryland, makes up much of the Delmarva Peninsula and includes nine counties: Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico, and Worcester. Farms, fishing ports, tidal marshes, beaches, maritime forests, and small towns shape the landscape in this region. It has the smallest population of Maryland's four regions, according to the 2023 ACS 5-year data.

Conservation is a major feature of the Eastern Region. Roughly 0.66M acres, about 35% of the region are protected. Major public lands include Assateague State Park (and parts of Assateague Island), Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, and numerous Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs).

These protected areas conserve tidal and salt marshes, barrier beaches and dunes, maritime forests, freshwater wetlands and ponds, riparian buffers, and working farmland under easement.

1.9M acres

Land Area

356,002

Population (2023)

0.66M acres

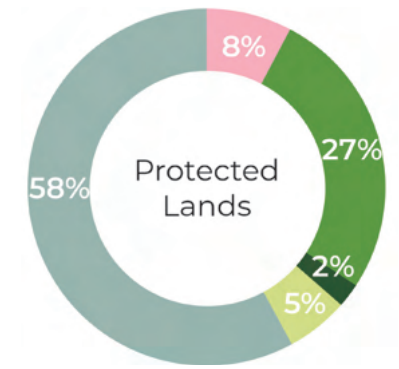
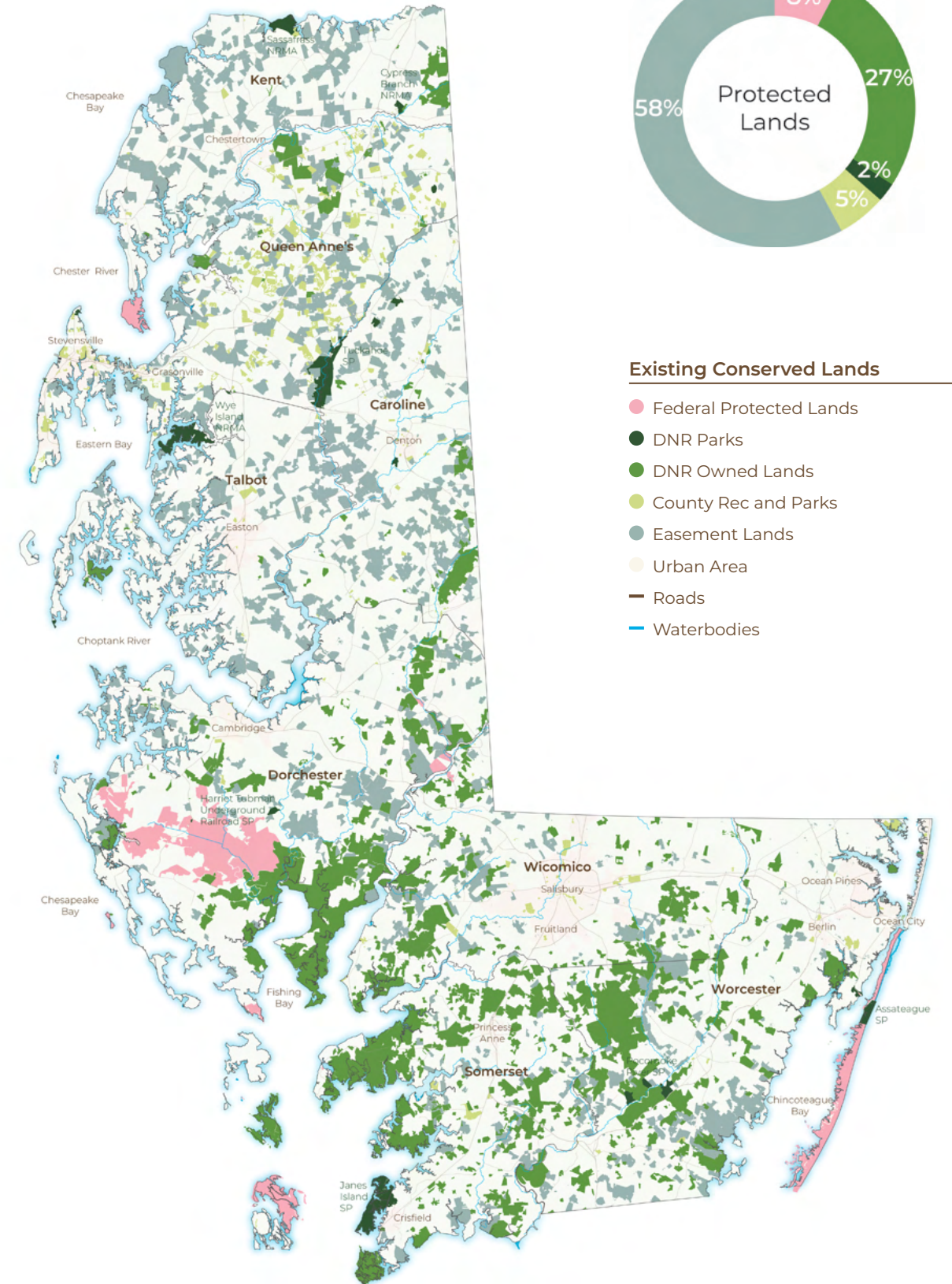
Protected Area

35.1%

Protected Lands Coverage



Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park



Existing Conserved Lands

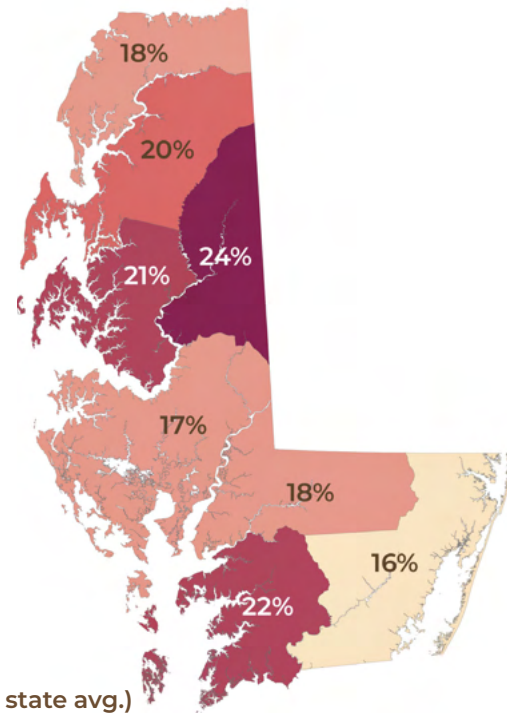
- Federal Protected Lands
- DNR Parks
- DNR Owned Lands
- County Rec and Parks
- Easement Lands
- Urban Area
- Roads
- Waterbodies



