



## House Bill 1267 (Delegate Henson) – Workgroup on Public Water Access Written Testimony

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**Date: February 26, 2021**

**Position: SUPPORT**

Submitted to: House Environment and Transportation Committee

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The Chesapeake Bay Trust supports its workgroup coordination role outlined in HB 1267. The Trust is a grant-making organization established by the General Assembly in 1985 with a mission that includes engaging the public in the restoration and protection of the natural resources of our region. Our 2020-2025 strategic plan articulates a goal to reach under-engaged audiences for mission-related reasons: A large portion of the watershed is privately owned, and for our natural resources to be restored and protected, a large number and diverse range of people need to be engaged and take actions and change behaviors. One cannot love what one cannot know, and so access to natural resources is an important step. The elements to be accomplished by the workgroup as outlined in the bill are, in turn, an important step in assessing and improving, as necessary, access.

Of course, the issue of access is not just about people improving natural resources; it's about natural resources improving people, also. All residents of our region have the ability to benefit our natural resources, and healthy natural resources, in turn, have the ability to benefit all residents as well. More and more science supports the connection between access to healthy outdoor spaces and human health.

### **Human health connection**

The theme of the Chesapeake Bay Trust's annual Maryland General Assembly legislative "reception" (virtual this year due to COVID) in January 2021 was the value of the outdoors, and legislators were each asked to share an outdoor spot they visited to enjoy or feel better – old favorites or new finds - given that so many indoor arenas like malls and theatres were closed. Over 60 legislators participated, enthusiastically sharing well past the hour scheduled for the event, and we had multiple requests to share a list of the various parks and sites offered by their colleagues. (And even offers to take other legislators fishing!)



As with Maryland General Assembly members, use of existing outdoor spaces by the general public has also been skyrocketing since spring 2020. Around the world, managers of parks report attendance has been at all time highs. Fishing license applications have increased. Going fishing at old secret spots that used to be isolated now results in meeting crowds. The reason these outdoor sites, like forests and parks and trails, have become so popular this year is not just because indoor venues were closed and there was nowhere else to go: It is because human health is so closely linked to access to healthy outdoor spaces, and people are starting to realize that at all levels.



Links between spending time outdoors in nature and human physical and mental health started to be quantified by scientists even before COVID-19<sup>1234</sup>. People who spend more time outdoors have lower levels of stress hormones, healthier blood chemistry, and better mental health. Crime is lower and reported “happiness” is higher in urban areas with green and blue spaces than in settings without such spaces. Healthier workforces take 27% fewer sick days, contributing more to their employers’ bottom lines<sup>5</sup>, and healthier populations save billions in health care costs<sup>6</sup>, and so time in nature has begun to be examined as a preventative health care measure. ParksRx in which doctors prescribe time in nature to patients. Programs that promote outdoor time as part of anti-obesity programs for children have been initiated.

COVID-19 brought the issue of getting outdoors to the mainstream in a number of ways. First, mortality rate of



COVID has been linked to factors such as obesity, diabetes, and other general health issues. People who spend time outdoors are healthier; therefore, people who spend more time outdoors should be able to fend off viruses like the novel coronavirus better. We know people in communities of color have a higher rate of mortality from COVID, and we know people in underserved communities have limited access to healthy outdoor spaces.

<sup>1</sup> Wolf KL, Robbins AS. 2015. Metro nature, environmental health, and economic value. *Environ Health Perspect* 123:390–398; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1289/ehp.1408216>

<sup>2</sup> South et al., 2018, **Effect of Greening Vacant Land on Mental Health of Community-Dwelling Adults: A Cluster Randomized Trial.** *JAMA Netw Open.* 2018;1(3):e180298. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2018.0298

<sup>3</sup> White, M.P., Alcock, I., Grellier, J. *et al.* 2019. Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing. *Sci Rep* **9**, 7730. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-019-44097-3>

<sup>4</sup> Spending Just 20 Minutes in a Park Makes You Happier. Here's What Else Being Outside Can Do for Your Health. 2019. *Time* magazine <https://time.com/5539942/green-space-health-wellness/>.

<sup>5</sup> R Merrill et al., 2011. Effectiveness of a Workplace Wellness Program for Maintaining Health and Promoting Healthy Behaviors. *J Occupational and Env Medicine* 53(7): 782-787.

<sup>6</sup> T. Maxwell. 2013. A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Health Care Models – Lessons Learned on the Importance of a Localized Preventative Care in Reducing Chronic Disease. *12 J. Int'l Bus. & L.* 443

Work to make sure that healthy outdoor spaces are available and accessible to all populations is imperative.

### **About the Chesapeake Bay Trust**

The Trust was created by the Maryland General Assembly in 1985 as a non-profit grant-making organization with a goal to increase stewardship and public 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 and reach large numbers of groups on the ground: schools, nonprofit organizations, faith-based 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 \$120 million through more than 12,000 grants and projects in every county in Maryland since 1985. We make 350-400 grants and other awards a year and have about 1,000 active grantees at any one time.

The Trust does not currently receive a direct state appropriation, 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 new 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.

The types of projects supported by the Trust include urban tree plantings, stream and park clean-ups, wetlands restoration, living shorelines, oyster seeding, local stream water quality monitoring, and outdoor educational experiences for children and adults. The Trust's programs reach about 80,000 K-12 students and 20,000 adult volunteers each year. 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 decades, putting it in the top 1% of non-profits in the nation.

One of the Trust's basic tenants in its strategic plan is to engage under-engaged audiences in natural resources issues. Every individual in our area benefits from healthy natural resources, and in turn, every individual can help natural resources. Three under-engaged audiences of particular focus identified by our Diversity and Inclusion Committee are the faith-based sector, communities of color, and the human health sector. The Trust has seen much



success: The number of students, volunteers, and teachers of color engaged in our grants match the demographics of Maryland. Close to 10% of our grants supported work at faith-based institutions of 13 different religions. We make grants for work at hospitals and other human health centers, but would like to do more.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to present to the Committee. If you should have any questions regarding the Trust's testimony, please contact me 410-974-2941 x100 or [jdavis@cbtrust.org](mailto:jdavis@cbtrust.org).