

# MIDDLE CHESAPEAKE SENTINEL LANDSCAPE

Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia | est. 2015



The Chesapeake Bay is one of America's treasures. The ecosystem is valued for its natural beauty, economic productivity, and ecological vitality. It is also home to one of the U.S. Navy's premier aircraft testing locations, Naval Air Station (NAS) Patuxent River-Atlantic Test Ranges (ATR). The U.S. Navy conducts over 150,000 annual testing and research flights within its 1.5 million-acre special use airspace in the region. This averages out to more than 410 aircraft operations occurring per day. In 2015, a diverse group of stakeholders came together to form the Middle Chesapeake Sentinel Landscape. Despite the landscape's historic agricultural and fishing traditions, it is less than two hours driving distance from Washington, D.C., and is a coveted location for weekend or summer homes. This dynamic presents a challenge for the partners within the sentinel landscape, whose individual missions can conflict with unfettered development. The primary goal of the Middle Chesapeake Sentinel Landscape is to protect land that supports wildlife, agricultural productivity, and the U.S. Navy's mission.

## Project Protects Military Readiness While Supporting Squirrel

In 2019, the U.S. Navy, Ducks Unlimited, the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) partnered to preserve a 414-acre parcel beneath the ATR restricted airspace. This project marks one of the first jointly funded easements between the Department of Defense's (DoD) Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program and USFWS's North American Wetlands Conservation Act. Located on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, the parcel supports hardwood and pine forests that provide habitat for the Delmarva fox squirrel. The large, grey squirrel was delisted from the federal list of endangered species in 2015 after being one of the first species protected under the Endangered Species Act

Figure 1: Middle Chesapeake Sentinel Landscape Map

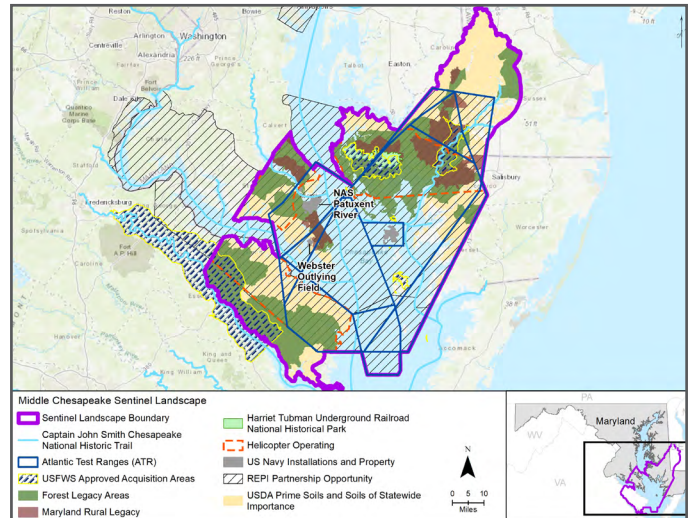




Table 1: Middle Chesapeake Sentinel Landscape Footprint Details (acres)

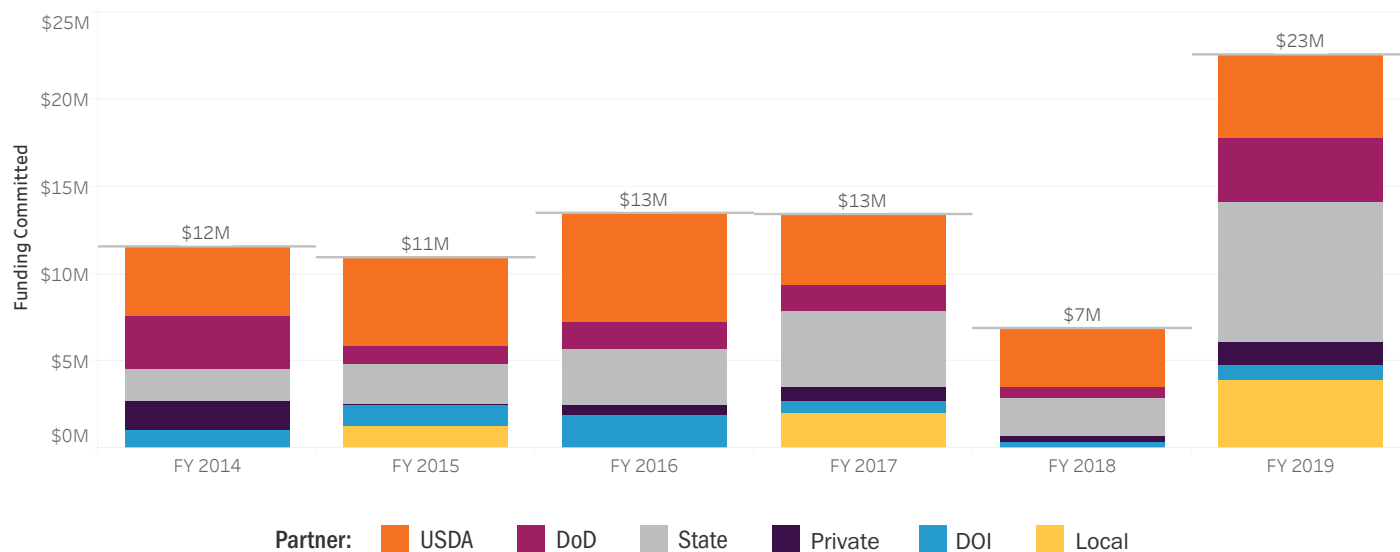
 Total Protected Acres: <sup>1</sup>	43,569
 Total Enrolled Acres: <sup>2</sup>	130,845
 Active Base Area:	7,640
 Total Sentinel Landscape Area:	2,232,563

