



2024 ANNUAL REPORT

NR §1-104(e)

**PREPARED BY THE MARYLAND
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES**

November 2025

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Photo: Carmelita Woy

A Message from the Secretary ...

This has been a year of great milestones for the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and Maryland's overall conservation goals.

In May, Governor Wes Moore announced that Maryland has met the land conservation goal required by state legislation – 30 percent of Maryland's land conserved by 2030 – six years ahead of schedule. This statewide effort is protecting working farms, forests, and ecological resources, while also providing critical public access to open space throughout the state. The Department of Natural Resources' public land portfolio is the largest sector of protected land at 502,307 acres, or about 33% of the total protected lands in Maryland. Thanks to the hard work of staff at the department and partners, we're on track to meet the state's lofty goal.

We're always looking for new opportunities to expand access to scenic natural areas in Maryland for the enjoyment of residents and visitors. In 2024 DNR completed acquisition of the former Savage River Lodge and the surrounding property in Garretty County, which enables us to address the significant public demand for cabins, yurts, and camping locations in beautiful Mountain Maryland as well as acquire a property that is surrounded by existing state forest land. We are excited about this opportunity and look forward to preserving and continuing a legacy of magical moments at this picturesque location.

Before the close of 2024, Maryland planted more than 1 million trees towards the state's 5 Million Trees Initiative. The millionth tree was planted in western Maryland in the fall, according to Maryland Department of Natural Resources data. The milestone came as the state saw a substantial increase in tree plantings in the past year. The rate of tree plantings for the initiative increased by more than 100% from 2023 to 2024.

Addressing our water resources, we began revisions of the 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement with Bay partners to update the Agreement beyond the original 2025 deadline. I have been honored to serve as head of the Principals Staff Committee that is working out the details of this effort, with Governor West Moore serving as chair of Chesapeake Bay Program Executive Council.

Parallel to this effort, in 2024 DNR helped roll out the Whole Watershed Fund, created by legislation. The fund will use existing funds for a five-year pilot program targeting five Maryland watersheds that best represent the state's diverse land uses, geographies, and impairments.

Working with diverse project partnerships across five watersheds - to be selected in 2025 - we can realize local benefits ranging from better water quality and new habitats to community health improvements and new job opportunities. Taken together, these local benefits will also help Maryland reach its overall restoration goals for the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal bays.

These are just a few examples of the work the Department of Natural Resources accomplishes in a single year - the following pages provide even more details of these efforts.

Josh Kurtz
Secretary,
Maryland Department of Natural Resources

Maryland Park Service



Photo: Mark Hollis

What is the Maryland Park Service?

The mission of the Maryland Park Service is to manage the natural, cultural, historical and recreational resources to provide for wise stewardship and enjoyment by people.



39 members graduated from the Maryland Conservation Corps, having improved more than **2,400** acres of parks and public lands; planted more than **9,963** native trees, bay grasses and plants; treated more than **7,902** trees against harmful insects and diseases; and taught environmental education programs to more than **23,750** students, youth, and park visitors.

Total Visitors: 18,465,258

17,544,410

Day Use



855,298

Camping



65,550

Cabins



258

Full-Time Staff



Office of Outdoor Recreation



What does the Office of Outdoor Recreation do?

The Office of Outdoor Recreation was established to support and enhance outdoor recreation opportunities across the state. Making outdoor recreation spaces more welcoming and inclusive, expand access to outdoor recreation opportunities, and amplify the good work that is being done in the field.



Partnered with Together Outdoors, to provide Outdoor Equity Grants up to **\$7,500** to small outdoor recreation organizations throughout the state.

