

Maryland Tree Canopy Action Plan

Background

In March 2023, the [Chesapeake Bay Watershed Tree Canopy Funding and Policy Roundtable](#) convened 125 local and state leaders from across the Chesapeake Bay Watershed to address challenges and opportunities in advancing tree canopy goals throughout the region. Centered around the themes of equity, climate resilience, and tree loss, the event featured expert presentations as well as generative discussions to identify data, tools and approaches to strengthen tree canopy outcomes. The Roundtable was intended to lay the groundwork for each Chesapeake Bay state to develop a two-year **Tree Canopy Action Plan** that pinpoints priority funding, policy, and programmatic strategies to advance tree canopy goals.

Maryland's Priority Strategies

The priority strategies presented below were identified by a group of stakeholders from Maryland who participated in pre- and post-Roundtable tree canopy strategy sessions and/or in discussion sessions at the Roundtable. These strategies were identified as having strong potential to advance tree canopy progress in the state in the near term. For each strategy, action steps and potential partners were identified.

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1. Strengthen regulations and incentives, and better enforce existing regulations, to preserve and maintain urban tree canopy, especially on private property.

Despite Maryland’s state and local tree protection regulations, the state is losing tree canopy. Particularly vulnerable are small forest patches below the minimum acreage threshold to trigger MD Forest Conservation Act provisions. Needed are local policies and ordinances to protect trees, as well as better enforcement of existing state and local regulations.

Opportunities for action	Who’s involved
<p>Share with counties and municipalities examples of protective local codes and code audit resources (including individual tree preservation ordinances like DC’s and Takoma Park’s), so they can review and improve local code and permitting requirements. Examples of resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chicago Region Tree Initiative code templates: https://chicagorti.org/resources/tree-preservation-ordinance-templates/ - MWCOG menu of code ordinance options for UTC protection - Center for Watershed Protection code audit guide - VA tree ordinance database - Takoma Park tree ordinance/permit 	<p>Maryland Municipal League</p> <p>Maryland Association of Counties</p>
<p>Convene a workgroup to audit the Forest Conservation Act and other tree preservation regulations in Maryland: How well are they being enforced? How many exemptions are being approved? Where are there loopholes?</p>	<p>Nonprofit / advocacy interests (e.g. Baltimore Represent)</p>
<p>Based on the workgroup audit findings (above), prepare a briefing paper on needed changes to state and local regulatory enforcement, to guide advocacy efforts.</p>	<p>Nonprofit / advocacy interests (e.g. Baltimore Represent)</p>
<p>Investigate financial incentives for private property owners to preserve trees (e.g. easement fees to keep a tree protected in perpetuity or for a certain number of years; tax incentives for ecological program participation).</p>	<p>Lead TBD</p>

2. Pursue career and business development opportunities to expand capacity for tree supply and maintenance.

Maryland needs good jobs in the green sector, especially in historically underserved and disadvantaged communities. Simultaneously, there is a need for increased native tree stock, given Maryland’s ambitious planting goals and those of neighboring states, as well as for trained tree care workers to maintain new plantings and mature trees.

Opportunities for action	Who’s involved
<p>Inventory existing career development and training programs in the state / region. Conduct a gap analysis to determine what is needed to reduce workforce shortages in high-need areas (planting, maintenance, invasive species removal, seed collection, grow-out, etc).</p> <p>Based on findings, convene workforce development interests to identify ways to fill gaps and to increase interest in existing programs.</p>	<p>Maryland Economic Development Commission (lead)</p> <p>State of Maryland (potential funder)</p> <p>Community colleges (especially those with horticultural programs)</p> <p>Nonprofits / companies (e.g. Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professionals)</p> <p>Labor and social services organizations</p>
<p>Identify and fund community groups to market existing career development programs to residents.</p>	<p>State of Maryland (potential funder)</p> <p>Community organizations</p>
<p>Convene a meeting between state forestry representatives and relevant nonprofit / community-based organizations to explore potential opportunities around urban nursery grow-out areas. Identify benefits (e.g. jobs and revenue streams for host organizations, local supply of native, climate-resilient tree stock) as well as barriers (e.g. zoning restrictions, lack of available land, slow profit margins).</p>	<p>Maryland Department of Forestry</p> <p>Maryland Economic Development Commission</p> <p>John S. Ayton State Tree Nursery</p>
<p>Explore the potential to engage in regional contracts with tree maintenance companies.</p>	<p>Maryland Department of Budget and Management</p>

3. Leverage climate funding opportunities for trees and amend funding programs to prioritize equity and maintenance.

There is an opportunity to leverage climate-related funding sources to achieve tree canopy goals, given trees’ climate benefits. Separately, existing tree-related funding programs in Maryland could be amended to more explicitly prioritize equity as well as tree maintenance.

