

# “Empowering a Conservation Revolution”

Remarks by Joel Dunn

Champions of the Chesapeake, October 4, 2016

Ladies and gentlemen, I’m Joel Dunn, President & CEO of the Chesapeake Conservancy, and that was “Naptown Sings,” a local music studio here in Annapolis for kids.

By the way, they have all been deputized as Junior Rangers by the National Park Service, the managers of the John Smith Chesapeake Trail. Congratulations kids, and thank you for performing for us tonight.

I’ve got a mountain of people to thank for making this night possible:

- Our co-chairs for tonight’s event, Nancy Merrill and Holly Evans,
- Our Board of Directors,
- Our staff,
- Our partners,
- Our volunteers, and especially,
- Our full cast of sponsors included in tonight’s program, particularly
- Intel and Microsoft who have invested in our vision
- Beveridge & Diamond, Brown Advisory, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Steve Harper, Hogan Lovells, and the Ryna and Melvin Cohen Family Foundation.

In addition, I want to thank all the spouses and family of everyone involved in our work, including my wife, mother, and uncle who are all here tonight. They are quiet conservation heroes... because they provide encouragement and create the overall environment for us to be successful in this very challenging endeavor.

The focus of tonight is to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the establishment of John Smith Chesapeake Trail and the contributions to our conservation movement by special members of the Greatest Generation, Generation X and the Millennial Generation. Through their hard work, generosity, and

perseverance, they have helped to preserve the peace of our rivers.

But for the next ten minutes I am going to:

- Describe why we conserve and restore the Chesapeake,
- Provide some context for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Park Service and the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the John Smith Chesapeake Trail
- Finally, I am going to convince you that you're part of a conservation revolution (this is pretty good trust me)

### Why We Conserve

We are very fortunate to live in a place with so many beautiful rivers. They are good for the mind, body and soul. They inspire us, console us and provide us the things we need for peace, love and joy. In fact, 408 years ago, when Captain John Smith first explored our great rivers and Bay, he declared that "Heaven and earth never framed a more perfect place for man's habitation." Isn't that the truth?

Captain Smith was right. This is a pretty perfect place to live. My family and I certainly love it here. It's so perfect that 18 million people live here now, which ironically threatens the peace of our rivers and harmony of the land. Everyone in this room is familiar with the challenges facing the Chesapeake like:

- Pollution and dangerously poor water quality
- Unbridled conversion of our forests and farms – including special places like Fones Cliffs
- And that approximately 98% of the shoreline is private, limiting public access and appreciation.

All that being said, the real Tragedy of the Chesapeake is that its degradation is unfair to those kids that sang tonight. They represent the next generation and are the major reason why we protect and restore the Chesapeake and its Great Rivers. We want them to:

- Know the beauty of an osprey as it dives to catch a fish on the Severn River.
- Fish for brook trout in the headwaters of the Potomac or the Susquehanna,
- Go to where the Wild Things Are and see the eagles soar at Fones Cliffs or see a bobcat on the Rappahannock River,
- Find a Doctor Seuss-looking pitcher plant on the Nanticoke River, and
- Jump from a rope swing into the Wye River without fearing that the water will

make them sick.

We want to fuel our children's imagination with wildlife and adventure. We want the next generation and their children and grandchildren to enjoy this special place just as we have.

While I love our rivers and they give me great joy, I don't have peace in my soul, because I am tortured by the prospect of losing the things that make the Chesapeake so great – especially now that I have a 17-month old daughter. For hundreds, perhaps thousands of years, the Haudenosaunee (also known as Iroquois) have lived by the seven generations principle -- making decisions today only after considering how it will affect people over a hundred years from now.

Perhaps inspired by the Haudenosaunee, Teddy Roosevelt once said, "I recognize the right and duty of this generation to develop and use the natural resources of our land; but I do not recognize the right to waste them, or to rob, by wasteful use, the generations that come after us."

The United States is stronger thanks Teddy Roosevelt and the founders of the National Park Service who had the foresight to put serious thought into the future of our public lands 100 years ago – and to protect those places so that we can enjoy them today. My friends here tonight from the **National Parks Conservation Association** would argue that our National Parks are America's best idea.

Ten years ago, Pat Noonan, Paul Sarbanes and John Warner and many of you in this room had the foresight to create the John Smith Chesapeake Trail, which has produced new opportunities for partnerships, collective impact and new federal, State and private funding for conservation, public access and restoration.

I hope 90 years from now, people are talking about what great foresight they had to create a trail that became a landscape scale framework for conservation. And that the John Smith Trail was one of America's best ideas.

Perhaps it's my Irish blood, rebellious spirit, or my good fortune to meet Pat

Noonan, but I am inclined to fight for what I believe in. And I believe that the Chesapeake and its Rivers are as grand as the Grand Canyon, as spectacular as Yosemite and as great as the Great Smokies. I believe that the Chesapeake is a national treasure and one of the passions of our time.