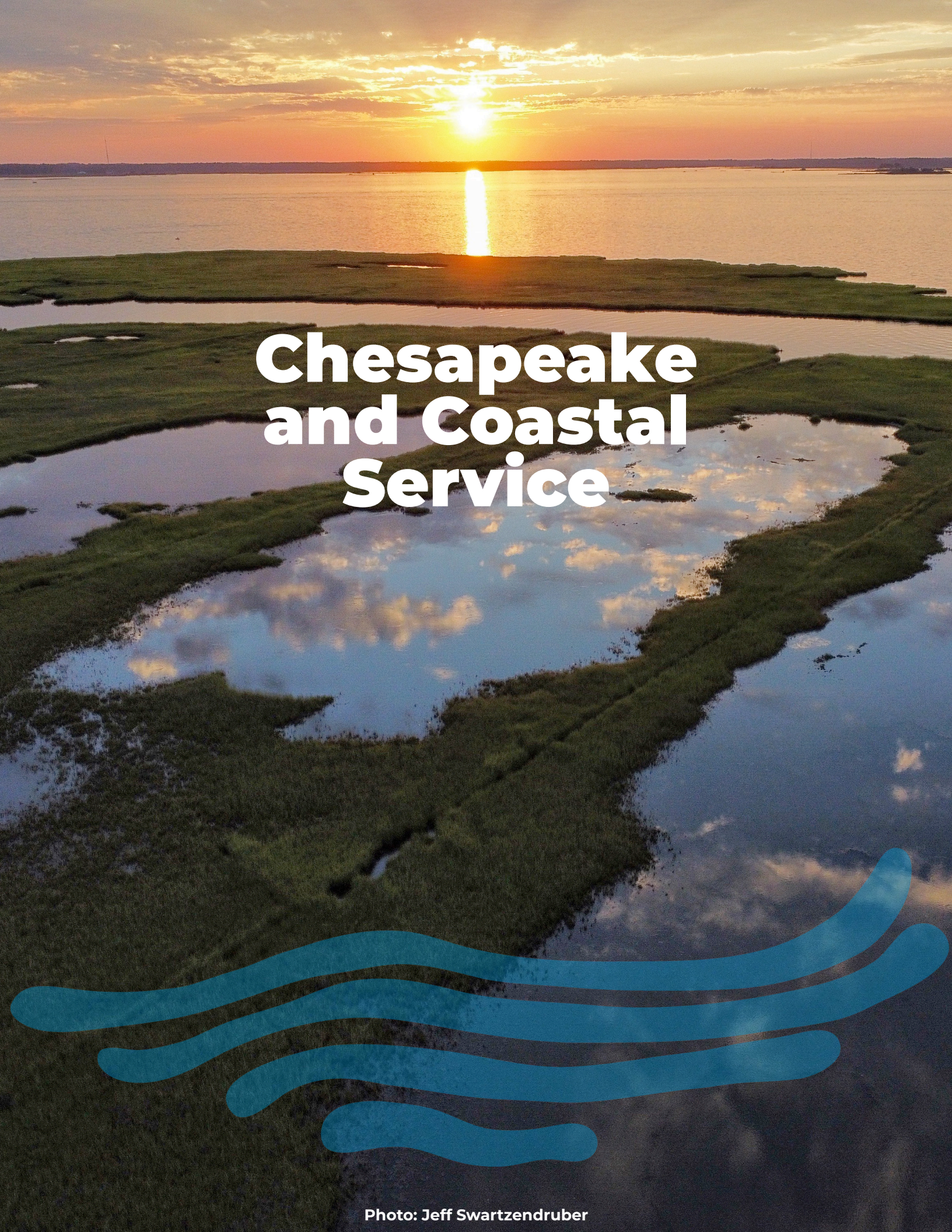
Maryland's Inaugural Outdoor Recreation Summit brought together more than **175** leaders from various sectors - including business, government, and nonprofits - to explore and expand upon the economic, health, and environmental benefits provided by Maryland's outdoor recreation opportunities.