Eastern Region

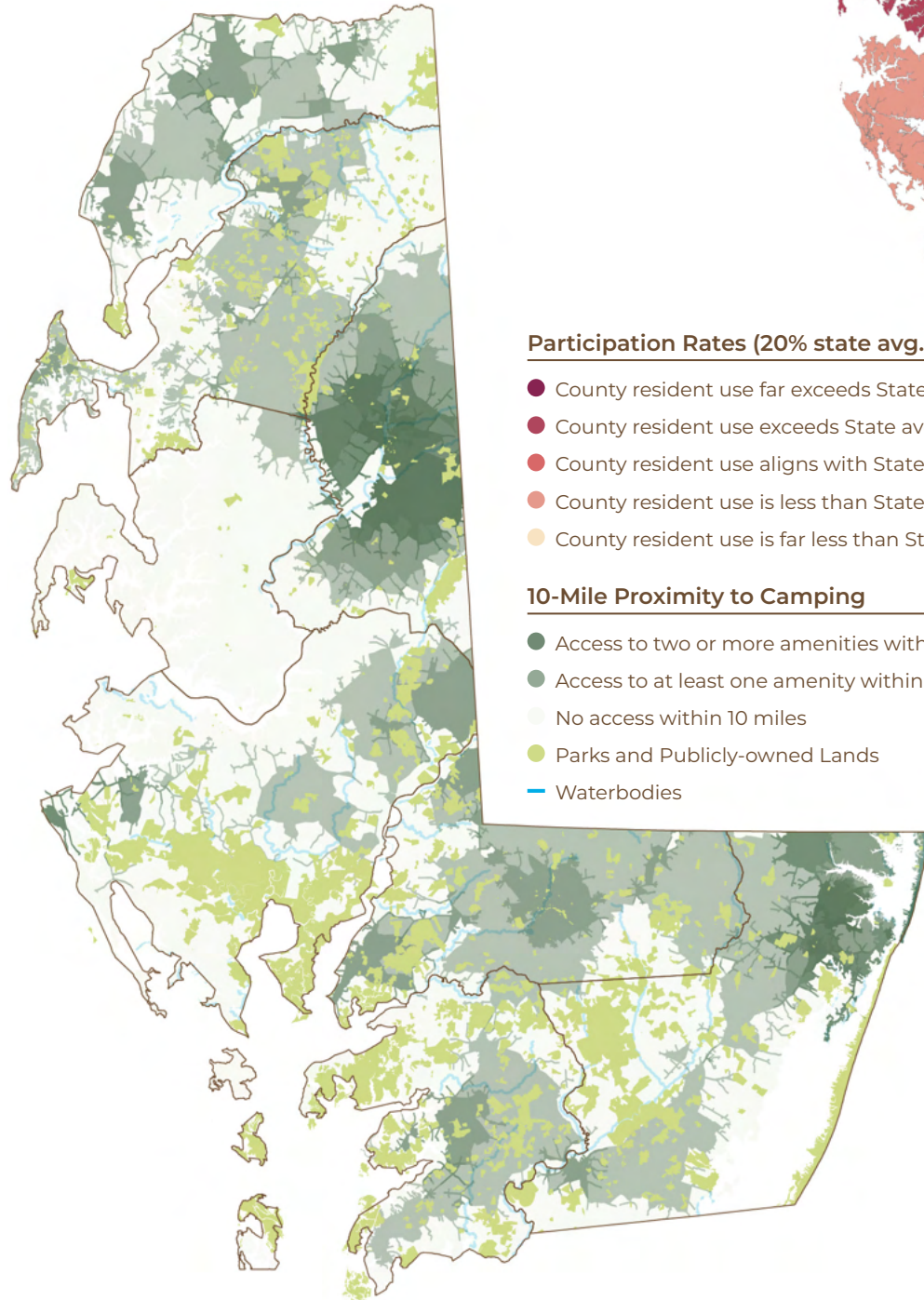
Participation in Camping Activities

Camping is a popular past time for Marylanders, with 20% of residents participating in a form of camping in 2024. In the Eastern Region of the State, camping is more popular in Caroline County than the State average and less popular in Worcester County, where there happens to be a higher number of camping destinations. The State's most popular State campground, Assateague State Park, is located in Worcester County.



- Participation Rates (20% state avg.)**
- County resident use far exceeds State average
 - County resident use exceeds State average
 - County resident use aligns with State average
 - County resident use is less than State average
 - County resident use is far less than State average

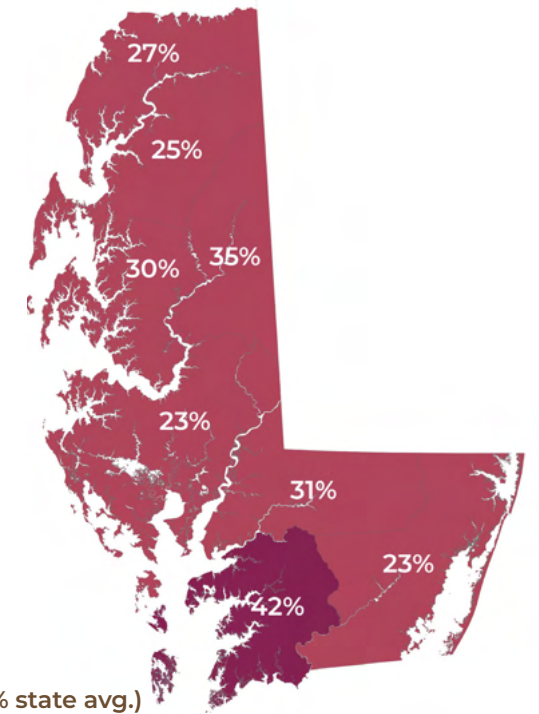
- 10-Mile Proximity to Camping**
- Access to two or more amenities within 10 miles
 - Access to at least one amenity within 10 miles
 - No access within 10 miles
 - Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
 - Waterbodies



Eastern Region

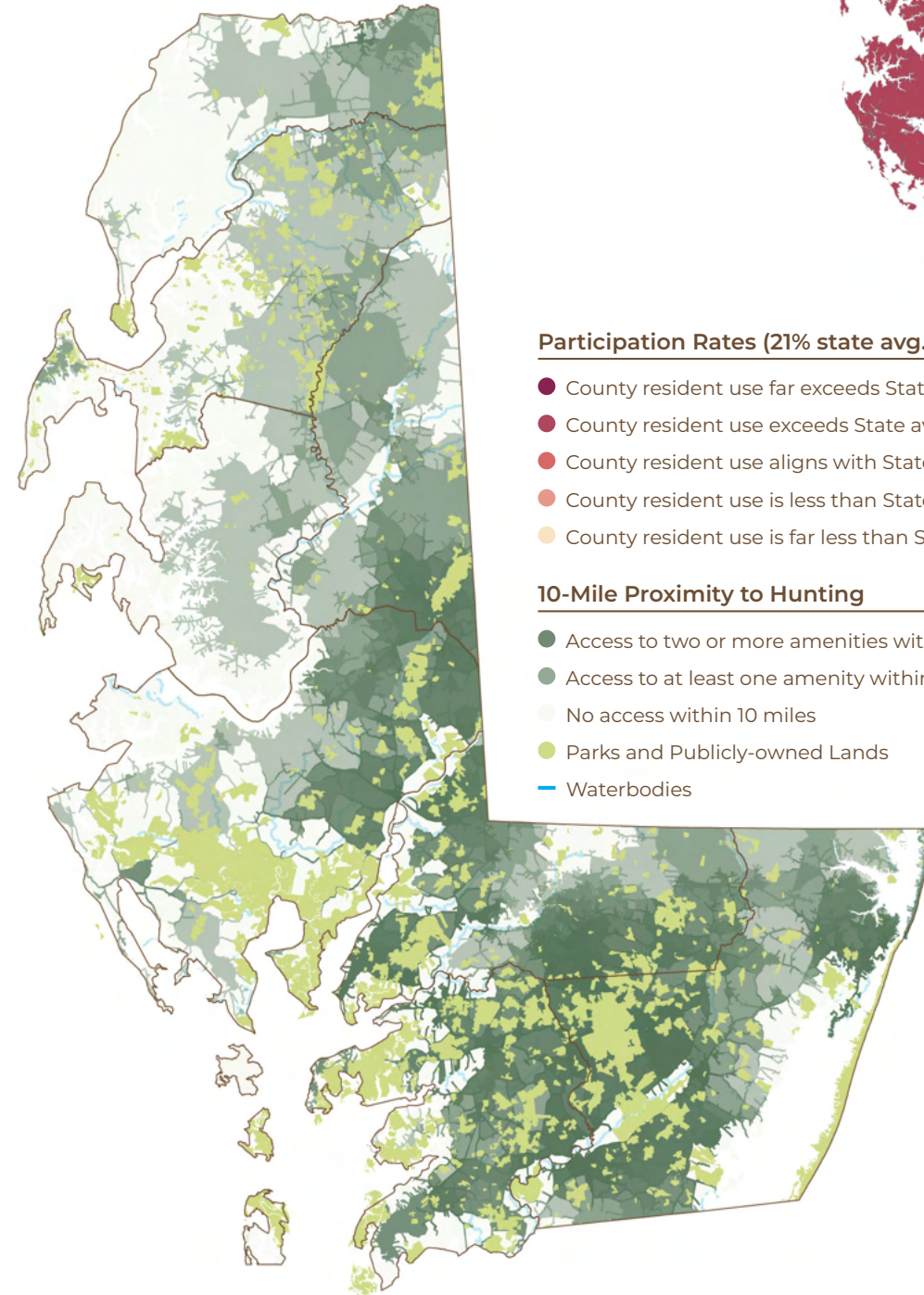
Participation in Hunting Activities

Hunting participation in the Eastern Region consistently exceeds the Statewide average of 21%. Somerset County more than doubles the State average. It is fair to assume that the Eastern Region is a popular place to live for hunting enthusiasts!



- Participation Rates (21% state avg.)**
- County resident use far exceeds State average
 - County resident use exceeds State average
 - County resident use aligns with State average
 - County resident use is less than State average
 - County resident use is far less than State average

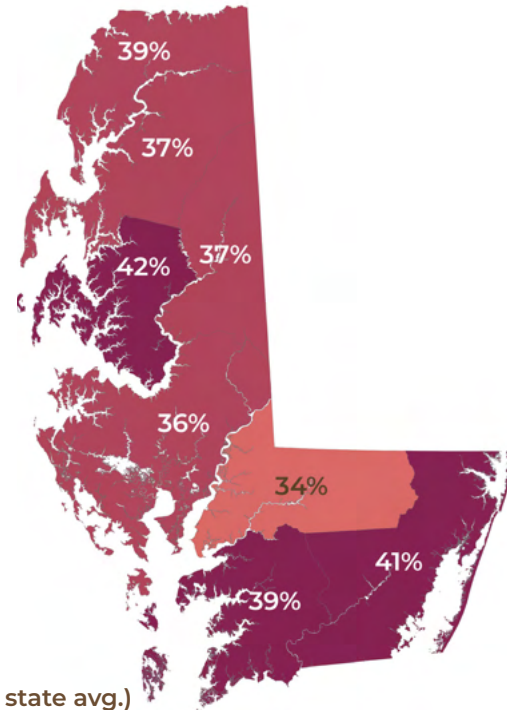
- 10-Mile Proximity to Hunting**
- Access to two or more amenities within 10 miles
 - Access to at least one amenity within 10 miles
 - No access within 10 miles
 - Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
 - Waterbodies



