

envision the susquehanna

In 2013, Chesapeake Conservancy launched the *Envision the Susquehanna (ETS)* in order to encourage individuals, community leaders and organizations to articulate their vision for the Susquehanna River watershed. Based on interviews with 62 key land use stakeholders, reviews of 36 open space, greenway and comprehensive plans in the watershed, a phone survey of 965 randomly sampled residents, and input from more than 250 practitioners and community members compiled through workshops and meetings in 17 communities throughout the watershed, the vision document contains recommendations for protecting and enhancing natural, heritage and recreational resources across three segments of the Susquehanna River watershed.

The *Vision* categorizes recommendation within five themes: American Indian Heritage and History, Recreation and Public Access, Working Lands, Stormwater and Flooding, and Wildlife Habitat in three watershed geographies: the Upper Watershed, Middle Watershed, and Lower Watershed.



Select Vision Statements

We Envision a Susquehanna...

- Where the cultural identity of the watershed is associated with its rich American Indian history.
- Where outdoor experiences leave people with a sense of connection to the natural landscape.
- Where the productivity of the watershed is in balance with and mutually supportive of the natural environment.
- Where green infrastructure and natural environments, including riparian forest buffers, rain gardens, and floodplains, are supported in their functions to mitigate the effects of everyday and major storm events.
- Where intact, connected, and resilient ecosystems provide functions and services that benefit society, such as clean water, flood protection, and lands for farming, forestry, and recreation.

Key insights revealed during ETS Visioning

Survey respondents reported caring about the environment (78%–90%) and taking personal action with the environment in mind (64%–77%). The survey results also suggest that respondents support land conservation for many reasons, but may not be committed to paying more in taxes for conservation benefits. Respondents also reported participation in passive recreational pursuits, including relaxing near the river, visiting a park, and wildlife viewing.

Community engagement efforts revealed that American Indian history is important to stakeholders, and should be incorporated into river-related messaging. Many groups agreed that recreation and public access provide a connection between residents, visitors, and the natural and cultural resources of the watershed. Across the watershed, there was broad support for land conservation for water quality improvement and protection of wildlife habitat and economically important working lands.

Chesapeake Conservancy has played a key role in convening stakeholders, analyzing and synthesizing data from myriad sources, and spearheading initial partnership-based implementation, including the following:

Identifying new restoration opportunities to improve water quality on working farm land. Riparian forest buffers are one of the most effective practices to reduce pollution from the landscape. In 2016, the Conservancy received funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to use new high-resolution land cover data to model and prioritize opportunities for buffer plantings to maximize pollution reduction.



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Gaps in forest buffers are identified, quantified and prioritized for restoration.

York County Stormwater Tool Advancing Urban Solutions. During ETS workshops in 2015, the York County, PA Planning Commission shared its challenges reviewing and prioritizing storm water project proposals from over 40 regulated municipalities each year requesting funding for implementation. The Conservancy worked with the Commission and local stormwater managers to develop a user-friendly, web-based tool called the York County Stormwater Consortium BMP Reporting Tool. The tool makes the project submittal process easier for municipalities, the review process easier for the Commission and tracking progress easier for both.

Protecting American Indian Heritage. Construction of the Conowingo Hydroelectric Dam on the Lower Susquehanna in the 1920s and the subsequent flooding would have buried petroglyphs carved into Indian Rock at Bald Friar's Ford. In 1926, as many intact petroglyphs specimens were collected to preserve this history. Over time many pieces were moved to various locations. In 2006, efforts began to locate these ancient artifacts and protect them from neglect and vandalism. The Chesapeake Conservancy worked with Maryland partners to preserve these important cultural relics and help move several petroglyphs to Susquehanna State Park, located close to the original location of Indian Rock along the Susquehanna River.



Bald Friar Petroglyphs display at Susquehanna State Park in Maryland.

The Chesapeake Conservancy's mission is to strengthen the connection between people and the watershed, conserve the landscapes and special places that sustain the Chesapeake's unique natural and cultural resources, and encourage the exploration and celebration of the Chesapeake as a national treasure.