Partnerships included campaigns, such as **Hike the Ice Cream Trail** in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Agriculture, and supporting local community events, including stakeholder meetings in Western Maryland. In addition to providing technical assistance and hands-on collaboration, OOR also highlighted the work and opportunities throughout Maryland, from programs for blind skiers to communities camping for the first time, through the #OutdoorsInAllFourSeasons social media campaign.

Workforce Development: In partnership with the Greater Baltimore Wilderness Coalition, coordinated and supported the Maryland Climate Crew Network, a pilot green workforce development initiative for young adults in Baltimore City, Prince George's County, and Howard County through a network of community-based organizations. The crew planted more **600 trees**, planted more than **3,000 live stakes**, **removed over 43,560 square feet of invasive plants**, and served 31 crew members, of whom 12 secured full-time employment.

Collaborated with the Maryland Park Service and Human Resources' Bilingual (Spanish/English) Facilitation Team to provide regional **Spanish Workshops to Park Rangers**, Administrative, and Maintenance Staff.

Three new staff members joined the team: The Outdoor Recreation Specialist, the Green Job Network Coordinator, and the Fair Hill Special Event Zone Coordinator.



Chesapeake and Coastal Service

Photo: Jeff Swartzendruber

What is the Chesapeake and Coastal Service?

Maryland's Chesapeake and Coastal Service (CCS), a unit of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, works to ensure that the state and its communities are equipped to better balance the often competing and occasionally conflicting demands and needs of Chesapeake and coastal resource use, economic development and conservation.

We do this through financial and technical assistance to state and local partners, rigorous use of science, strong public participation, education and effective intergovernmental coordination. CCS supports the department's mission through partnerships with federal, state, and local government agencies; regional and international institutions; universities; formal and non-formal k-12 and community-based educators; nongovernmental organizations and the private sector. With programs that have a foundation in science and enable its on-the-ground application, we are providing essential services for our communities' resilience to a changing climate and economic well-being.



Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Coastal Trust Fund supported projects to reduce

3,592,193

Pounds of nitrogen; **27,356** pounds of phosphorus; and **7,967** tons of suspended solids from Maryland waters.

62

Applications requesting Waterway Improvement Funding were awarded grants for **21** dredging related projects, **37** public motorboat facility improvements, and acquisition of **4** safety vessels.

320

Site visits were performed to provide technical and financial assistance and **136** site visits to engage in restoration and assessment activities.

800

Unique users created MyCoast-MD accounts **mycoast.org/md** to document nuisance and precipitation based flooding throughout Maryland

37

Projects supported to-date through the Resiliency through Restoration Initiative, of which **13** projects were completed and **6** projects initiated construction.

3

New Maryland Clean Marina Certified and **29** Clean Marinas recertified, confirming they volunteer to continue implementing pollution practices and comply with all environmental regulations.



115 Marinas enrolled in the Pumpout Operations and Maintenance Program to assist marinas in keeping pumpouts operational and available to the public.

5,200 Petroleum control kits provided to recreational boaters to capture small spills and leaks.

836 Orders for water trail guides and maps processed and fulfilled by the Public Access, Water Trails and Recreation Planning Program.

87 Local and state planners trained on use of Wetland Adaptation Area data at 3 training events.

89 Acres of riparian buffer planted; **404** reforested acres; **24,406** linear feet of stream restoration completed; and **15** acres of non-tidal wetlands were created/restored/enhanced, **49** stormwater best management practices.

61,347 people visited the Chesapeake Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. **8307** visitors participated in onsite programs and **5,019** K-12 students were engaged. In addition, **8,083** volunteer hours were logged at the Estuarine Research Reserve sites

Maryland Natural Resources Police



Who are the Maryland Natrual Resources Police?

They protect people, communities, and the natural resources of Maryland through safety, trust, and shared stewardship. Striving toward a future where the Natural Resources Police champions equity, innovation, and wellness, earning trust by protecting Maryland's natural resources and communities, and growing as a learning organization at every level.