Eastern Region

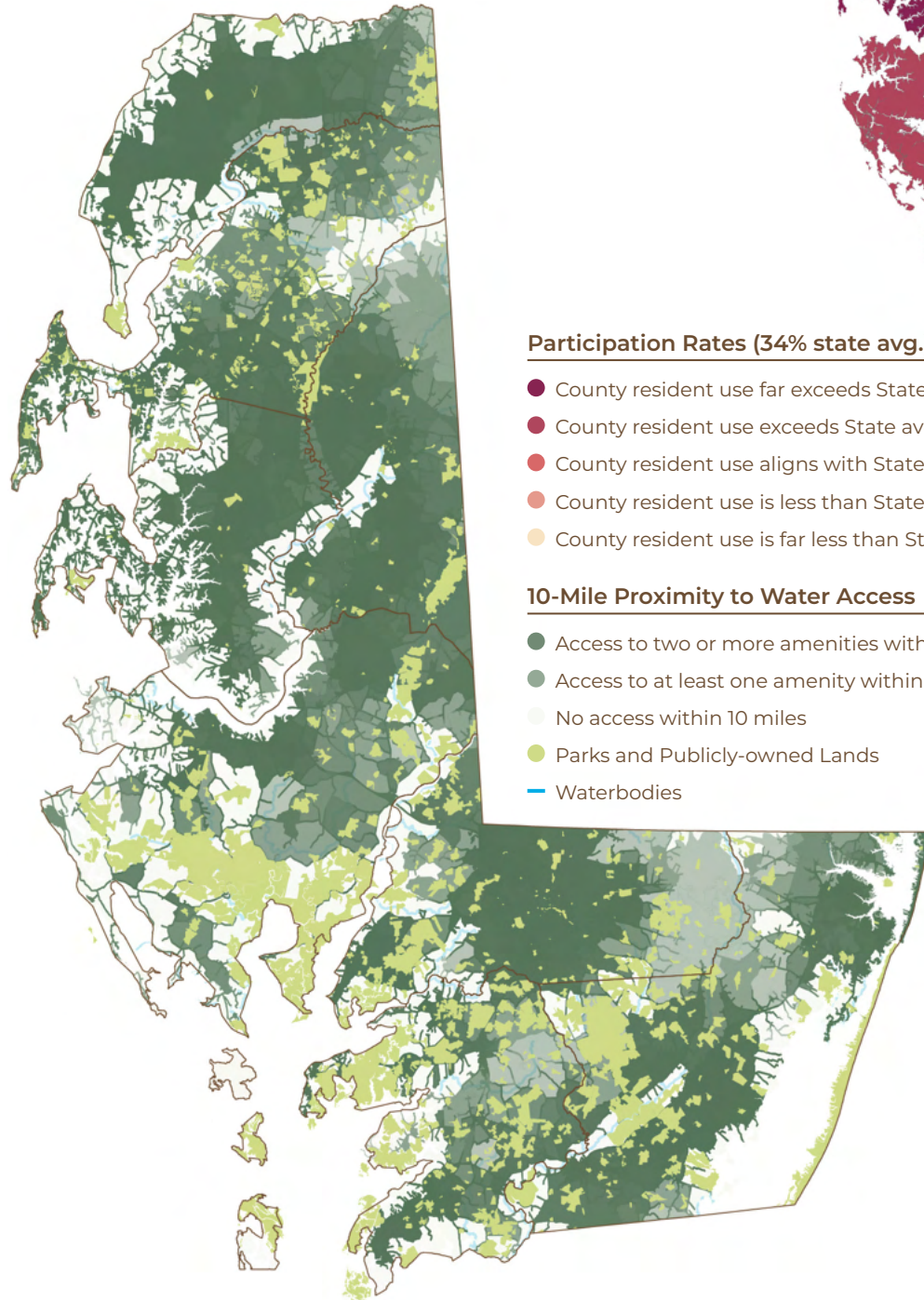
Participation in Water Activities

Statewide participation in water activities, like swimming, paddling, motorboat use, and sailing, is 34% and the Eastern Region consistently hosts higher rates of participation, especially in Talbot, Worcester, and Somerset Counties. Outdoor swimming opportunities at places like beaches and outdoor pools, were among the top five priorities for residents living within in the Eastern Region.



- Participation Rates (34% state avg.)**
- County resident use far exceeds State average
 - County resident use exceeds State average
 - County resident use aligns with State average
 - County resident use is less than State average
 - County resident use is far less than State average

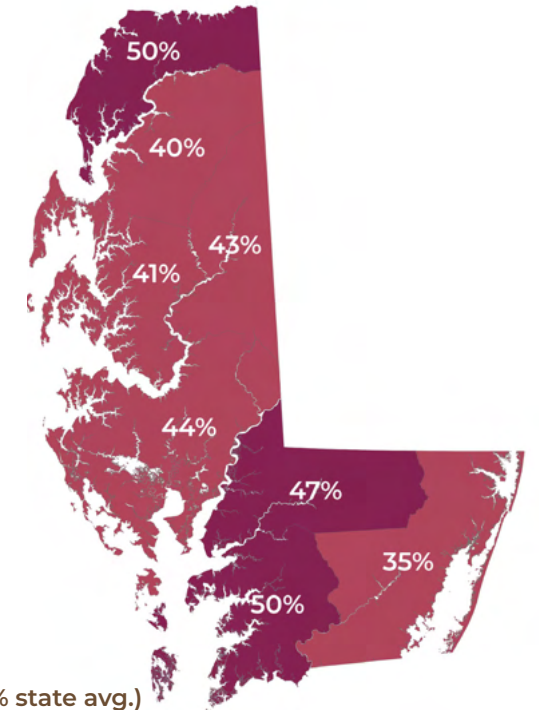
- 10-Mile Proximity to Water Access**
- Access to two or more amenities within 10 miles
 - Access to at least one amenity within 10 miles
 - No access within 10 miles
 - Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
 - Waterbodies



Eastern Region

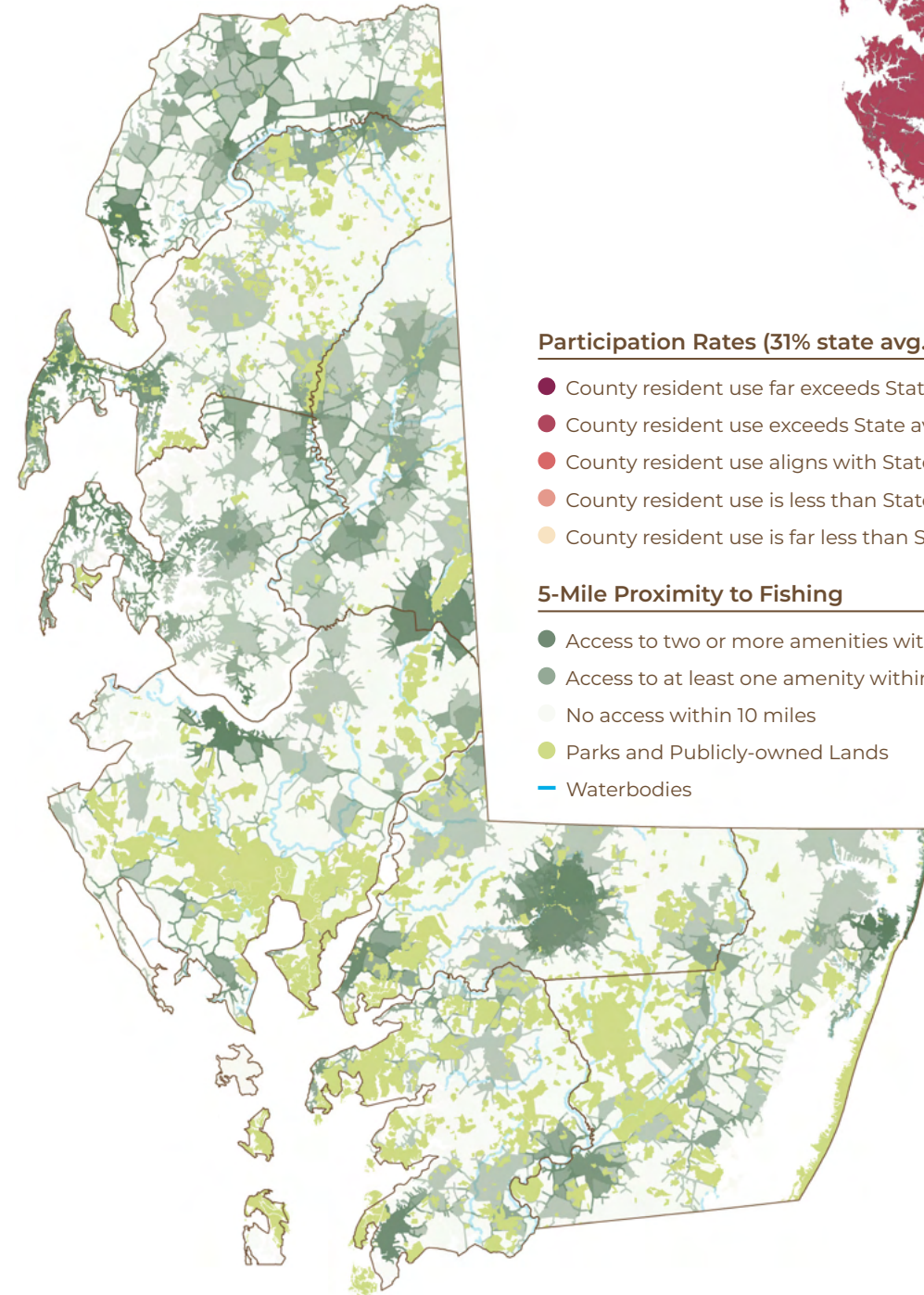
Participation in Fishing Activities

The Eastern Region far exceeds rates of participation across the State, with many counties in this region almost doubling the State average participation rate of 31%. Still, residents of this region would like to see more investments in fishing access.



