

Image Courtesy of Harford County Government



Aberdeen Proving Ground

Army Compatible Use Buffer Program

Prepared By:

The Maryland Department of Planning



Aberdeen Proving Ground (APG) uses the Army Compatible Use Program (ACUB) to identify areas where conservation easement or fee simple acquisition may present an opportunity to improve land use compatibility. Leveraging the Department of Defense (DoD)'s Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program and Army Service funds, APG has partnered with Harford Land Trust (HLT) and Eastern Shore Land Conservancy (ESLC) to reduce encroachment and improve installation resilience. APG's ACUB projects are examples of the sustained effort by the Army and community partners to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

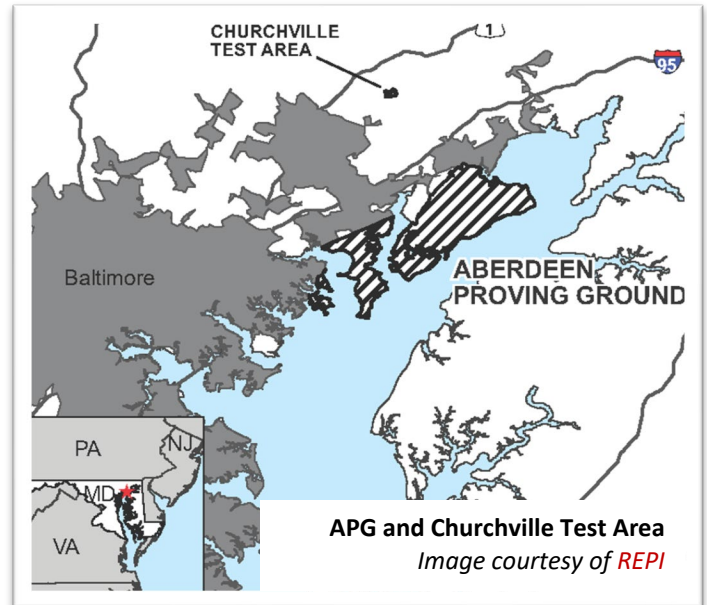
APG is a premier Research, Development, Test and Evaluation (RDTE) Army installation, allowing the rigorous evaluation of equipment and systems before they are deployed. APG's operations can have a potential, significant noise and/or dust impact on surrounding areas. Therefore, protecting land use compatibility with APG test and training missions is a priority. Working with ACUB partners, county, and other land preservation partners, APG continues to identify mutual objectives for conserving critical open areas through several preservation projects. This case study highlights some of the preservation efforts around APG as well as on the western and eastern shores of the Chesapeake Bay. As of 2024, APG's ACUB program has preserved over 6,500 acres over 29 different transactions.

Preservation Efforts Around Churchville Test Area

Harford County

The Churchville Test Area is a separate portion of APG located northwest of the main installation. This important test area is used for endurance testing of all types of automotive vehicles across all branches of the military, including the Army's largest tanks. A hilly area with cross-country roads, Churchville's steep inclines and tight turns allow vehicles to be tested in challenging conditions. However, suburban growth from Baltimore and nearby towns has increased the potential for conflict since vehicle testing generates noise and dust.

To help alleviate these problems, in 2007 APG collaborated with the Harford Land Trust to preserve existing farms around the Test Area. Working with the Hopkins family, who have raised crops, cattle, and horses since the 1950s, their 163.5-acre farm was protected and preserved from residential development through a Deer Creek Valley Rural Legacy Easement. Not only does this easement protect scenic habitats and allow operations to continue at Churchville Test Area, but it also protects the Deer Creek watershed, which is a community water source and the only known habitat for the endangered Maryland darter fish. The easement also helps alleviate concerns about increased impervious surfaces in the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area, which could amplify flooding on area properties and major thoroughfares and negatively impact water quality through stormwater runoff.



Churchville Test Area is a geographically separate portion of Aberdeen Proving Ground north of Bel Air in Harford County.

