

CHESAPEAKE CONSERVANCY 2019 WINTER NEWSLETTER

Shorelines

Saving the Chesapeake's Great Rivers and Special Places



Chesapeake's First National Marine Sanctuary

PHOTO BY DARYL BYRD/MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

COVER STORY PAGE 4

Mission

The Chesapeake Conservancy's mission is to conserve and restore the natural and cultural resources of the Chesapeake Bay watershed for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. We serve as a catalyst for change, advancing strong public and private partnerships, developing and using new technology, and empowering environmental stewardship.

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Pursuing Big Ideas

Humanity's greatest ideas begin with tough questions that defy conventional thinking. "What if we could circumnavigate the world?" "What if we could reach the stars?" Some great ideas begin with a simple question: "What if we could do things differently?" These ideas inspire; they invite skepticism; they unleash a flurry of ensuing questions; but when pursued, they reshape our world and expand the very confines of our reality.

At Chesapeake Conservancy, we constantly grapple with big ideas and challenging questions. Even as we applaud the successes in land conservation described in the recent *Marking Milestones* report from the Chesapeake Conservation Partnership, we are looking beyond the conservation goal set in the 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement—to conserve an additional two million acres by 2025. We and our conservation partners are now asking: "Is this goal sufficient to protect the health of the Chesapeake in perpetuity?" "What if we could do more?"

We believe that the threats of dramatic land use change, rapid biodiversity loss, and climate change require us to think bigger and bolder, and to take a leap of faith. Though it may be a daunting prospect, we now ask: "What if we could join today's conservation thought leaders and protect 30 percent of the Chesapeake Bay watershed by 2030 and 50 percent by 2050?"

We are also asking big questions about parks, outdoor recreation, and how to foster a sense of belonging among all visitors and residents. As a primary partner, we have been working closely with the National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Office to enhance park experiences and increase opportunities for everyone to connect with the Chesapeake Bay. We believe that the Chesapeake is just as beautiful, iconic, historic, and nationally significant as any national park.



Chesapeake Conservancy President & CEO Joel Dunn
PHOTO BY MARK HAMILTON

So we ask, "What if we could have a national park for the Chesapeake Bay?"

This question has inspired robust discussion about establishing the Chesapeake Bay National Recreation Area as a full-fledged unit of the National Park Service. Picture a network of existing parks, refuges, museums, and ports across the Bay and its primary rivers offering authentic Chesapeake heritage and recreational experiences. These would be linked together and part of the National Recreation Area as partner sites with NPS branding and standing.

Even as we reflect on remarkable successes in this edition of *Shorelines*—such as the Chesapeake's first National Marine Sanctuary—our eyes are set firmly forward on the realm of future possibility. I am so grateful for your support and the dedicated efforts of our staff, and I invite you to join us as we pursue big ideas for the Chesapeake Bay.

Sincerely,



JOEL E. DUNN, *President and CEO*



Allenby Contributes to GIS Book

Chesapeake Conservancy's Director of Conservation Technology Jeffrey Allenby joined Lucas Joppa and Nebojsa Jojic of Microsoft Research to contribute a chapter to the recently published book *GIS for Science*. The chapter called "Identifying the Natural Efficient Frontier" is available online at www.gisforscience.com.

New NPS Superintendent for the Chesapeake

Wendy O'Sullivan, a 20-year veteran of the National Park Service (NPS), was named superintendent of the NPS Chesapeake Bay Office in July. Based in Annapolis, Maryland, the Chesapeake Bay Office oversees the NPS effort to manage and develop the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network and support the protection and restoration of the Chesapeake Bay. For more than a decade, Chesapeake Conservancy has worked hand in hand with the Chesapeake Bay Office as its principal nonprofit partner.

Congress established the Gateways program in 1998, which has enabled NPS to provide approximately \$22 million in financial and technical assistance for more than 360 projects in communities across the Chesapeake Bay watershed, improving Bay access and fueling our thriving outdoor recreation economy. O'Sullivan brings extensive experience creating and sustaining partnerships to her new role in the Gateways program. She previously served as associate regional director for Partnerships, Visitor Experience, and Outdoor Recreation for the National Capital Region in Washington, DC, overseeing six regional programs and a \$3.8 million budget.