- Participation Rates (31% state avg.)**
- County resident use far exceeds State average
 - County resident use exceeds State average
 - County resident use aligns with State average
 - County resident use is less than State average
 - County resident use is far less than State average

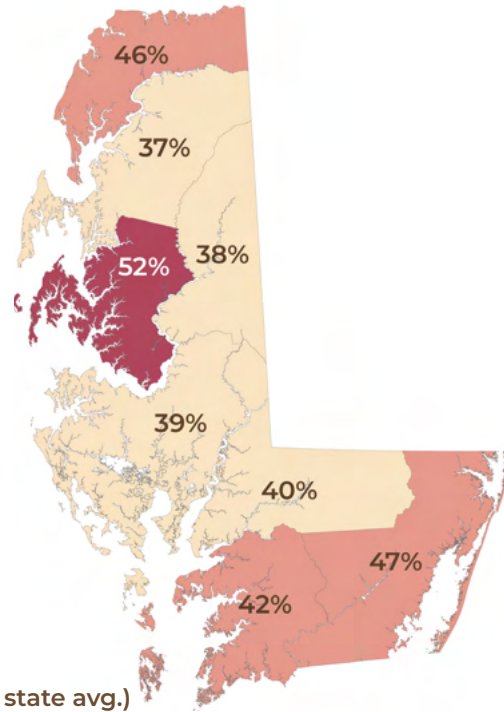
- 5-Mile Proximity to Fishing**
- Access to two or more amenities within 5 miles
 - Access to at least one amenity within 5 miles
 - No access within 10 miles
 - Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
 - Waterbodies



Eastern Region

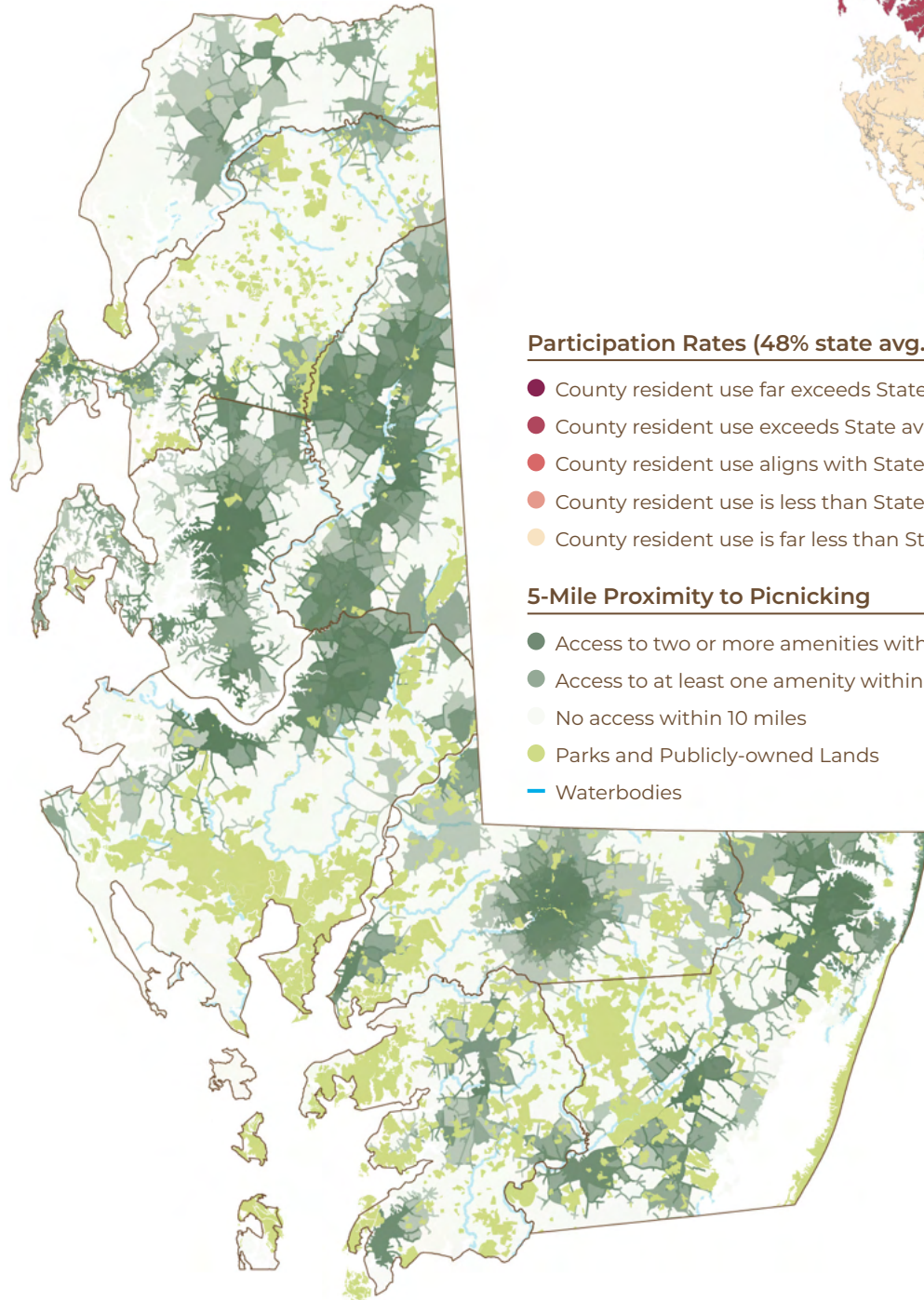
Participation in Picnicking Activities

Over 48% of Marylanders shared that they or members of their household participate in picnicking. In the Eastern Region, participation in picnicking was typically lower than the State average. The Eastern Region also hosts fewer places that support barbecues or family events. Talbot County is an exception, with over half of residents engaging in outdoor gatherings with family and friends, and according to the access map below, not many places that formally support those types of activities.



- Participation Rates (48% state avg.)**
- County resident use far exceeds State average
 - County resident use exceeds State average
 - County resident use aligns with State average
 - County resident use is less than State average
 - County resident use is far less than State average

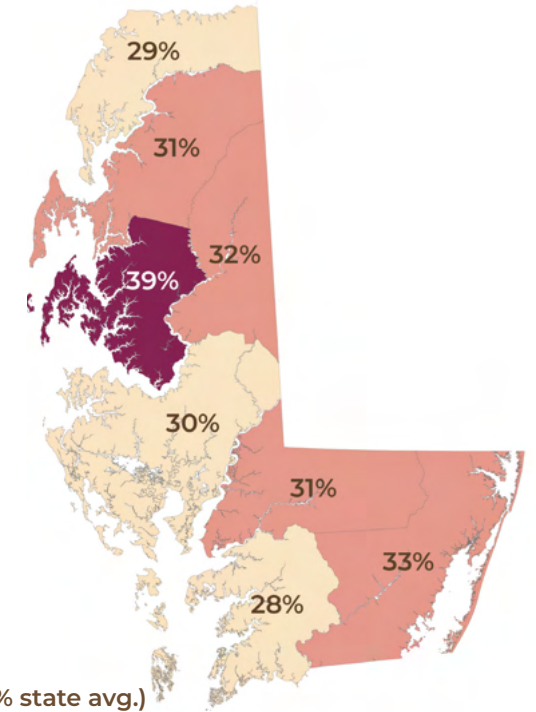
- 5-Mile Proximity to Picnicking**
- Access to two or more amenities within 5 miles
 - Access to at least one amenity within 5 miles
 - No access within 10 miles
 - Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
 - Waterbodies