At-A-Glance

Active: 2007; 2012 - ongoing

Example Preservation Projects

- Churchville Test Area (164 acres)
- Belle Vue Farm (347 acres)
- Green Point Farms (450 acres)
- Bracebridge Farm (441 acres)

Partners:

- Aberdeen Proving Ground
- Eastern Shore Land Conservancy, Inc.
- Harford Land Trust

Preservation Efforts on the Western Shore of the Chesapeake Bay

Harford County

APG has partnered with Harford Land Trust since 2007, working together to preserve properties within APG's ACUB priority areas and adjacent to APG's Churchville Test Area. APG and HLT have successfully preserved over 1,900 acres in Harford County protecting valuable mission assets including vehicle test tracks, firing ranges, and soldier training areas from external encroachment. APG has protected valuable forest and wetland habitats, Chesapeake Bay shoreline and Critical Area, rural working lands and historically significant cultural resources. This work has been accomplished with funding from the U.S. Army, REPI Program, Harford County, Maryland Department of Natural Resources Program Open Space, and private donations. Additional partners that were instrumental in these transactions include The Conservation Fund and Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

Belle Vue Farm Preservation

Belle Vue Farm is located north of Aberdeen Proving Ground in an area rich in natural and cultural resources known as the Oakington Peninsula. Efforts to acquire and preserve the 347-acre property, which was the only undeveloped area of privately owned Chesapeake Bay shoreline in Harford County, date back to 1994. Over the years, developers have explored options for industrial parks, business complexes, and residential development of the property; however, the property is currently zoned for agricultural use and not planned for public water or sewer service.

The property's proximity to APG caught the interest of the Harford Land Trust as a candidate for the ACUB program. As demonstrated by the Churchville Test Area preservation, the land trust had been working with APG for years to reduce incompatible development and preserve habitat; this was particularly important for Belle Vue Farms as its location across the water from APG made it vulnerable to noise impacts from testing and operations.

Harford Land Trust worked with APG and Harford County from 2018 to 2020 to negotiate, finalize, and fund the purchase of Belle Vue Farm. Purchased for \$6,270,000, the property is now under the ownership of Harford County and is permanently preserved by a Program Open Space conservation easement with the state of Maryland. Most importantly, the preservation of Belle Vue Farms adds to three other neighboring preserved properties, which together total 1,250 acres of which 90% is now public parkland. The property includes a mile of Chesapeake Bay coastline, including 60-acres of **Chesapeake Bay Critical Area**, and federally-designated critical habitat for the Maryland darter.

Preservation of Belle Vue Farm creates numerous opportunities for public recreational and educational activities. Now that the area is preserved, further environmental study and historic research will take place to determine the most compatible uses for the property given its proximity to APG. Learn more about the preservation effort of Belle Vue Farm in the Harford Land Trust's documentary, *The Story of Belle Vue*.



Belle Vue Farms contains shallow coves, wetlands, and acres of wildlife habitat. The Farm's soil composition rank among the most productive in Harford County and represents one of the few remaining farms within the county's allocated growth area.

Preservation Efforts on the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay

Cecil and Kent Counties

While the waters of the Chesapeake Bay prevent incompatible development immediately adjacent to the APG boundary, it can exacerbate and expand the potential impact of operational noise on Maryland's Eastern Shore. The lure of relaxed coastal living draws residents to the Eastern Shore, who may not be accustomed to the noise being generated across the Bay. Preserving the rural way of life and limiting high density development is a goal of Eastern Shore Land Conservancy and Eastern Shore landowners. Several large properties have been protected in Cecil and Kent Counties which protect static and live fire ranges and impact areas of APG. Like the success on the Western Shore, this partnership has protected rural working lands, vital forests, coastal wetlands, and Chesapeake Bay shorelines.

On the Eastern Shore, APG's ACUB Priority Areas overlap several of Maryland Rural Legacy priority areas, allowing additional partner funding sources to complete transactions. ESLC has successfully closed conservation easements on several large parcels under APG's ACUB program including the Bracebridge parcel, multiple parcels of the Green Point Farms project, and multiple large agricultural parcels.