"I am truly excited to join the federal, state, and local efforts to restore, protect, and promote the Chesapeake Bay and its vast watershed," O'Sullivan said. "I look forward

to collaborating across the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network to honor and highlight the Bay's maritime, farming, and cultural heritage, while also advancing watershed stewardship, coastal resilience, and recreational access."

"The Chesapeake Conservancy is thrilled by the selection of Wendy O'Sullivan, a national NPS leader in partnerships and community engagement with a background in marine policy. We look forward to this next chapter and continuing to strengthen our collaboration with NPS now with Wendy's leadership. Anyone familiar with conservation work in the Chesapeake knows that the most successful outcomes are those reached through partnership and collaboration," said Chesapeake Conservancy President and CEO Joel Dunn.

Superintendent O'Sullivan has a degree in marine affairs and business and has previously worked at Biscayne National Park in South Florida and as acting superintendent for Fire Island National Seashore, as well as at NPS headquarters in Washington. Her connection to the land and her coastal heritage is what drew her and her husband to set their own roots in Davidsonville, Maryland, where they enjoy time on the Chesapeake Bay.

Large Landscape Conservation Success Story

In October, the US Forest Service conserved Grace Furnace, a large tract of land in the James River watershed in southwest Virginia. Chesapeake Conservancy, along with partners, advocated for the Rivers of the Chesapeake Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Collaborative Landscape proposal, which helped acquire federal funds for nearly 4,700 acres in the Blue Ridge Mountains at the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests.

"With its beautiful trees and wild trout streams at the headwaters of the Chesapeake Bay, the Grace Furnace property is big, special, and inspiring," said Joel Dunn, president and CEO of Chesapeake Conservancy. "This successful project highlights the importance and power of combining philanthropic and public investments in protecting our planet, which are both required to conserve land of this caliber and size. The addition of these 4,664.5 acres to the national forest makes a significant contribution toward our goal of protecting 30 percent of the

Chesapeake Bay watershed by 2030, but we still have a long way to go."

The Grace Furnace property was purchased for \$5 million by the Open Space Institute (OSI), with funding from the Wyss Foundation.

"This significant conservation project demonstrates the critical role that protecting upstream forests can play in achieving large-scale watershed protection for the Chesapeake Bay," said Kim Elliman, OSI's president and CEO. "We are proud of the role OSI played in originally securing the property, preventing it from being disassembled and developed. We also congratulate the Blue Ridge Land Conservancy, the Valley Conservation Council, and the Department of the Interior for the successful conservation of this property. And of course, we thank our partner, the Chesapeake Conservancy, for leading the Rivers of the Chesapeake collaborative, and for their tireless efforts to protect the irreplaceable Chesapeake Bay."



From left to right: Chesapeake Conservancy Government Relations Specialist Reed Perry, National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Office Superintendent Wendy O'Sullivan, and Chesapeake Conservancy Vice President and Director of Programs Susan Shingledecker visit Capitol Hill in October. COURTESY PHOTO

27 More Acres to Celebrate at Blackwater NWR

In September, a partnership between the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Chesapeake Conservancy led to the addition of 27 acres of forested habitat to the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge in Dorchester County, Maryland. Using private funds secured by Chesapeake Conservancy from Mt. Cuba Center, this conservation easement adds to the 155 acres that were acquired for the refuge in 2018.



At nearly 4,700 acres, conservation of Grace Furnace makes a significant contribution toward our goal of protecting 30 percent of the Chesapeake Bay watershed by 2030. PHOTO BY NEIL JORDAN/OPEN SPACE INSTITUTE



Paddlers can get up close to the “Ghost Fleet” at Mallows Bay–Potomac River National Marine Sanctuary. PHOTO BY PETER TURCIK

National Marine Sanctuary Designated in the Chesapeake Bay

The Chesapeake Bay has a new claim to fame, and its fans are celebrating a big win. For years, a community-driven effort has been advocating for Mallows Bay–Potomac River to be designated as the Chesapeake’s first national marine sanctuary, and the first new marine sanctuary in 19 years. That dream became a reality when the designation became effective on September 3, 2019, following a review period by Congress and Maryland Governor Larry Hogan.