Eastern Region

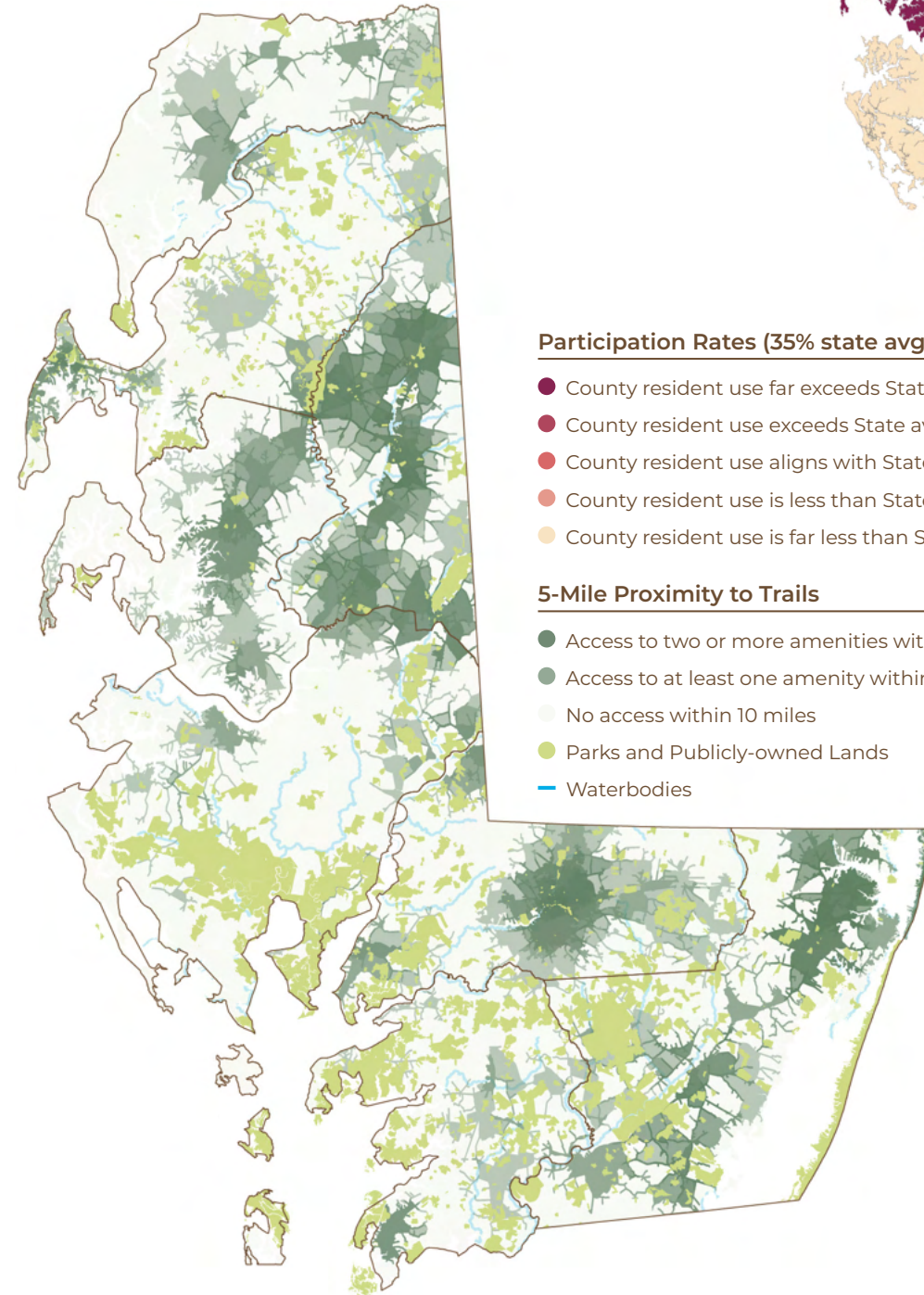
Participation in Trail Activities

The statewide average participation rate in trail use in 2024 was 35%. Within the Eastern Region, resident participation rates, according to the survey, were typically aligned or lower than the statewide average, though Talbot County is the only county in this region to exceed the state average. Similar to other regions, residents within the Eastern Region expressed a desire for more paved trails. Paved trails in this region ranked third in the list of priorities.



- Participation Rates (35% state avg.)**
- County resident use far exceeds State average
 - County resident use exceeds State average
 - County resident use aligns with State average
 - County resident use is less than State average
 - County resident use is far less than State average

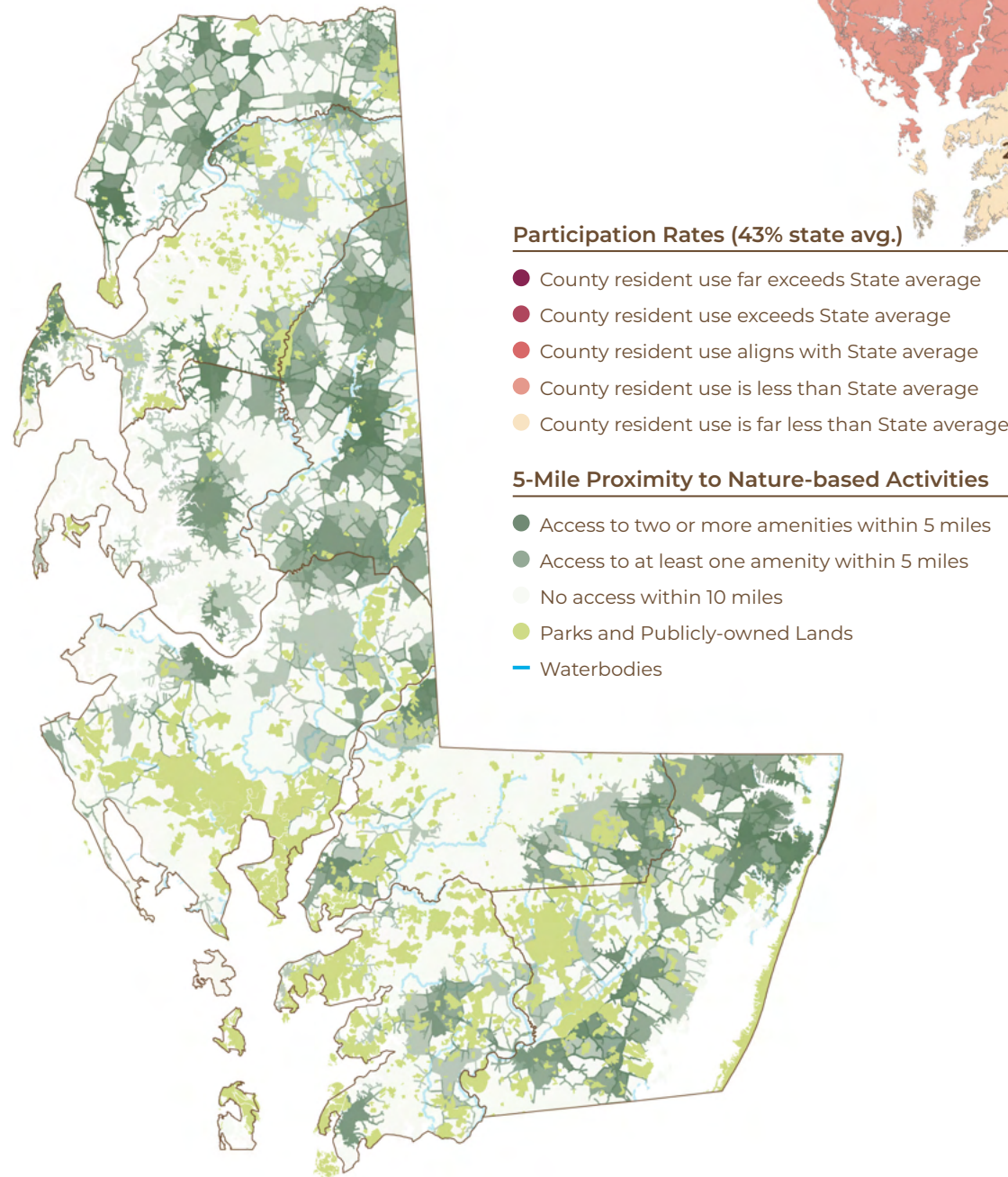
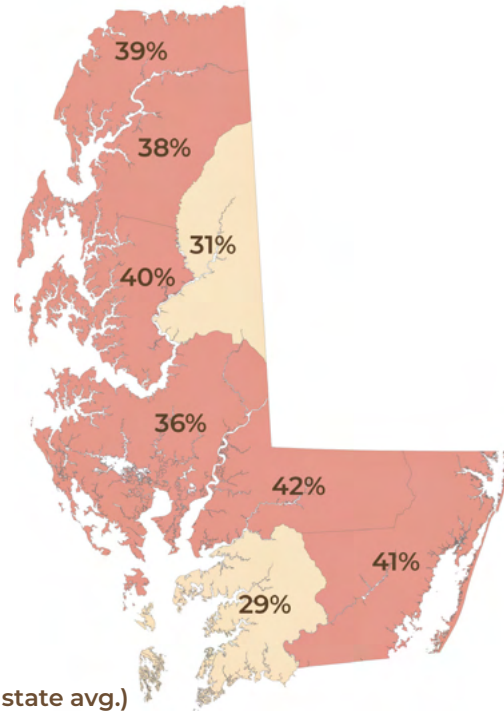
- 5-Mile Proximity to Trails**
- Access to two or more amenities within 5 miles
 - Access to at least one amenity within 5 miles
 - No access within 10 miles
 - Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
 - Waterbodies



Eastern Region

Participation in Nature-based Activities

Statewide participation in nature-based activities continues to grow statewide, jumping from about 30% in 2018 to 43% in 2024. Interest and participation in nature-based programs and activities was lower in the Eastern Region than the state average, and the counties with the least access to natural areas, like Wicomico County, still have access to many parks and open spaces that may not include the same amount of access to natural resources or nature-based activities as other areas in the state (see access map below), the parks in the region still provide ways to get outside for recreation. Somerset County and Caroline County also have the lowest participation rate compared to their neighboring counties and the state.