The Maryland Natural Resources Police, a full-service statewide law enforcement agency, exists to **enforce** all laws and regulations statewide through proactive, fair, and professional policing to ensure public safety and resource protection.

Conserve Maryland's natural resources through effective law enforcement, stewardship, and educational outreach. **Protect** Maryland coastal and inland waters, ensuring safety and security as the State's maritime homeland security agency. **Provide** maritime and land-based search and rescue operations to assist in emergencies and safeguard lives.

Support and collaborate with public safety partners at the local, state, and federal levels by coordinating emergency response, disaster preparedness, and mutual aid efforts to protect lives, property, and resources. **Engage** multifaceted communities, especially those historically underrepresented, by fostering inclusion, transparency, and partnership through education and outreach. **Build** public trust by demonstrating our core values of character, stewardship, and valor in every aspect of service.



A sunset scene over a body of water. In the foreground, a small fishing boat with two people is silhouetted against the golden water. In the background, a large fishing vessel with cranes is docked on the right, and a roller coaster is visible on the left. The sky is filled with orange and yellow clouds.

Fishing and Boating Services

Photo: Jean Meile

What does Fishing and Boating Services do?

The mission of Maryland's Fishing and Boating Services is to sustainably manage and conserve the state's fisheries, providing equitable access to fishing opportunities for the public while supporting the ecological and economic health of the state's aquatic resources. This is achieved through scientific investigation, monitoring, and strategic management to ensure balanced ecological and economic benefits for current and future generations.

With the passage of **House Bill 613**, the Department created the first recreational oyster license. A portion of the funds raised by the \$10 annual license goes to **replenish shell and juvenile oysters on the public fishery oyster bar**.

The cooperative effort between the department, Constellation Energy, Normandeau Associates, and J.J. McDonnell collected invasive fishes from the fish lifts at Conowingo Dam for use in science or donation to needy families at local food banks. More than **2,000** northern snakehead and nearly **700** flathead catfish have been collected and utilized in beneficial ways.

Two Coastal Commercial and Coastal Recreational Fisheries Forums were held in Ocean City as well as two Coastal Recreational Fisheries Forums.



Stakeholder Outreach and Services Division reported:

- **1,656** direct fishing and boating related inquiries from the public were processed
- Email subscriptions increased by 6.6% to **181,497**. Subscribers received 248 emails related to fishing and boating within the state, same as 2023
- **80** unit-related press releases involving staff were pushed out by the department
- **2.869 million** unique views of unit-related content on the web, an annual increase of 36%
- **48** fishing license exemptions were issued to qualifying groups and individuals
- **5 state record fish** were caught and recognized in 2024
- **10** regulation change requests were presented to the Boat Act Advisory Committee by the department for consideration, two proposals ultimately went into effect
- A federal grant allowed the department to commission a focus group **study to better understand public perceptions related to catching and eating invasive blue catfish**. The goal of this project was to evaluate marketing concepts and approaches and to recommend a more unified marketing approach to encourage blue catfish consumption. Findings and recommendations were put to use in 2025

Licensing and Registration Service



Photo: Mark Rutt



Photo: Steve Harman

What does the Licensing and Registration Service do?

The DNR licensing and registration service **manages the sale and issuance of various permits and licenses for recreational and commercial activities**, such as hunting, fishing, and boat or off-road vehicle registration. It provides services through a centralized online portal and through in-person service centers for customers. The service handles the collection of related fees, excise taxes, and ensures compliance with state regulations.



The Maryland Department of Natural Resources manages over 250 sport license agents statewide. These agents allow individuals to purchase hunting and fishing licenses locally, often with extended and weekend hours.

2,758,386 Customers

547,783 Unique transactions

1,211,097 Products sold

166 Products available

Total Revenue \$51,061,399.50



Maryland Forest Service

What does the Maryland Forest Service do?