“We are thrilled by NOAA’s announcement of the Mallows Bay–Potomac River National Marine Sanctuary designation,” said Maryland Governor Larry Hogan. “Preserving our history, heritage, and natural resources has always been a priority for our administration, and designating this national treasure as a national marine sanctuary is yet another example of our stewardship and will ensure that people from both Maryland and beyond will have the opportunity to experience this amazing site for years to come.”

“This is a great day for the Chesapeake Bay. The first national marine sanctuary in the Chesapeake means there will be a spotlight on one of the hardest fought restoration efforts of our time. All eyes will now be on our challenges and our achievements as we work to restore the health of the Chesapeake Bay. We hope that the designation will encourage more people to come out and kayak through the

shipwrecks to experience the wonder of Mallows Bay firsthand,” said Chesapeake Conservancy President and CEO Joel Dunn.

“We are grateful to NOAA, Congress, Governor Hogan, and Charles County, and our many partners in this effort, including two of our board members: Charlie Stek, who first approached us with this idea in 2015, and Charles County Administrator Mark Belton. Donald Shomette, author of *The Ghost Fleet of Mallows Bay*, should also be applauded for keeping the history of Mallows Bay alive for future generations,” continued Dunn.

Mallows Bay is a small bay on the Maryland side of the Potomac River just 30 miles south of Washington, DC. It is famous for its “Ghost Fleet,” which includes more than 100 wooden steamships built for the US Emergency Fleet during World War I—an effort that propelled America to the forefront of shipbuilding—as well as many other wrecks from Revolutionary times through the 1900s. The wrecks are largely submerged during high tide but are revealed during low tide, which is where the term “Ghost Fleet” originates. Today, these wrecks support diverse ecosystems that attract recreational fishing and ecotourists to the area to see a diversity of wildlife, including bald eagles, heron, deer, and turtles. Osprey have even chosen some of the shipwrecks as homes for their nests.



In June, Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MD DNR) Secretary Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio signed the Mallows Bay–Potomac River National Marine Sanctuary Memorandum of Agreement, along with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Liaison for Programs and Partnerships Paul “Sammy” Orlando and MD DNR Chesapeake & Coastal Service Section Chief Kelly Collins-Choi. This was an important step toward the final national marine sanctuary designation.

PHOTO BY KARIN DODGE/MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

In addition to unique natural resources, Mallows Bay–Potomac River boasts rich American Indian and African American history. This section of the Potomac River is part of the traditional lands and cultural landscape of the Piscataway Indian people, as well as the site of important archeological findings. African Americans have been a part of the area’s history for centuries as well, with history related to enslaved Africans landing on Maryland’s shores and their descendants fighting in the Civil War. African Americans also built many of the wooden steamships that now rest in the shallow waters of Mallows Bay.

“If you haven’t been to Mallows Bay–Potomac River yet, we hope you will soon make the trip. Together with our partners, we’ve produced an audio tour, as well as the *Paddler’s Guide to Mallows Bay*, a self-guided tour to help you explore the Ghost Fleet by kayak,” said Chesapeake Conservancy’s Vice President and Director of Programs Susan Shingledecker. “While nothing beats seeing the beauty of Mallows Bay in person, we’ve also created a few ways that you can tour the Ghost Ships from your computer or mobile device, including two types of virtual tours. ‘Riverview’ is a virtual tour created by Terrain360, similar to Google Street View, that takes you through the shipwrecks as if you are in a kayak paddling the Bay. We also offer a bird’s-eye view with 360-degree virtual tours using drone and 360 video technology.” These resources are available at www.chesapeakeconservancy.org.

Thank you to our funders REI, the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the Curtis and Edith Munson Foundation, whose support has made our work toward the audio tour, interpretive materials, and advocacy possible.



