



Maryland DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING

November 26th, 2024

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Chair, Education, Energy, and Environment
Committee
Senate of Maryland
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Marc Korman
Chair, Environment and Transportation
Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
251 Taylor House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: 2024 Maryland the Beautiful Report (MSAR #14860)

I am enclosing a copy of the 2024 Maryland the Beautiful Annual Report (MSAR #14860). This report highlights the actions taken and progress made towards the state's ambitious land conservation goals established by SB 470 – the Maryland the Beautiful Act – of the 2023 Regular Session.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Flora, AICP, LEED ND / BD+C
Secretary

CC: Sarah Albert, Department of Legislative Services
Encl: Five copies 2024 Maryland the Beautiful Annual Report



MARYLAND
the **BEAUTIFUL**

Sustainable Growth Subcabinet Annual Report 2024

Introduction

The Maryland the Beautiful Act ([CH546](#)), which was enacted in 2023 in recognition of the multiple benefits derived from protected lands throughout the state, established ambitious land conservation goals including to conserve 30% of the state's land by 2030 (30 by 30) and conserve 40% of the state's land by 2040 (40 by 40). Through the combined efforts of state agencies, local governments, the federal government, and nonprofit land trusts, the first goal to conserve 30% of Maryland land was achieved in 2024, in advance of the 2030 goal year.

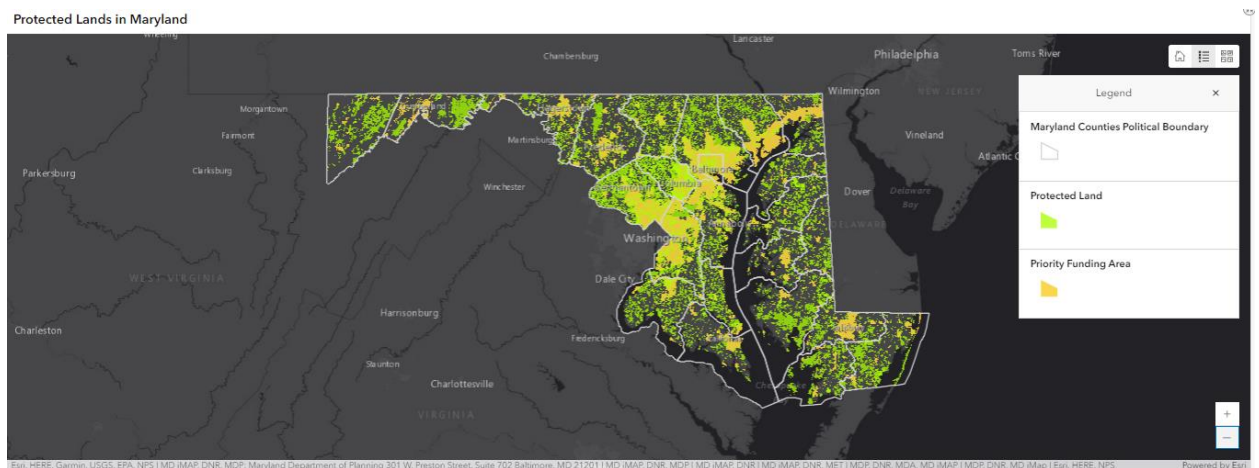
The Maryland the Beautiful Act requires the Sustainable Growth Subcabinet provide an annual report on the state's progress on or before December 1 of each year. This report provides an update on acres conserved and highlights key actions taken.

Future annual reports, along with future five year updates to this plan, will provide more information on ongoing initiatives, funding, statistics, updated projections, and additional actions to meet the 40% goal by 2040.

Progress to Date

Update on Acres Conserved

Maryland state agencies use the [Maryland Protected Lands Dashboard](#) to track progress towards each state-level land preservation goal. The Maryland Department of Planning (MDP), Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Maryland Environmental Trust (MET), and Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) work collaboratively to collect data from various sources (federal, state, local, and nongovernmental organizations) and MDP updates the dashboard quarterly. The number of acres protected are also reported as part of the agencies' annual Managing for Results (MFR) submissions.



Data collected that are counted towards the state conservation goals include the following land preservation categories:

- MET easements
- Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) easements
- Local Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) and Transferable Development Rights (TDR) easements
- Local cluster subdivision remainders
- Private conservation organizations, such as local land trusts
- Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO)
- Rural Legacy easements

- Federal program easements, such as Forest Legacy or Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)
- Program Open Space (POS) state-side easements
- Local recreation facilities and parks, including those funded with POS local-side
- DNR state lands
- Federal parks and conservation properties

According to the Maryland Protected Lands Dashboard, 1,871,462 acres have been protected in Maryland as of the end of FY24.¹

There are 6,189,629 land acres in Maryland. Therefore, Maryland has conserved 30.23% of its land as of FY24. The goal of 30% conserved land in advance of 2030 was met at the end of 2023.²

Highlighted Actions

While the state has met the first goal established in the Maryland the Beautiful Act, protecting 30% of Maryland’s land well in advance of the 2030 goal, the state agencies continue to look ahead to how to accomplish the ambitious goal of protecting 40 percent by 2040. In addition to continuing to conserve land through the state’s land conservation programs, state agencies work with stakeholders and partners to advance land conservation. The items listed below are examples of work accomplished in 2024.

1. The Sustainable Growth Subcabinet developed and published [The Maryland the Beautiful Act Smart Growth Subcabinet Five-Year Plan](#). The plan is available on the Subcabinet’s website and will be updated at least every five years.

<https://planning.maryland.gov/Pages/OurEngagement/SGSubcabinet/legislative-assignments.aspx>

¹ Best available data as of September 4, 2024. This is our best estimate for the end of fiscal year 2024 acres preserved.

² Note that acreage protected with state funds is included in state program reporting so when a private conservation organization, such as a local land trust, uses state funds to place an easement on a property, the acreage is not attributed as land conserved by the private conservation organization. Distinguishing between lands conserved by private conservation organizations through government funding versus through private funding is a difficult but important task to ensure that we are not double-counting preserved lands. MET, MDP and DNR worked together over the past two years to identify critical data needs, in conformance with the Chesapeake Bay Program data standard, and then developed a spreadsheet and instructions to improve the collection of private conservation organization data. To provide technical assistance on this issue, the agencies held a webinar on March 1, 2024 for local land trusts.

2. DNR, in consultation with the Greenspace Advisory Board, established the [Greenspace Equity Program](#). The Greenspace Equity Program was established through legislation in 2023 ([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. Funding for the program was authorized from the state share of Program Open Space in FY25. Applications for FY25 grant funding were due on November 1, 2024. DNR anticipates presenting recommended grant awards to the Maryland Board of Public Works for approval in the second half of FY25.
3. DNR, MET, and MALPF continued to foster and grow partnerships with land trusts and local governments to facilitate conservation projects. The three agencies worked with land trusts and local governments throughout 2024 on conservation projects.
4. MET, MDP, and DNR continued work on refining data and reporting procedures. The three agencies worked together to develop a spreadsheet and instructions to improve the collection of private conservation organization data. The agencies held a webinar on March 1, 2024 for local land trusts to provide technical assistance.
5. DNR celebrated the 25th anniversary of its Rural Legacy Program. Since its inception, the program and its partners (land trusts and county governments) have protected more than 125,000 acres of ecologically valuable properties, productive farms, and forests, representing a public investment of more than \$405 million.