Eastern Region

Needs

FACILITY NEEDS:

Top 5 Needs:

1. Natural areas/open space
2. Hiking/Backpacking trails
3. Paved multi-use trails
4. Fishing access (marine, saltwater, freshwater, etc.)
5. Outdoor swimming opportunities (beaches, outdoor pools, etc.)

Other High Priority Needs:

- ▶ Shooting range (firearms/archery)
- ▶ Indoor recreation facilities (community centers, recreation centers, etc.)
- ▶ Water access for non-motorized watercraft (canoeing, kayaking, paddleboard, sailing, etc.)
- ▶ Historical sites/museums
- ▶ Non-motorized watercraft rental location (paddleboards, kayaks, canoes)

PROGRAM NEEDS:

Top 5 Needs:

1. Nature programs/environmental education
2. Festivals/Special events
3. Fishing programs (freshwater/saltwater)
4. Firearm safety training
5. Equipment rentals (kayak/canoe, bicycle, fishing)

Other High Priority Needs:

- ▶ Arts programming (visual and performance)
- ▶ Fitness classes (yoga, aerobics, etc)
- ▶ Guided hikes
- ▶ Historical reenactments and other historical programming
- ▶ Public lectures

OTHER PRIORITY NEEDS

Expand water access and water-trail connections

Provide more places for fishing, paddling, and small-boat access. Create water-trail links so users can move between sites without overloading a few launch points.

Develop a shoreline rail-trail and land trails

Convert or create trail corridors along the Eastern shoreline connected with inland routes. Continuous trails give people safe routes and help spread visitor use.

Cross-county coordination for trails and assets

Counties need to plan together so trails, parks, and water access connect across borders. Joint planning reduces gaps and makes larger regional projects possible.

Highlight agricultural and historic assets

Use the region's farm history and Harriet Tubman-era sites as interpretive anchors. Place based interpretation and routes that connect several historic state moments, that can draw users to less visited sites and highlight undertold histories.

Plan for shoreline change and shifting recreation

Account for shoreline erosion and changing use patterns in trail and access planning. Design water access points to be responsive to different tidal conditions and armor any major water access to withstand major storms and protect marsh edges where they buffer the coast.

Address funding and system maintenance

The region needs sustainable funding to acquire, develop, and maintain trails, launch sites, and amenities. Reliable funding keeps sites safe and usable over time.

Improve public information and outreach

Many residents and visitors don't know about existing sites beyond well-known destinations. Better maps, signage, and simple outreach will connect new users to more places and reduce crowding.

Protected Lands

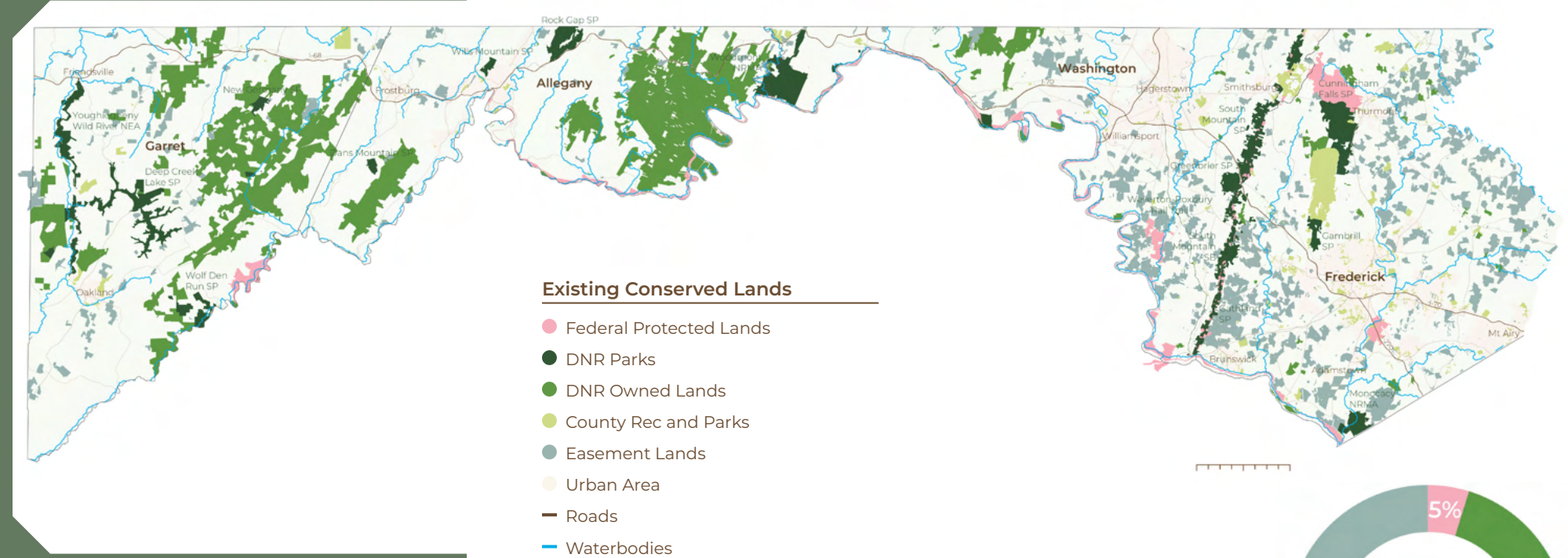
Western Region

The Western Region sits in Maryland's mountains and highlands. It comprises Washington, Allegany, Garrett, and Frederick counties. Ridges, valleys, headwater streams, and forested plateaus shape the landscape.

The region covers about 1.7 million acres and is sparsely populated. Its population is roughly 531,849 (2023). Small towns and rural communities are concentrated in valley floors and along river corridors.

About 0.51 million acres, or roughly 30.1% of the region, are protected.

Major protected land types in the Western Region include State forests, wildlife management areas, state parks, and conservation easements. Notable public sites and holdings include Deep Creek Lake State Park and the South Mountain State Park and Green Ridge State Forest complex. County land-preservation programs also contribute much of the easement land in Washington, and Frederick counties.



1.7M acres

Land Area

531,849

Population (2023)

0.51M acres

Protected Area

30.1%

Protected Lands Coverage



Wolf Den Run State Park

Western Region

Participation in Camping Activities

Participation in cabin use, RV camping, glamping, and tent camping, hovered around 20% Statewide in the 2024 community survey. Except for Garrett County, with less camping participation than the Statewide average, the Western Region has higher levels of participation and an abundance of camping options within the region, especially within the Appalachian Mountain range along Maryland's narrowest stretch of land.

Participation Rates (20% statewide average)

- County resident use far exceeds State average
- County resident use exceeds State average
- County resident use aligns with State average
- County resident use is less than State average
- County resident use is far less than State average



10-Mile Proximity to Camping

- Access to two or more amenities within 10 miles
- Access to at least one amenity within 10 miles
- No access within 10 miles
- Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
- Waterbodies



Western Region

Participation in Hunting Activities

Hunting participation in the Western region is generally aligned with the State average of 20%, based on the community survey. Garrett County has participation rates that are more than double the State average, and Allegany also has a significant participation rate. These participation rates appear to be supported by public lands that support hunting within a five-mile driving distance.

Participation Rates (21% statewide average)

- County resident use far exceeds State average
- County resident use exceeds State average
- County resident use aligns with State average
- County resident use is less than State average
- County resident use is far less than State average



10-Mile Proximity to Hunting

- Access to two or more amenities within 10 miles
- Access to at least one amenity within 10 miles
- No access within 10 miles
- Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
- Waterbodies



Western Region

Participation in Water Activities

Statewide participation in activities that require water access, like swimming, paddling, motorboat use, and sailing vary from activity to activity and region to region. While Statewide participation in water activities is 34%, the Western Region has varied rates of participation. Garrett County residents identified high levels of participation in water-based activities, while Washington and Frederick County reported less participation, which is surprising considering the number and accessibility of water access points in the State, including local and State parks.

Participation Rates (34% statewide average)

- County resident use far exceeds State average
- County resident use exceeds State average
- County resident use aligns with State average
- County resident use is less than State average
- County resident use is far less than State average



10-Mile Proximity to Water Access

- Access to two or more amenities within 10 miles
- Access to at least one amenity within 10 miles
- No access within 10 miles
- Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
- Waterbodies



Western Region

Participation in Fishing Activities

According to the community survey, Statewide participation in fishing is 31%, and with the exception of Frederick County, the counties in the Western Region are generally aligned in regard to their participation rates. Residents of the Western Region communicated through the survey a desire for more equipment rentals for items like fishing equipment, signaling a desire for more fishing opportunities among residents who have limited access or resources to fish today.