Green Point Farms Preservation

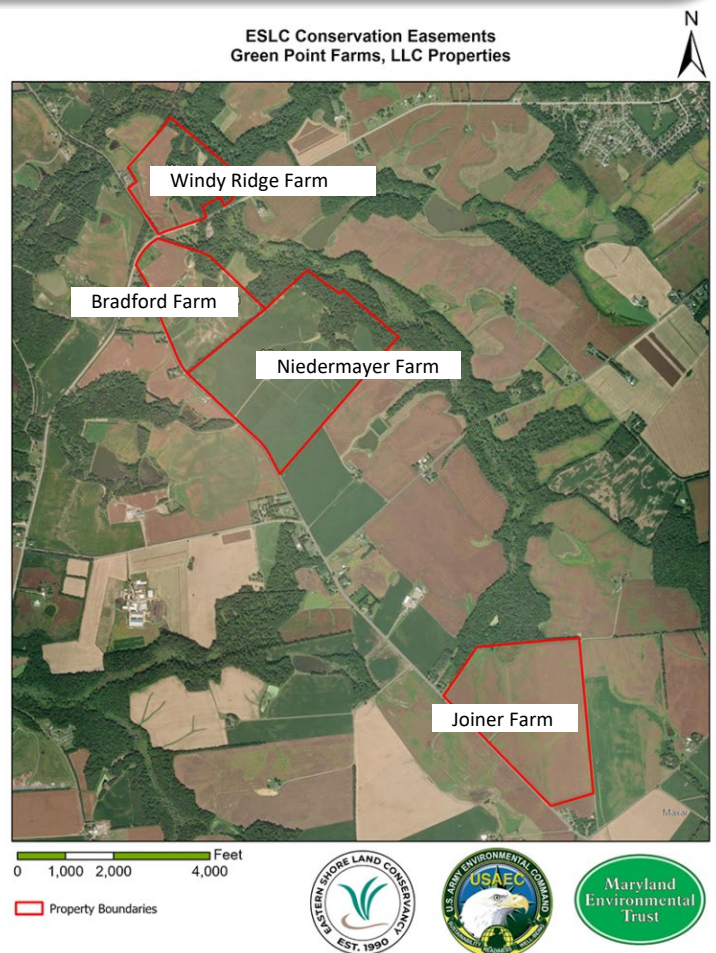
Green Point Farms, LLC, continues to partner with the ESLC to protect farmland on the eastern shore, preserve the scenic view shed, and support APG's military mission. Since 2020, Green Point Farms has completed three conservation easements with the ESLC totaling over 450 acres of protected land in northwest Kent County. Farms located within an easement include Joiner Farm, Niedermayer Farm, and Bradford Farm. A fourth easement, Windy Ridge Farm, is expected to be completed in 2024 and will protect more than 75 acres of agricultural and wooded land along Mill Creek; approximately 46 acres are devoted to traditional grain agriculture practices while the remaining are held in woodlands. The ACUB program will fund the acquisition of the easement with support from the Maryland Environmental Trust.



Spotlight: Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) Program

The **ACUB Program** allows the Army to work with partners to place easements on land outside of installations to buffer training, without acquiring new land for Army ownership. The Army has protected over 390,000 acres of land at over 40 installations, in partnership with over 50 partners. Partners vary from land trusts that operate around the nation to local municipalities. As of September 2019, over a billion dollars had been expended through the ACUB Program, of which \$278 million came from the REPI Program, \$305 million from the Army, and \$483 million from partner contributions, including cash and in-kind services. In-kind contributions include evaluating parcels, negotiating with landowners, and monitoring easement compliance.

ESLC Conservation Easements
Green Point Farms, LLC Properties



Map of Green Point Farms, LLC land conservation easements in Kent County. Source: ESLC

Bracebridge Parcel Preservation



Creek view of the Bracebridge Hall Property.
Source: ESLC

The Eastern Shore Land Conservancy's work includes conservation efforts in Cecil County, where 441 acres of agricultural land and critical species habitat were preserved through ACUB in 2020. The Bracebridge Parcel easement is located off Back Creek and McGill Creek and is one of several in this area of the county. Supported by funding from the Maryland Department of Natural Resource's Rural Legacy Program and the Army's Compatible Use Buffer Program, the preserved property is the Bracebridge Hall location for the Recovery Centers of America.

This conservation effort is unique based on land use beyond that of agriculture. Of the full 530-acre project, 89 acres are unprotected to allow for the expansion of Bracebridge Hall as needed for operations, while the remaining 441 acres are permanently preserved. This effort was made possible by the collaboration of active community members, farmers, families, and the Recovery Centers of America.



Harford Land Trust

[Harford Land Trust](#) is a non-profit established in 1991 to ensure that important natural systems and productive landscapes remain intact in Harford County. It administers its portion of the APG ACUB program for parts of Edgewood, Joppa, Abingdon, Belcamp, Aberdeen, Havre de Grace, Perryman, and Bel Air by ensuring all terms of the easement agreement continue to be met.

Eastern Shore Land Conservancy

[Eastern Shore Land Conservancy \(ESLC\)](#) is a non-profit established in 1990 due to the concern that the Eastern Shore's important wildlife habitat and prime farmland were being consumed by sprawling development. To date, ESLC has protected more than 60,000 acres of the Eastern Shore's natural habitat areas and prime farmland using easements on more than 300 properties and the creation of three preserves. It is considered one of the most successful land conservancies in the country.

