



## Senate Bill 282 Recreational Equality for Service Members Act Written Testimony

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**Date: March 26, 2025**

Submitted to: Environment and Transportation Committee

Submitted by: Jana Davis, Chesapeake Bay Trust

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The Chesapeake Bay Trust is honored to administer funds contributed to the Healing Hunting and Fishing Fund, which is supported by individuals purchasing boating, fishing, or hunting licenses/registrations who optionally donate to the Fund at the time of their transaction. The Trust then distributes the funds through our Veterans Outdoor Engagement Grant Program to organizations that benefit veterans for projects like recreational and/or therapeutic outdoor activities or green job workforce training (<https://cbtrust.org/grants/veterans-engagement/>; see Figure 1 below).

This bill would expand the number of groups and individuals who could be served by this program, and the Trust is poised to provide resources to an expanded audience. There is significant research indicating that being outdoors promotes healing in individuals recovering from physical and mental trauma or health issues.

Projects specifically focused on veterans we have funded in the past include TALMAR Gardens & Horticultural Therapy's veterans-to-farmers initiative, "Breaking New Ground," a 10-month farmer's training providing the skills for employment in agriculture and Talisman Therapeutic Riding's "Talisman TheraBay Trails" program to support their veterans therapeutic programs and annual Veteran's Victory Garden, and many more (see Table 1 below).

### Figure 1: Chesapeake Bay Trust's Veterans Program

<https://cbtrust.org/veterans/>



#### The Veterans Engagement Mini Grant Program

The Chesapeake Bay Trust recently released the [Veteran's Engagement Mini Grant Program](https://cbtrust.org/grants/veterans-engagement/). This program is designed to support veteran's groups and organizations engaging veteran's groups as they provide healing and therapeutic services, outdoor recreation, community engagement, and green jobs training. This program funds activities such as outdoor meditation, adaptive camping, therapeutic green spaces, or stipends for green jobs and training. To see a longer list of potential projects, review evaluation criteria, and learn more about the application process, read the full Request for Proposals (RFP).

<https://cbtrust.org/grants/veterans-engagement/>

## Veteran's Engagement Mini Grant Program

The Veteran's Engagement Mini Grant Program is designed to support veteran's groups and organizations engaging veteran's groups as they provide healing and therapeutic services, outdoor recreation, community engagement, and green jobs training.

**What this funds:** Activities such as outdoor meditation, adaptive camping, therapeutic green spaces, or stipends for green jobs and training. To see a longer list of potential projects, read the full Request for Proposals (RFP). Please note the RFP is updated every year.

**Who can apply:** Veterans' groups and organizations serving veterans groups. Applications are particularly encouraged from organizations who have never received a grant from the Trust. Organizations must be either a non-profit organization or a municipal, county, regional, state, or federal agency.

**How much can be awarded:** Up to \$5,000.

**Is match required?** Match is encouraged, but not required.

**Grant Application Process:** The Chesapeake Bay Trust's grant applications are all submitted through an online system, using the "Start a New Application" button below. If you have questions regarding the application process, please contact this program's grant manager, Craig Freeland, at 410-974-2941 ext. 103 or at cfreeland@cbtrust.org.

### Program Status: **OPEN**

[View RFP](#)

**Deadline:** Rolling basis. Requests for this Mini Grant Program are accepted on an on-going basis until funds are fully expended for the fiscal year.

### Mentorship Opportunity

Available to new applicants to provide support during project development and application submission.

[Mentorship Program](#)

### Start A New Application

[New Grant](#)

## Healing, Hunting and Fishing Fund

Calling all veterans! The Trust is honored to play a role in administering funds contributed to the Healing, Hunting and Fishing Fund. Through this process, hunters and anglers who obtain licenses online through the Maryland Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) Compass registration system can choose to make a contribution to support the Fund.

Contributions will be directed to the Chesapeake Bay Trust. The Trust will distribute the funds through competitive grants to nonprofits, and will support such activities as therapeutic outdoor activities, outdoor recreational activities such as hunting or fishing, or workforce development for green jobs.



There is significant research that indicates that being outdoors promotes healing in individuals recovering from physical and mental trauma or health issues. For these benefits to be realized, two things need to happen. First, more individuals need to recognize the value of time spent outdoors or otherwise engaging with nature on their physical and mental health. Second, we need to make sure that there are healthy spaces for people to use for human health benefits. The Trust is committed to helping realize these benefits through the Healing, Hunting, and Fishing Fund.