in 1967. The property connects with existing protected parcels, creating a 2,700-acre contiguous wildlife corridor for the squirrel that will contribute to its long-term sustainability.

<sup>1</sup> Represents total acres protected by projects administered by sentinel landscape partners since FY 2014

<sup>2</sup> Represents total acres enrolled in technical assistance programs administered by sentinel landscape partners since FY 2014

**Figure 2:** Middle Chesapeake Sentinel Landscape Total Funding by Partner



“By aligning and focusing our collective priorities through the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership, both the [U.S.] Navy and [U.S. Fish and Wildlife] Service have been able to accelerate the conservation gains made around the Chesapeake Bay. This type of collaborative effort is allowing us to...complete projects beyond our individual capacities.”

- Christina Ryder, *Biologist for USFWS*

### Increasing Access to the Nanticoke River

The Middle Chesapeake Sentinel Landscape encompasses portions of the Nanticoke River, which extends 64 miles from southern Delaware through Maryland’s Eastern Shore. A tributary to the Chesapeake Bay and rich with natural beauty, the Nanticoke River has long been a target for conservation efforts. In 2019, Middle Chesapeake Sentinel Landscape partners demonstrated that success in this arena could come in all sizes. With the support of the Mt. Cuba Center, the Chesapeake Conservancy permanently protected a one-acre parcel in Seaford, Delaware that will provide waterfront access to the river. While the project might be small in acreage, it has had a profound impact on local communities that take pride in the historically significant waterway. In the future, the Nanticoke River Watershed Conservancy—the organization set to manage the property—plans to convert the parcel into a public park with a kayak launch and other low-impact amenities.



Previously listed as an endangered species, the Delmarva fox squirrel was de-listed from the Endangered Species Act in 2015 after rigorous recovery efforts. Credit: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

### Significant Tree Community Protected

In 2019, the DoD REPI Program partnered with the Maryland Environmental Trust, Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust, and Cove

Point Natural Heritage Trust to permanently protect Hemlock Preserve, a 67-acre parcel located along Hellen Creek in Calvert County, Maryland. The original owner named Hemlock Preserve after an isolated stand of eastern Canadian hemlock, a type of evergreen that extends across the property. The forest stand is thought to be a relict community left behind by glaciers roughly 15,000 years ago. By protecting Hemlock Preserve, partners have enhanced an ecosystem that supports over 50 distinct species of birds. This project marked the first partnership between the DoD REPI Program and the Maryland Environmental Trust. Established in 1967, the Maryland Environmental Trust is a quasi-public entity that conserves land across the state to preserve Maryland's ecological, cultural, and scenic value. The effort also enabled the U.S. Navy to expand its REPI project area within the State of Maryland.

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**“The Hemlock Preserve is our first REPI project in Calvert County. We have used REPI successfully in St. Mary’s County, and others – on the Eastern Shore for example – for many years to help prevent encroachment on our training areas and flying routes, and we look forward to expanding the use of this program with Calvert County.”**

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- Christopher Cox, **Commander Officer of NAS Patuxent River**

## **Maryland Rural Legacy Program Reaches Critical Milestone**

In 2019, Maryland's Rural Legacy Program celebrated a significant milestone. Over the past 20 years, the program has conserved 100,000 acres of land throughout the State of Maryland. The Rural Legacy Program provides funding to permanently protect large tracts of land that enhance natural resources while supporting agriculture and forestry. Enacted by the Maryland General Assembly in 1997, the Rural Legacy Program acquired its first conservation easement in 1999. The U.S. Navy has completed a majority of its REPI projects at NAS Patuxent River-ATR in partnership with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources in state-designated Rural Legacy Areas. Since 2010, the U.S. Navy has worked with the State to permanently protect more than 6,000 acres of land beneath military airspace to reduce the threat of incompatible development.

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**“We have successfully worked with local partners, farmers and other landowners to conserve and maintain the rural character of our state for future generations.”**

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*Agricultural landowners play a critical role in protecting Naval Air Station Patuxent River from incompatible development. Credit: Natural Resource Conservation Service*

- Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio, **Maryland Natural Resources Secretary**