Opportunities for action	Who’s involved
Develop written guidance for local governments around opportunities to achieve tree goals with climate-focus funding sources. Emphasize benefits of integrated solutions as well as how trees can be an effective part of climate resilience initiatives.	Lead TBD
Convene major tree funding program partners to discuss feedback from the Roundtable process regarding the need to improve programs, specifically: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Include better definitions around engagement and equity (rubric with flexibility) - Provide preference to minority-owned companies for plantings - Fund community outreach and organizational support (move away from overly strong focus on tree plantings) - Ensure set-aside funding for maintenance, including toward invasives management - Deliberately fund collaborations (e.g. across education and workforce interests) 	Maryland DNR Forest Service (convener / communicator) Maryland Department of Natural Resources / MUCFC Chesapeake Bay Trust Other funders

4. Invest in education, partnerships and technical assistance, especially in and with under-resourced communities.

Education was identified as a key need in Maryland – in particular, education for the general public and for local governments about the benefits of trees (especially related to energy savings and climate change mitigation), existing policies and programs to protect trees, and property techniques related to tree planting and care. In addition, technical assistance is needed, especially in smaller or less-resourced communities.

Opportunities for action	Who's involved
<p>Produce written best practices for meaningful community engagement in tree planting and care, for the target audience of municipalities and counties who are seeking to plant trees in underserved areas. Consider including these best practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify community leaders to help lead the process - Hire community organizers from the communities targeted for plantings (leverage partners to do this, as state hiring process is difficult) to generate interest in tree plantings and also advance workforce development - If hiring outreach firms, make sure they look like the communities in which they will be doing plantings - Use bilingual information material and culturally appropriate outreach strategies for residents in underserved communities 	<p>5 Million Trees Team (Maryland Department of the Environment, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Maryland Department of Agriculture, Chesapeake Bay Trust)</p>
<p>Engage partners to make existing educational materials (such as the Chesapeake Bay Program's Local Government Guide tree canopy educational materials and modules) accessible to local governments, private property owners, and landscape professionals.</p>	<p>Chesapeake Tree Canopy Network (lead)</p>
<p>For Maryland's tree planting programs (e.g. 5 Million Trees), establish clear, high-impact marketing messages: we are planting trees to improve human health and wellness, environmental and economic benefits, community connectivity, equity, etc.</p>	<p>5 Million Trees Team</p>

5. Fill gaps in research and data needs, especially related to tree canopy resilience metrics.

There is a need for better resilience indicators and metrics to measure and communicate the co-benefits of trees (such as air quality improvements, flooding prevention, stormwater management, etc.) In addition, more analysis on the causes of tree loss could enable localities to make informed planting and maintenance plans that minimize loss.

Opportunities for action	Who's involved
Connect local groups and nonprofits to state data as well as existing data and mapping resources, including the Chesapeake Bay Program Tree Cover Status & Change factsheets , which quantify and visualize tree loss by county. CAN THIS BE MADE MORE SPECIFIC?	Lead TBD
Improve monitoring of tree canopy change through technological innovation (as recommended in the 2022 Technical Study on Changes in Forest Cover and Tree Canopy in Maryland by the Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology, University of Maryland College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, the Chesapeake Conservancy, and the University of Vermont)	Lead TBD
Improve quantification of trees' climate and carbon benefits.	Lead TBD
Assess causes of mortality and tree canopy change in high-loss areas of the state, including within forest blocks (as recommended in the 2022 Technical Study on Changes in Forest Cover and Tree Canopy in Maryland by the Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology, University of Maryland College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, the Chesapeake Conservancy, and the University of Vermont)	Lead TBD