



House Bill 1135
Environment - Maryland Clean Water Fund - Authorized Uses
Written Testimony

Date: February 26, 2025

For Information

Submitted to: House Environment and Transportation Committee

Submitted by: Jana Davis, Chesapeake Bay Trust

The Chesapeake Bay Trust supports tree planting activities throughout Maryland through a number of grant programs. Several sources of funding currently managed by the Trust are dedicated specifically to projects in urban, underserved communities and/or the Jones Falls watershed. Programs to which applicants can apply for tree planting projects in the Jones Falls watershed include:

- 1) Urban Trees Grant Program. (web link: <https://cbtrust.org/grants/urban-trees-2/>) . This program was established by the Maryland General Assembly through the Tree Solutions Now Act of 2021, allocating \$10 million per year for projects specifically in urban underserved areas as defined in statute. Many areas of the Jones Falls watershed are eligible, and potential applicants can determine whether their project site is eligible by visiting the map: [Underserved Areas As Defined by the 2021 Tree Solutions Now Act](#) or <https://maryland.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=4258d3e39f6a47fca146b854c0f01e31>). This program is currently open with an application deadline of March 6, 2025, for applications for projects beginning in FY26, contingent upon availability of funds allocated during the 2025 Maryland General Assembly session.
- 2) Green Streets, Green Jobs, Green Towns Grant Program: web link: <https://cbtrust.org/grants/green-streets-green-jobs-green-towns/>). This program is funded predominantly by the U.S Environmental Protection Agency, dollars leveraged by two sources of unrestricted revenue created by the Maryland General Assembly for the Chesapeake Bay Trust (the Trust's Chesapeake and Coastal Bays vehicle license plate ("Bay Plate") and the Chesapeake and Endangered Species Fund tax checkoff option on the Maryland state income tax form). This program funds a wide range of green infrastructure projects, including tree planting. Potential applicants whose projects do not fit the strict geographic or vegetation type criteria of the Urban Trees program are often directed to this program. The program is open now with an application deadline of March 10, 2025. Although the EPA previously committed funds to this program for federal fiscal year 2025, whether the Trust can make this funding available to applicants is dependent upon the outcome of the judicial branch's consideration of the proposed federal funding freeze.
- 3) Outreach and Restoration Grant Program. (web link: <https://cbtrust.org/grants/outreach-and-restoration/>). This program is one of the oldest at the 40-year old Trust, funded by a wide range of sources, the backbone of which are the Bay Plate and the Chesapeake and Coastal Bays tax checkoff. The program is open to a wide range of projects, including tree planting. The next cycle of the program is slated to be announced in the spring with an August 2025 application deadline,

and is to some degree dependent on the status of the federal funding freeze given the Trust's existing grantee obligations.

- 4) Healthy Environment Healthy Communities umbrella of programs. (web links <https://cbtrust.org/grants/healthy-environment-healthy-communities-jones-falls/> and <https://cbtrust.org/grants/healthy-environment-healthy-communities/>) In recent years, the Trust has been tapped to manage funds from civil and criminal enforcement actions as part of our Healthy Environment, Healthy Communities initiative. While the majority of funding in this program was allocated in mid-February 2025 to projects through open, competitive grant programs open to applicants in the fall, some funds that can be applied to Jones Falls watershed projects remain to be allocated, and the Trust will announce those opportunities shortly after conversations with funding partners.
- 5) Small Grants Program for New Applicants (web links: <https://cbtrust.org/grants/community-engagement/>). This program is the oldest at the Trust, funded predominantly by the Bay Plate, tax checkoff, and a relatively new donation option on the Maryland boating, fishing, and hunting registration/licensing system managed by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. This program is open to relatively new applicants only as way to attract new groups to the natural resources space and provide capacity building, and tree planting is an eligible activity.

All applications for grant awards in the first four grant programs described above are reviewed by external peer and/or expert reviewers, who score the proposals and make recommendations for funding to the Trust Board of Trustees. The role of Trust staff during the application process is to explain grant programs and criteria to potential applicants, provide assistance in applying with aspects of proposal preparation such as idea generation and budgeting, and facilitate the review process. Trust staff do not make decisions on awards. In general, demand for Trust resources is three times higher than available funding (which is why we try to protect and grow our revenue streams and use the bay plate and tax checkoff revenue to attract other sources.

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). 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.