The Maryland Forest Service restores, manages, and protects Maryland's trees, forests, and forested ecosystems to sustain our natural resources and connect people to the land.

Community Forestry Catalyst Fund awarded **\$1.2 million** in funds for 6 projects across Maryland. Emphasis was placed on building the capacity of local organizations to have a sustainable impact. Projects will expand an existing high school workforce development model, provide career training and forestry-based education, and more.

Renewed certification of five-year certification of six state forests - more than **218,000 acres** – that are certified by the Forest Stewardship Council and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative.

Backyard Buffer seedlings distributed: **39,200**

Bare root tree and shrub seedlings grown/shipped from the John S. Ayton State Tree Nursery: **3 million**

Forest Stewardship Plans and acres MBF of state forests in Western MD: **516** on **21,489** acres

Forest Product Operators licensed: **579**



Photo: Stephen Badger

Consecutive years of Chesapeake Forest Lands maintaining dual certification for sustainable forest management by Sustainable Forestry Initiative and Forest Stewardship Council: **21**

Trees planted under Tree-Mendous Maryland program: 3,638
Trees planted under the Marylanders Plant Trees initiative: 2,850

Wildfire Response in Maryland: **165 fires on 953.4 acres**

Interstate Wildfire Response: **54 personnel, 14 assignments, 16 incidents, 7 states, 118 fires on 9,188 acres**



Photo: Monte Mitchell

346,000

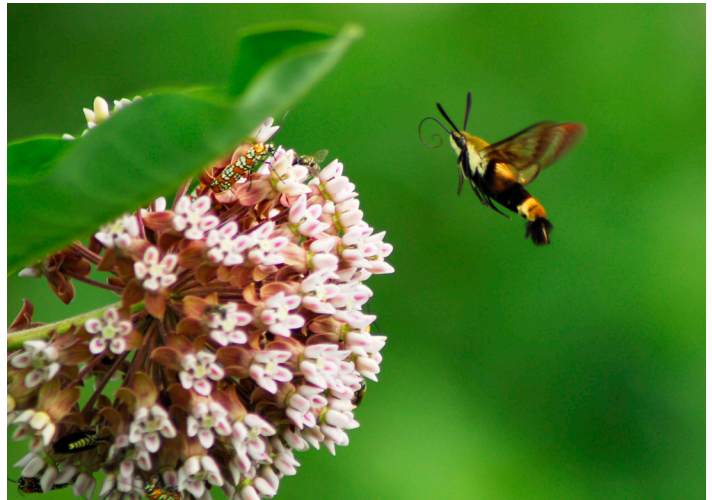
Number of trees planted in 2024 toward 5 Million Trees goal.

Wildlife and Heritage Service



What is the Wildlife and Heritage Service?

The Wildlife and Heritage Service is responsible for managing and conserving Maryland's wildlife, including protecting endangered species, regulating hunting and fishing, and managing habitats. It conducts population monitoring, establishes hunting seasons, protects rare, threatened, and endangered species through the Natural Heritage Program, and provides programs and resources for public education and



3,445

offshore blind and shoreline licenses were issued to landowners and waterfowl hunters, and **2,024** special wildlife permits were granted.

15,000

students participated in the Maryland National Archery in the Schools program, their mission is to promote student education through participation in the sport of archery.

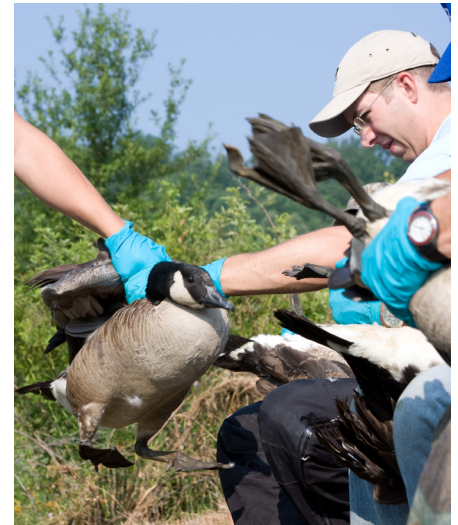
Staff responded to 1,260 wildlife incidents