**The Trust has funded multiple human health-related outdoor therapeutic projects, including healing gardens at hospitals and planting projects for facilities that support individuals with disabilities. Below are grants that were funded in support of veteran projects.**

**Table 1: Examples of Veterans-related projects funded by/through the Chesapeake Bay Trust**

**TALMAR Gardens & Horticultural Therapy Center**, for the installation of accessible agricultural features by and for veterans, Baltimore County, \$5,000

**Catfish for Heroes**, for Rockfish fishing trips for veterans and first responders, Upper Bay, \$4,948

**Cheverly American Legion Post 108**, for invasive species removal and the creation of a green space for veterans to connect, Prince George's County, \$4,328

**Friends of the Patapsco Valley State Park**, for camping supplies to increase the accessibility for disabled veterans to the Hilton and Hollofield campsites, Howard and Baltimore Counties, \$4,988

**Audubon Naturalist Society of the Central Atlantic States, Inc.**, for green jobs training, environmental education, and healing for 75 veterans, Montgomery County, \$4,999

**Warrior Canine Connection**, for an outdoor obstacle course event at Seneca Street State Park hosted for 50 veterans and their service dogs, Montgomery County, \$4,500

**God's Outdoor Angels Foundation**, for costs of 4 charter fishing trips and guided hunting trips for 10 disabled veterans, statewide, \$5,000

**Preservation Trust of Wicomico, Inc.**, for a nature trail to commemorate Buffalo Soldier history, Wicomico County, \$5,000

**Friends of the Patapsco Valley State Park**, for an adaptive recreational hand-crank cycling program for veterans, partnering with the MD DNR Wounded Warrior and Veteran Outreach program, Howard and Baltimore Counties, \$24,000

**Audubon Naturalist Society of the Central Atlantic States, Inc.**, for experiences in nature for veterans through community environmental education programs along a wheelchair-accessible, streamside nature trail at 40-acre Woodend Nature Sanctuary, Montgomery County, \$10,126

**TALMAR Gardens & Horticultural Therapy Center**, for the implementation of the "Breaking New Ground" program, a veterans-to-farmers initiative, Baltimore County, \$15,000

**Talisman Therapeutic Riding, Inc.**, for the "Talisman TheraBay Trails" program to incorporate watershed education curriculum into their seven year-round programs, summer camp initiative, volunteer training materials, and annual Veteran's Victory Garden, Queen Anne's County, \$9,550

**About the Chesapeake Bay Trust**

The Trust was created by the Maryland General Assembly in 1985 as a nonprofit grant-making organization with a goal to increase stewardship and engagement in the restoration of the state's local rivers, streams, parks, and other natural resources in diverse communities across the state, from the mountains of Western Maryland and the Youghiogheny watershed to the marshes of the Coastal Bays.

The goal was to create an entity that could complement state agency work with groups on the ground: schools, nonprofit organizations, faith-based and reach large institutions, homeowners associations, community and civic associations, and other types of groups.

The Trust invests in local communities and watersheds through grant programs and special initiatives and is known for its efficiency, putting on average 90 cents of every dollar into programs. The Trust has awarded over \$200 million through more than 12,500 grants and projects in every county in Maryland since 1985 ([www.cbtrust.org/impact](http://www.cbtrust.org/impact)). We make about 450 grants and other awards a year and have about 1,000 active grantees at any one time.

The Trust does not receive a direct state appropriation to support its operations, instead supported through revenue from the Chesapeake Bay vehicle license plate; half of the Chesapeake and Endangered Species Fund checkoff on the state income tax form; two donation options through Maryland's online boating, fishing, hunting license system, one that focuses on veterans' rehabilitation; partnerships with federal, state, local agencies, family foundations, and corporate foundations; and individual donors.

Due to its efficiency, the Trust has been rated with the maximum four-star rating by the nation's leading charity evaluator, Charity Navigator, for more than two decades, putting it in the top 1% of non-profits in the nation.

One of the Trust's basic tenets in its strategic plan is to a wide range of audiences in natural resources issues, and that theme characterizes all the Trust's programs. Every individual in our area benefits from healthy natural resources, and in turn, every individual can help natural resources.