



FOREVER
MARYLAND

Advancing and Enhancing Land Conservation

Strategic Plan

2022-2027



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OUR MISSION

Forever Maryland promotes and supports the land and water conservation community, through education, advocacy, and outreach, to permanently protect working landscapes and healthy ecosystems for all.

OUR VISION

Forever Maryland envisions a future where all Maryland's lands and waters – mountain forest to ocean beaches, rural farms to city parks, sweeping rivers to tidal bays – are actively conserved, restored, stewarded, appreciated, and enjoyed by all Marylanders, including historically under-resourced communities.

STATEMENT ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION & JUSTICE

Forever Maryland is dedicated to the conservation of our state's land, water, wildlife, and other natural values – values that can be experienced and cherished by everyone and will sustain healthy, vibrant, and economically resilient communities. Racism, injustice, and exclusion must never be found in or advantaged by our work. The principles of equality, justice, and inclusion should guide us all and will be honored by Forever Maryland.

INTRODUCTION

Forever Maryland's story began when key stakeholders were interviewed for Maryland Environmental Trust's 2017 Five Year Strategic Plan - A Bold Vision of Sustainability. Thus, the idea to create a new organization bloomed. After extensive research, interviews and surveys, it was determined that a unique organization was needed to provide innovative support for land trusts statewide to help advance land conservation and restoration. Our founding was rooted in the idea that land conservation and restoration of conserved lands, and related goals are a vital component of Maryland's future identity and prosperity.

We take pride in the Forever Maryland name and logo. The White Oak leaf weaves infinitely, symbolizing our state tree's sustainability, longevity and impact. Attributes we aspire to mirror. Forever Maryland launched in the fall of 2019 with seed funding from Maryland Environmental Trust. Although launching right before the pandemic proved challenging, our two-year Business Plan helped pave the way for initial success. Unfortunately, the pandemic continues and brings with it a multitude of challenges. But, a bright light that came out of the pandemic is the recognition and understanding of the value that access to the outdoors is paramount to physical, mental and emotional health, especially in and proximate to under-resourced communities. Since the coronavirus began, park use and access to various accessible open spaces across the state and country has been at an all-time high.

In our two short years of operation, we've hosted two successful two-day conferences, 18 webinars, and five workshops on climate, conservation, collaboration and leadership, featuring state and national trailblazers. We testified virtually and in-person in Annapolis for land conservation funding and Program Open Space funding which resulted in the state successfully passing over \$305 million for parks and open spaces. We've become the fiscal sponsor of Partners for Open Space – a coalition of organizations working together to support funding for local and state parks, agriculture preservation and conservation easements. Forever Maryland has also been instrumental in the creation and success of two Regional Conservation Partnerships which are proven to be effective and efficient. And, to add a bit of levity during these challenging times, we've hosted quarterly "Lunacy Virtual Happy Hours" on the eve of full moons for our hard-working land trust community.

The time is now for Forever Maryland's inaugural Five Year Strategic Plan (2022-2027) which communicates the direction Forever Maryland will head on our journey to strengthen and support land trusts, landowners, local governments, agricultural businesses and environmental nonprofits across the state to fortify conservation efforts. We'll broaden our partnerships to catalyze innovation and conservation while inspiring and including all citizens. The effects of climate change are dramatically impacting our state, our country and our globe. Forever Maryland is positioned to mitigate the effects and advance land conservation through our three pillars: Education, Advocacy and Outreach. This plan builds on and expands the work of our first two years, pushing us to scale-up existing work while stretching us to continue to operate in new and innovative ways.

Priority One – Advance Education, Advocacy and Outreach Programs

PRIORITY OVERVIEW: Forever Maryland works with land trusts and environmental nonprofits across the state to strengthen land conservation and restoration efforts. The education, advocacy and outreach programs address current issues necessary for protecting the state's important natural resources. Forever Maryland will provide high quality programs that meet and exceed the needs of the land conservation community by continuing to hone existing program offerings, staying abreast of current/future state and national conservation policy trends, and by introducing new initiatives to enhance Forever Maryland's mission.

Objective 1: Enhance existing education and outreach initiatives to set Forever Maryland as a statewide leader in supporting land conservation and restoration efforts.

Strategies:

1. Provide dynamic training, networking and information sharing opportunities by offering annual conferences, webinars, and workshops.
2. Develop an equity data and reporting strategy to ensure ongoing programming addresses entrenched environmental problems – specifically topics within traditionally disadvantaged communities and where a focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice can improve the community as a whole.
3. Collect and analyze program participants' feedback to guide content and programs, and to ensure future programming is innovative, interesting, and relevant.

4. Provide the latest and most relevant resources for Maryland land trusts and conservationists to increase expertise and knowledge ensuring perpetual easements are protected and enforced forever.
5. Provide superior Keep Maryland Beautiful Program grant administration recognizing that the program must be sustainable and supported by Forever Maryland partners and Board members.

Objective 2: Position Forever Maryland as the policy and advocacy voice for land trusts and land conservationists.

