

SUBTITLE 9A. RURAL LEGACY PROGRAM.

5-9A-01.

(A) THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY DECLARES THAT:

(1) SPRAWL DEVELOPMENT AND OTHER MODIFICATIONS TO THE LANDSCAPE IN MARYLAND CONTINUE AT AN ALARMING RATE, CONSUMING LAND RICH IN NATURAL RESOURCE AND, AGRICULTURAL, AND FORESTRY VALUE, ADVERSELY AFFECTING WATER QUALITY, WETLANDS AND HABITAT, THREATENING RESOURCE-BASED ECONOMIES AND CULTURAL ASSETS, AND RENDING THE FABRIC OF RURAL LIFE;

(2) CURRENT STATE, COUNTY, AND LOCAL LAND CONSERVATION PROGRAMS HELP TO LIMIT THE EFFECT OF SPRAWL DEVELOPMENT BUT LACK SUFFICIENT FUNDING AND FOCUS TO PRESERVE KEY AREAS BEFORE ESCALATING LAND VALUES MAKE THEIR PROTECTION IMPOSSIBLE OR THE LAND IS LOST TO DEVELOPMENT; AND

(3) A GRANT PROGRAM THAT LEVERAGES AVAILABLE FUNDING, FOCUSES ON PRESERVATION OF STRATEGIC RESOURCES, INCLUDING THOSE RESOURCES THREATENED BY SPRAWL DEVELOPMENT, STREAMLINES REAL PROPERTY ACQUISITION PROCEDURES TO EXPEDITE LAND PRESERVATION, AND PROMOTES A GREATER LEVEL OF NATURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES PROTECTION THAN IS PROVIDED BY EXISTING EFFORTS, ~~WHILE MAINTAINING THE VIABILITY OF RESOURCE-BASED LAND USAGE AND PROPER MANAGEMENT OF TILLABLE AND WOODED AREAS~~, WILL ESTABLISH A RURAL LEGACY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

(B) (1) A RURAL LEGACY PROGRAM IS ESTABLISHED TO ENHANCE NATURAL RESOURCE, AGRICULTURAL, FORESTRY, AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AS PROVIDED IN SUBSECTION (A) OF THIS SECTION ~~BY PROVIDING, WHILE MAINTAINING THE VIABILITY OF RESOURCE-BASED LAND USAGE AND PROPER MANAGEMENT OF TILLABLE AND WOODED AREAS THROUGH ACCEPTED AGRICULTURAL AND SILVICULTURAL PRACTICES FOR FARM PRODUCTION AND TIMBER HARVESTS.~~

(2) THE PROGRAM PROVIDES FUNDS TO THE ~~STATE~~, LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND LAND TRUSTS TO PURCHASE INTERESTS IN REAL PROPERTY FROM WILLING SELLERS, INCLUDING EASEMENTS AND FEE ESTATES, FOCUSED IN DESIGNATED RURAL LEGACY AREAS.

(2) (3) THE PROGRAM SHALL ~~CREATE~~ ENCOURAGE PARTNERSHIPS AMONG THE FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, AND NONPROFIT LAND TRUST ORGANIZATIONS AND ENCOURAGE ~~LOCAL~~ LAND CONSERVATION INITIATIVES.

(3) (4) THE PROGRAM IS ADMINISTERED BY A RURAL LEGACY BOARD IN THE DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, AN ADVISORY COMMITTEE, AND EXISTING STATE STAFF.