with assigned firearms and/or chemical immobilization equipment in 2024. Of these events, **635** involved deer and **118** were bear incidents; others included bald eagles, raccoons, red foxes, gray foxes, common loons, vultures (turkey vultures & black vultures), hawks, brown pelicans, crows, turkeys, gray squirrels, great blue herons, Canada geese, beavers, rabbits, owls, bobcats, sparrow, opossums, ospreys, porcupines, groundhogs, bats, coyotes, sika deer, ducks, ducklings, skunks, swans, snapping turtles, a flying squirrel, timber rattlesnakes, red-tailed hawks, geese, goslings, black rat snakes, barred owls, gulls, and screech owl; **210 calls were after hours.**



Staff banded 2,765 migratory game birds

supporting international flyway management and monitoring programs. Banding totals included **274** black ducks, **360** mallards, **613** wood ducks, **426** mourning doves, and **1077** Canada geese. In addition, **20** Canada geese, **20** wood ducks, **25** black ducks, and **32** mallards were marked with GPS transmitters as part of studies examining reproductive success and habitat use in Maryland (wood ducks) and migration and productivity in the Atlantic Flyway (mallards, black ducks, and Canada geese).



Staff captured **314** wild turkeys for research purposes, including **85** females that received GPS transmitters as part of a multi-state hen ecology study. Gobblers were leg-banded to determine survival and harvest rates.

2,241

Environmental Review staff processed 2,241 **proposed projects and plans** across the state to identify and mitigate potential impacts to state and federally listed species, rare species of concern, colonial nesting waterbird breeding sites, forest interior dwelling species, and unique and sensitive natural communities.

1.2 million

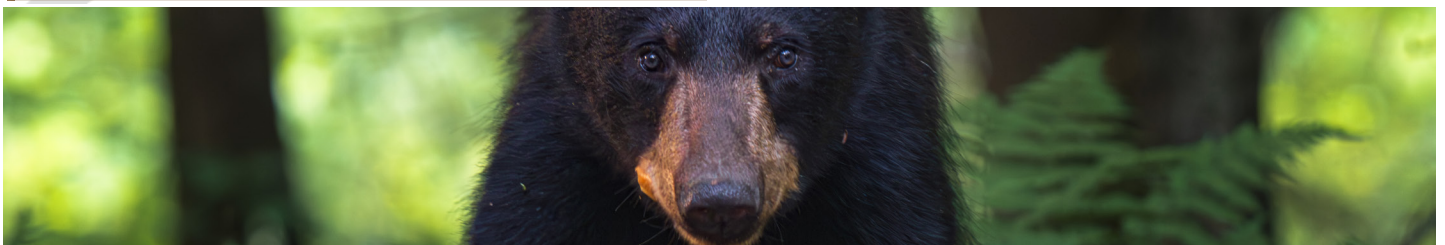
The Breeding Bird Atlas, a five-year collaborative project with the birding community throughout Maryland and the District of Columbia, concluded with more than **2,400** people reporting 1.2 million breeding records. A total of **209** bird species were documented as at least possibly breeding, and **197** species were confirmed as breeding.

450

individuals participated in the **Maryland Mentored Hunt Program** designed to reach youth, new and lapsed hunters, and retain hunters who regularly purchase a Maryland hunting license.

478

acres were acquired and added to our statewide system of 64 Wildlife Management Areas, bringing the **combined land area to 128,212 acres.**



The **Maryland Black Bear Management Program reproduction surveys tagged 17 cubs from six sows** in western Maryland. The largest litter was 4 cubs. The annual litter size has ranged from 2.5 to 3.5 cubs per sow, indicating good quality habitat and a healthy black bear population.