Strategies:

1. Survey Maryland land trusts as well as restoration and other conservation organizations on an annual basis to determine how Forever Maryland can enhance or support shared goals.
2. Determine how to use policy and advocacy to support increased monitoring and stewardship of permanently conserved Maryland lands.
3. Expand and train a diverse and inclusive network of local and state advocates on key state and federal policy initiatives, while also helping build support for proper land use policy at the local government level.
4. Engage the land trust and broader frontline conservation community in annual policy and advocacy trainings and discussions.
5. Through policy and advocacy, create a plan to help streamline easement processes and advance stewardship.
6. Convene policy workgroups (as needed) to help educate and build consensus on key issues.
7. Protect conservation funding at all levels of government through sharing best practices, advocating storytelling, and more.
8. Continue to protect the state's conservation funding by being an advocate for full funding of Program Open Space, providing fiduciary responsibility as the fiscal sponsor of the Partners for Open Space, and continuing to lead the Partners for Open Space Coalition.

Objective 3: Launch new strategic initiatives that will address entrenched conservation and environmental challenges – bringing about new partnerships, supporters, and funders – to enhance Forever Maryland's mission and impact.

Strategies:

1. Build informed and engaged local advocates for better land use policy.
2. Advance access to natural resources for all.
3. Advance the greening of urban Maryland.
4. Address native species loss in Maryland.

5. Through partnerships and collaborations, build resilient, engaged, and stronger environmental and conservation-related nonprofits.

Priority Two – Improve Brand Awareness and Become a Trusted Resource

PRIORITY OVERVIEW: Forever Maryland serves as an important resource for the land conservation community and the challenges it faces. The organization is uniquely positioned to facilitate authentic relationships and collaborations capable of increasing the impact and effectiveness of local and regional land trusts, the Maryland Environmental Trust, and the larger environmental nonprofit community. Forever Maryland recognizes the importance of building brand awareness and communicating its position as a unique organization and is the only statewide nonprofit focused exclusively on strengthening Maryland’s land trusts and vital on-the-ground conservation and restoration nonprofits.

Objective 1: Position Forever Maryland as the trusted leader, voice, and principal resource for Maryland land trusts

Strategies:

1. Work with other state associations to gain recognition beyond Maryland.
2. Build capacity within current Maryland land trusts to service all corners of the state.

Objective 2: Create new partnerships and collaborate on projects and initiatives beyond land trusts.

Strategies:

1. Identify allies and ambassadors beyond the land trust community that align with local, state and federal legislative and funding priorities critical to land conservation and restoration in Maryland.
2. Support the growth and development of Regional Conservation Partnerships (RCPs) and similar collaborations while also continuing to evaluate Forever Maryland’s role within RCPs.
3. Explore possible relationships with higher education institutions, industry experts and other like-minded partners to advance the mission.
4. Engage on-the-ground nonprofits and community organizations – including those who serve diverse, disadvantaged, and disparate communities - to determine potential collaboration around addressing systemic inequities through greenspace.

Objective 3: Leverage strategic marketing and communications to raise awareness and promote the work of the organization.

Strategies:

1. Develop an effective annual communications plan that identifies target audiences and key messaging to enhance effectiveness of marketing.
2. Communicate annual legislative priorities on behalf of the land trust community for government policies that support land conservation.
3. Promote Forever Maryland partner organizations to amplify its work and expand constituencies.

Priority Three - Build Internal Organizational Capacity

PRIORITY OVERVIEW: Building healthy, robust land trusts that are strong, sustainable organizations requires Forever Maryland to have a stable foundation of support. By leveraging its existing relationships, Forever Maryland will expand its current Board and Advisory Council, define and message the distinctive roles of Maryland Environmental Trust (MET) and Forever Maryland, and solidify a sustainable model of financial support.

Objective 1: Continue to develop the Forever Maryland Board to support the organization.

Strategies:

1. Align structure and governance with Forever Maryland's values and commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ) by recruiting and cultivating board members from around the state with diverse backgrounds, knowledge, skills, experiences, and networks aligned with the organization's mission.
2. Cultivate a board-led fundraising culture and strategy for the organization.
3. Build an Advisory Council engagement plan to foster ongoing support from board alumni, industry leaders, allies, and supporters to bolster the work of Forever Maryland.

Objective 2: Adopt policies and practices that encourage recruiting, supporting, training, retaining, and/or promoting staff, interns, volunteers and/or contractors from diverse backgrounds.

Objective 3: Reset and reaffirm relationship with the Maryland Environmental Trust to better leverage each organization.

Strategies:

1. Cultivate relationships between the two boards and their leadership.
2. Clarify and market each organization's unique role in Maryland.
3. Explore ways to promote and amplify each other's work and accomplishments to strengthen the missions and avoid duplication of efforts.

Objective 4: Create stable and diverse funding sources that support Forever Maryland's mission and work.

Strategies:

1. Create a diverse foundation of support by pursuing multiple funding streams to increase program and administrative money to support the organization including individual donors, public and private foundations, corporations and government funding.
2. Secure robust sponsorship support of conference, events and programming as a revenue stream.
3. Develop and identify current and future programming that generates revenue.