And because this cause is worthwhile and right, and because we have great hope for the future of the Chesapeake and our planet, we can bear a hardship today. We can be angry about the injustice of the current state of the Bay, but see light in the future despite all of the various challenges.

I'm pleased to report that in 2015 major threats to water quality all showed improvement.

Our community also successfully permanently protected some of the most iconic places in the Chesapeake Bay. A few examples include:

**Werowocomoco** – the capital of the Powhatan confederacy for hundreds of years and one of the most significant American Indian sites in eastern North America. The antiquity and spirituality of this place cannot be understated—think of it as the Machu Pichu of the Chesapeake. Thanks to funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund and great work from our partners at The Conservation Fund, it is now owned by the National Park Service.

Another example is the **Nanticoke River Corridor** - the most biodiverse area on the Delmarva Peninsula. Working with the Mt. Cuba Center and many other partners, we have protected key parcels along an evocative river corridor, and one of the few places you can go to see the world as John Smith and the Native Americans saw it 400 years ago.

And we're making great progress toward getting **Mallows Bay** designated as the next **National Marine Sanctuary** – the first in nearly 20 years, the first-ever in the Chesapeake and the only one where you can kayak around the ship wrecks.

Lastly, I'm pleased to report that over **86 new public access sites** opened in the watershed between 2010 and now. This infrastructure is enhancing the bond between a recreation economy, tourism & conservation advocacy. These are all important symbols of progress that merit celebration. So we are

beginning to turn the tide—and that is in large part as a result of many of the people in this room.

### Join the Revolution

When Smith first visited the Chesapeake, he enjoyed healthy waters with abundant forests, wetlands, shorelines, and open spaces; a place of natural wonder. Smith mapped the Chesapeake with the tools of his time: a compass, a quill, and the stars overhead. His exploration and maps – paid for through venture capital funding – demonstrated Smith’s entrepreneurial spirit and led to the birth of this nation as we know it. At the Chesapeake Conservancy, we think of ourselves as entrepreneurs—conservation entrepreneurs. Like Smith, we are explorers forging new ground in service of our movement—developing the tools and resources to plan seven generations ahead. We are a little disruptive, because we see the new paradigm – including the Internet of everything—and we chase big ideas.

We are small and we are new, and I firmly believe that we are changing the American conservation movement through the application of technology to environmental challenges along the Trail and by bringing all the nonprofit organizations, government agencies and companies together to have a collective impact.

A primary example is how our staff spent the last 18 months working with the Chesapeake Bay Program to produce a 1-meter by 1-meter resolution land cover data for the entire Chesapeake watershed.

Like the Wright brothers pursuit of flight, I believe time will tell that this was a major leap forward for the Bay movement.

Land cover data is the fundamental underlying dataset for every conservation model and policy you can think of. This data is 900 times the resolution of the National Land Cover Dataset and is 96% accurate.

Just as Smith’s data and analysis did in 1608, this new data represents a brave new world for conservation, a world where big data can create big impacts on the health of our watershed, by enhancing collaboration and opening ecosystem markets.

We are pleased to be working with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Susquehanna University, and the government of Pennsylvania – to use the data to practice precision conservation on the Susquehanna River.

We are working to get the right practices, in the right place, and at the right scale and to make sure they are working. Just as any savvy investor would do.

As Steve Harper mentioned, our work was just cited in a major White House report, and has been mentioned as model to be replicated nationwide.

I'd like to thank:

- Nicholas DiPasquale who leads the EPA's Chesapeake Bay Program Office
- Ann Swanson, who leads the Chesapeake Bay Commission
- Chuck Hunt, the Superintendent of the NPS Chesapeake Office and the John Smith Chesapeake Trail.
- and, Mike Slattery, Chesapeake Coordinator with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Ann, Nick, Chuck, and Mike gave the Conservancy the vote of confidence and the opportunity to complete such a groundbreaking project. Mike has been supporting us along the way and making sure that the data is utilized to its full potential.

In summary, working with our partners from across the watershed, to create tangible conservation achievements—parks, wildlife refuges, and access sites—and simultaneously fundamentally changing the underlying data infrastructure for land management and conservation forever, to dramatically enhance our collective results.

So here you are tonight, at the epicenter of a conservation revolution. A revolution born of hope, evidence, partnerships and strong community support. I like to think that because you are here... you are part of this revolution.

In 2014, I gave a speech at this dinner about how I believe in the Chesapeake conservation movement – that with the power of technology and the power of community we can protect and restore our great rivers and special places

forever.??In 2015, I gave a speech at this dinner to remind you that you are the key to achieving this worthwhile and just cause and that ‘you are the Chesapeake.’

This year, my message to you is that we are in the middle of a conservation revolution. We are leveraging multiple generations of extraordinary leadership and hard work, to raise all ships in the conservation movement—making everyone smarter, more efficient and more effective at restoring and conserving the peace of our great rivers and special places for future generations.

Thank you for your participation tonight and in this worthy endeavor.