Participation Rates (31% statewide average)

- County resident use far exceeds State average
- County resident use exceeds State average
- County resident use aligns with State average
- County resident use is less than State average
- County resident use is far less than State average



5-Mile Proximity to Fishing

- Access to two or more amenities within 5 miles
- Access to at least one amenity within 5 miles
- No access within 10 miles
- Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
- Waterbodies



Western Region

Participation in Picnicking Activities

According to the community survey, 48% of Marylanders shared that they or members of their household participate in picnicking. The Western Region boasts some of the highest participation rates in picnicking across the State, especially in the State's two Westernmost counties, where formal picnic amenities are more sparsely distributed than in counties that are more densely populated and have more options for spaces to gather for a barbecue or family gathering.

Participation Rates (48% statewide average)

- County resident use far exceeds State average
- County resident use exceeds State average
- County resident use aligns with State average
- County resident use is less than State average
- County resident use is far less than State average



5-Mile Proximity to Picnicking

- Access to two or more amenities within 5 miles
- Access to at least one amenity within 5 miles
- No access within 10 miles
- Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
- Waterbodies



Western Region

Participation in Trail Activities

The Western Region boasts some of the State's more challenging and complex trail networks and residents within this region appear to enjoy them! The Statewide average participation rate in trail use in 2024 was 35%, while Garrett, Allegany, and Frederick County residents who took the community survey shared that they use trails for hiking, biking, horse riding, and snowshoeing more than their neighbors.

Participation Rates (35% statewide average)

- County resident use far exceeds State average
- County resident use exceeds State average
- County resident use aligns with State average
- County resident use is less than State average
- County resident use is far less than State average



5-Mile Proximity to Trails

- Access to two or more amenities within 5 miles
- Access to at least one amenity within 5 miles
- No access within 10 miles
- Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
- Waterbodies



Western Region

Participation in Nature-based Activities

Statewide participation in nature-based activities continues to grow Statewide, jumping from about 30% in 2018 to 43% in 2024. Interest and participation in nature-based programs and activities was lower in the Western Region than the State average, except for in Frederick County.

Participation Rates (43% statewide average)

- County resident use far exceeds State average
- County resident use exceeds State average
- County resident use aligns with State average
- County resident use is less than State average
- County resident use is far less than State average



5-Mile Proximity to Picnicking

- Access to two or more amenities within 5 miles
- Access to at least one amenity within 5 miles
- No access within 10 miles
- Parks and Publicly-owned Lands
- Waterbodies



Western Region

Needs

FACILITY NEEDS:

Top 5 Needs:

1. Natural areas/open space
2. Hiking/backpacking trails
3. Paved multi-use trails
4. Outdoor swimming opportunities (beaches, outdoor pools, etc.)
5. Water access for non-motorized watercraft (canoeing, kayaking, paddleboard, sailing, etc.)

Other High Priority Needs:

- ▶ Indoor recreation facilities (community centers, recreation centers, etc.)
- ▶ Historical sites/museums
- ▶ Shooting range (firearms/archery)
- ▶ Fishing access (marine, saltwater, freshwater, etc.)
- ▶ Bird watching/wildlife viewing areas

PROGRAM NEEDS:

Top 5 Needs:

1. Nature programs/environmental education
2. Festivals/Special events
3. Equipment rentals (kayak/canoe, bicycle, fishing)
4. Fishing programs (freshwater/saltwater)
5. Arts programming (visual and performance)

Other High Priority Needs:

- ▶ Firearm safety training
- ▶ Guided hikes
- ▶ Fitness classes (yoga, aerobics, etc)
- ▶ Public lectures
- ▶ Historical reenactments and other historical programming

OTHER PRIORITY NEEDS

Coordinate across landowners

Land is owned and managed by many different entities. The region needs coordinated planning so rules, stewardship, and access work across public and private holdings.

Build trail connections across protected acres

Many protected lands are not linked for walking and riding. Create trail connections that cross ownership boundaries so users can move between sites and so corridors function for wildlife.

Protect natural features and scenic views

Ridges, valleys, and forested plateaus give the region its character. Maintain those natural features and viewsheds so the landscape and visitor experience stay intact.

Grow a clear outdoor recreation identity

Towns and counties already have outdoor recreational strengths. Strengthen that identity with coordinated programming and partnerships so residents and visitors recognize the region as an outdoor destination.

Support winter recreation in a changing climate

Winter sports and seasonal uses face changing conditions. Plan for flexible recreation options and infrastructure that can adjust as winters warm.

Reduce gaps in access across counties

Outdoor opportunities differ between counties, for example Allegany County, including limited access to picnicking and water access experiences. Target investments so more places offer similar access and recreation choices aligned with facility and program needs for residents.

V.

Implementing the Vision

Outlining a Roadmap for Collaborative Implementation

This chapter provides a roadmap for implementation. It begins with an overview of funding strategies, along with funding resources to support implementation. It also includes implementation matrices for each principle that outline responsible parties and partners for implementing the plan's recommendations. Continuing to expand and improve Maryland's parks, recreation, and protected lands will require expanded collaboration across boundaries and levels of government. Together, we can create a greener, healthier Maryland for our communities and our ecosystems.

Achieving 40% protected land, while continuing to steward existing parks and protected lands, will require a team effort, along with creativity and new funding strategies.

DNR and Other State Agencies	Land Trusts	Local Residents
	Development Community	Local Jurisdictions
Local Businesses	Counties	Nonprofits and Community Organizations
Utility Providers		

Implementing the Vision

Funding Strategies

Stabilize, expand, and diversify funding for parks, recreation, and open space.

EXISTING STRENGTHS

- ▶ Passage of Great Maryland Outdoors Act (GMOA)
- ▶ Strength of local parks funding
- ▶ Non-profit and community support for recreation and natural resource conservation

EMERGING CHALLENGES

- ▶ Limitations in State funding
- ▶ Federal funding unpredictability
- ▶ Program Open Space fund variability
- ▶ Limited diversity of funding mechanisms for capital improvements, staffing, and land acquisition
- ▶ Redistribution of state funding from park and recreation needs to other state needs, especially during periods of budget deficits

STRATEGIES

The State and Partners should continue to...

- ▶ Use the revenue case studies and recommendations of the Maryland State Parks System Study to advocate for additional funding streams, including a recreation gear sales tax, public-private and non-profit park partnerships, additional bonds, and fee increases.
- ▶ Partner with advocacy groups who can lobby to protect and dedicate future funding mechanisms to public land preservation.
- ▶ Communicate the economic impact of State and local parks systems as a whole and as individual parks within communities. Demonstrate the positive effects they have on local businesses, tourism, and ecosystem services.

New or expanded actions for the State and partners...

- ▶ Evaluate and increase fees for services to provide additional financial support for sustaining and growing staff and maintenance levels. Implement market-based fee structure for all retail operations, hospitality, and recreational activities.

- ▶ Use dedicated funding sources and special funds for the purposes in statute. Consider repayment of any transfer tax diversions for future public land preservation efforts.
- ▶ Using the Maryland State Parks System Study budget review as a guide, ensure future budget allocations support sustainable operations of existing parks while also increasing funding to support the growth of the system.
- ▶ In alignment with the Maryland Parks System Study, establish a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting Maryland's parks and preserved lands, including, for example, State Parks, multi-use trails, and State-owned recreational areas. Leverage the nonprofit to facilitate collaboration, increase private funding support, and resource sharing.
- ▶ Develop business plans for State Parks with high visitation or revenue generating uses. Business plans should address topics like: financial analysis, revenue / funding plan, operations and staffing plan, resource protection and restoration plan (natural and cultural), land acquisition needs plan (if relevant), and programming and interpretation plan.

STRATEGY HIGHLIGHT

Funding Sources and Grants

DNR and other partners offer a variety of funding support, tax credits, and grants to support land preservation, healthy ecosystems, new park development, and park improvements. Here are some of them:

Healthy Waterways and Watersheds

[Waterways Restoration Grants Gateway](#)

To assist Maryland's communities, the Grants Gateway provides a single point of entry for organizations seeking technical and financial assistance to restore local waterways, increase their resilience to climate impacts, strengthen local economies, and to develop the next generation of environmental stewards. Grants are made possible with funding through the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Trust Fund, the Coastal Resiliency Program, the Waterway Improvement Fund, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Environmental Protection Agency's Chesapeake Bay Program (administered by DNR's Watershed and Climate Services)

[Nutrient and Sediment Reduction Innovative Technology Fund](#)

In partnership with the University of Maryland's Maryland Industrial Partnership Program (MIPS), the State funds research and development projects focused on developing technologies that reduce nutrient and sediment pollution in the Chesapeake Bay. (administered by DNR's Watershed and Climate Services)

[Shore Erosion Control](#)

Provides assistance to waterfront property owners in resolving shoreline and streambank erosion problems. Provides technical and financial assistance for design and installation of shoreline stabilization and streambank restoration projects. (administered by DNR's Watershed and Climate Services)

[Watershed Assistance Grant Program](#)

In partnership with the Chesapeake Bay Trust, the State offers planning and design grants and technical assistance through the Watershed Assistance Grant Program to meet the needs of local governments and communities preparing to undertake a comprehensive restoration effort. (administered by DNR's Watershed and Climate Services)

Preserving Forests and Growing Tree Canopy

[Maryland Urban and Community Forestry Committee Grants Program](#)

Funds for tree planting and education projects Statewide to enhance Maryland's urban forest (administered by Maryland Forest Service)

[Forest Conservation Program](#)

Minimizes the loss of Maryland's forest resources during land development through the identification and protection of forests and other sensitive areas and creation of private property forest management plans. (administered by Maryland Forest Service)

[Forest Legacy Program](#)

A federal program run in partnership with States that provides up to 75% federal cost-share for the purchase of conservation easements to protect forest land. (administered by Maryland Forest Service)

[Income Tax Modification for Reforestation and Timber Stand Improvement](#)

Provides a modification to personal income taxes for initiating forest management practices, such as timber stand improvement and reforestation. (administered by Maryland Forest Service)

[Cost Share Programs](#)

Cost share programs administered by Maryland Forest Service available to private landowners include:

- [Environmental Quality Incentive Program \(EQIP\)](#)
- [Woodland Incentive Program \(WIP\)](#)
- [Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program](#)
- [Glatfelter Pulpwood Company.](#)

Land Acquisition and Planning

[Community Parks and Playgrounds](#)

Flexible grants to local governments to respond to the unmet need for assistance in projects to benefit existing parks or create new ones.

[Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund](#)

Matching fund assistance to local governments to acquire and/or develop public outdoor recreational areas and facilities.

[Program Open Space](#)

Financial and technical assistance to local governments for the planning, acquisition, and/or development of recreation land or open space areas.

Rural Legacy Program

Funding to preserve large, contiguous tracts of land and to enhance natural resource, agricultural, forestry and environmental protection while supporting a sustainable land base for natural resource based industries.

Greenspace Equity Program

The Greenspace Equity Program was established in 2023 through legislation (Chapter 487 of 2023) to provide grants to eligible applicants for enhancing the public health and livability of overburdened and underserved communities by implementing projects to preserve, create, and improve public greenspace in overburdened and underserved communities. Funding for the program is authorized to come from the state share of Program Open Space subject to annual budget actions.

Maryland Environmental Trust

Conservation Easement Program

Conservation Property Tax Credit - Encourages donation of conservation easements and gives participating landowners a 15-year property tax credit on unimproved land under easement to the Maryland Environmental Trust.

State Income Tax Credit - Encourages donation of conservation easements and gives landowners a State income tax credit in return for the donation of easement to the Maryland Environmental Trust or the Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation.

Keep Maryland Beautiful Grants

Grants through the Keep Maryland Beautiful program help volunteer-based, nonprofit groups, communities and land trusts in Maryland to support environmental education and stewardship projects, litter removal and to protect natural resources in urban and rural areas. These grants include the Community Stewardship grant, Capacity Building for Land Trusts grant and Tree Planting on Agricultural Lands grant.

Land Trust Capacity, Excellence and Stewardship Grants

These grants are intended to increase land trust capacity, support programming and innovation and foster stronger, better connected land trusts that will protect all natural resources and enhance the lives

of Maryland citizens and generations to come. These grants are available to local land trusts in Maryland and include the [Aileen Hughes Grant](#) and the [Janice Hollmann Grant](#).

Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF)

The MALPF purchases agricultural preservation easements that forever restrict development on prime farmland and woodland and has permanently preserved land in each of Maryland's 23 counties.

Sources:

<https://dnr.maryland.gov/ccs/pages/funding/fundingopp.aspx>

<https://dnr.maryland.gov/pages/grantsandloans.aspx>

STRATEGY HIGHLIGHT

Maryland Department of Transportation announces \$8.2 million in funding to expand safe bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure across Maryland

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) announced the award of 26 grants totaling \$8.2 million for 25 bicycle, pedestrian and trail projects across the State. These investments will help State and local partners improve safety, enhance sustainability and boost economic development. The funding reflects MDOT's commitment to creating a more connected and accessible transportation system for all Marylanders.

The Transportation Alternatives Program and Recreational Trails Program are federally funded grant programs for community projects designed to support bike and pedestrian infrastructure. The Maryland State Highway Administration solicited applications for both programs and worked with regional committees and Metropolitan Planning Organizations to review and select projects. This year's awards include \$450,000 through the Recreational Trails Program to four projects, and \$5.8 million through the Transportation Alternatives Program to 10 projects.

With the vision and guiding principles defining Maryland's collective direction, and the goals and actions outlining the steps needed to realize that vision, this plan provides a clear path forward for decision-making and investment. Through committed leadership, collaboration, and a strong framework for implementation, the plan serves as both a roadmap and an invitation to champion the values of stewardship, access, and connection that will shape the future of protected lands across the state.



Franklin Point State Park

Wetlands Priority Component

The Maryland Department of Natural Resource's [Habitat Connectivity Network](#) includes high value wetland areas that should be considered for conservation action based on their:

- ▶ Size of contiguous habitat (minimum of 50 acres)
- ▶ Wildlife and rare species habitat value
- ▶ Importance for protecting water quality and maintaining biodiversity
- ▶ Role in supporting tidal fisheries production
- ▶ Protection of coastal and floodplain areas from flooding associated with extreme storm events and rising sea level
- ▶ Value in facilitating adaptation to a changing climate and rising sea level through wetland migration

The Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986 provides for the use of Land and Water Conservation Funds for the acquisition of wetlands, provided that the State

Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (this plan) contains or references a wetland priority component. At a minimum, the wetland priority component must meet the following four criteria:

1. Be consistent with the [National Wetlands Priority Conservation Plan](#), prepared by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The primary purpose of the National Wetlands Priority Conservation Plan is to assist decision makers in focusing their acquisition efforts on the most important, scarce, and vulnerable wetlands in the nation. The Habitat Connectivity Network identifies large intact wetland areas that provide an exceptionally high degree of public benefit based on rarity, biodiversity support, and maintenance of water quality, protection from flooding, coastal storm surge and sea level rise, and provision of passive outdoor recreational uses such as hiking, paddling and birding.

2. Provide evidence of consultation with the state agency responsible for fish and wildlife resources

The Department of Natural Resources is the agency responsible for Maryland's fish and wildlife resources. Identification of the Habitat Connectivity Network and related priority conservation areas like the Targeted Ecological Areas relies heavily on the wetland assessment and prioritization efforts that are described in the [2015 Maryland State Wildlife Action Plan](#). The plan outlines strategic conservation approaches for wildlife and wildlife habitats and is required by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a condition for the continuation of State Wildlife Grant funding. Wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need and their key wildlife habitats, many of which are wetland habitats, are identified as a strategic conservation priority.

3. Contain a listing of those wetland types which should receive priority for the conservation of fish and wildlife resources

The following table identifies the acreage of all wetlands identified as a conservation priority for fish and wildlife resources through inclusion in the Habitat Connectivity Network. The table below is organized by wetland type which follows the National Wetland Inventory[1] classification system of wetland habitats at the system level. Wetland types relevant to land conservation include 1) Estuarine wetlands, which are the salt and brackish marshes and tidally connected forested wetlands, and, 2) Palustrine wetlands, which are freshwater wetlands that are often characterized by the type of vegetation they support (forested, scrub shrub, and emergent). Seventy eight percent (78%) of the freshwater wetlands (palustrine) and seventy nine percent (79%) of tidal wetlands (estuarine) in Maryland have been identified as being part of the Habitat Conservation Network. This is a large difference from the estuarine wetlands contained in the Targeted Ecological Areas (TEAs) because the TEAs did not include areas below 2 feet of elevation, with the rationale that those areas are likely to be submerged as sea level rises. However, a case can be made that conservation of low lying coastal wetlands

and areas adjacent to wetlands is going to be necessary to allow wetlands to transition into adjacent uplands as sea level rises. Coastal wetlands have been found to provide the highest per acre ecosystem service value of any Maryland ecosystem[2], so conservation today and helping to ensure they will persist into the future can provide a high return on investment for the state.

	Wetland Type	
	Estuarine	Palustrine
Acres Statewide	200,659	537,403
% Acres within Habitat Connectivity Network (HCN)	79%	78%
%HCN Wetland Acres Protected	54%	38%
% Wetland Acres Protected Statewide	50%	36%

Data source: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. (2024). National Wetlands Inventory. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. <https://data.nal.usda.gov/dataset/national-wetlands-inventory>. Accessed [February 2026]

4. Consider outdoor recreation opportunities associated with its wetland resources for meeting the State's public outdoor recreation needs

Every property considered for acquisition by the Department of Natural Resources must undergo an internal stewardship review. The opportunity for public access and the provision of outdoor recreational experiences are two factors considered in the stewardship review. The presence of high-quality wetlands is rated highly because they support superb opportunities for wildlife and bird viewing.

[1] Tiner, R.W., and D.G. Burke. 1995. Wetlands of Maryland. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ecological Services, Region 5, Hadley, MA and Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Annapolis, MD. Cooperative publication. 193 pp. plus. Appendices

[2] Campbell, Elliott, Rachel Marks, Christine Conn, Spatial modeling of the biophysical and economic values of ecosystem services in Maryland, USA, Ecosystem Services, Volume 43, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecoser.2020.101093>