The ships at Mallows Bay have become thriving ecological habitats above and below the waterline. PHOTO BY MARINE ROBOTICS & REMOTE SENSING, DUKE UNIVERSITY

Champions of the Chesapeake



Ann P. Swanson, executive director, Chesapeake Bay Commission, accepted the 2019 Lifetime Achievement Award, presented by Chesapeake Conservancy President and CEO Joel Dunn and US Senator Chris Van Hollen (MD). PHOTO BY DAVID HARP



The 2019 Public Service Award was received by Chesapeake Bay Commission Leadership: Senator Gene Yaw (PA), Delegate David Bulova (VA), and Senator Guy Guzzone (MD). Presented by Chesapeake Conservancy President and CEO Joel Dunn (far left) and US Representative Bobby Scott (VA) (far right). PHOTO BY DAVID HARP

Thank You to Sponsors of the 6th Annual Champions of the Chesapeake Awards!

November 7, 2019, National Aquarium, Baltimore

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The Future Is Now: New AI Expert Accelerates Precision Conservation



Kumar Mainali
PHOTO BY MICHAEL BOWMAN

Kumar Mainali, an expert in artificial intelligence (AI), has joined Chesapeake Conservancy's Conservation Innovation Center's technology team. The position is funded by a grant from the Grayce B. Kerr Fund. Mainali, a geospatial data scientist, holds a Ph.D. in ecology and M.S. in statistics, both from the University of Texas at Austin. He then joined the University of Maryland's department of biology as a postdoctoral associate where he was

advised by Bill Fagan, professor and chair of the department. His research career includes 31 projects in conservation biology, ecology, biogeography, climate change, human microbiome, animal behavior, and remote sensing. At Chesapeake Conservancy, his focus will be on accelerating the science behind our precision conservation data.

"I am thrilled to join the Chesapeake Conservancy's Conservation Innovation Center team. I am passionate about working on burning issues of conservation and environment. These are by far the most rewarding," said Mainali.

AI for the Bay

"Kumar hit the ground running and is already working on a broad range of projects. He is applying the most powerful algorithms of artificial intelligence toward solving important environmental problems in the Chesapeake and beyond," said Chesapeake Conservancy Director of Conservation Technology Jeffrey Allenby. "We are very grateful to the Grayce B. Kerr Fund for funding this position, which will magnify the power of our data through the use of deep learning."

Mainali uses AI to identify the land cover type of every square meter of the Chesapeake Bay. Through machine learning, he is teaching the computer to detect a forest, a shrub, or a tree over a sidewalk

or a building at a fine spatial scale and with very high accuracy. Mainali is also conducting an analysis of water quality in the Chesapeake Bay, crunching time series data of water quality from various locations.

Colorado Calls on CIC's Expertise

Mainali's expertise is already being shared outside of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, including a project concerning water flow management in Colorado in an area where water is a scarce resource. To help manage the demands of water for agriculture and wildlife, Mainali wrote algorithms that optimize the water flow and release from reservoirs by various agencies. These algorithms will be used for informed decision-making about sharing the responsibility of water release from multiple reservoirs on a daily basis.

"Chesapeake Conservancy is a small but mighty nonprofit that has proven that anyone with a big idea can change the world. Their approach to data-driven conservation in the Chesapeake has caught global attention, as their model has the potential to be replicated worldwide," said Lucas Joppa, Microsoft's chief environmental officer. "We look forward to seeing where the power of AI takes their work next."



Conowingo Dam on the Susquehanna River
PHOTO BY CHESAPEAKE BAY PROGRAM

Supporting Conowingo Partnership

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced in October an award to Chesapeake Conservancy to track, verify, and report implementation of the Conowingo Chesapeake Bay Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) and two-year milestones. The Conservancy is also working with the Center for Watershed Protection, University of Maryland Sea Grant Extension Program, and the Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology to develop the WIP and conduct outreach about the WIP in Pennsylvania and Maryland.

"We appreciate EPA's support of multi-state progress on the Conowingo watershed plan and congratulate the impressive awardees and their partners," said Maryland Governor Larry Hogan. "We all benefit from innovative partnerships to protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay."

"We are excited to partner with some of the leading organizations in the watershed. We have a large challenge ahead, but more importantly a large opportunity to usher in the future of data-driven restoration," said Chesapeake Conservancy Director of Conservation Technology Jeffrey Allenby.

Roving Ranger Update

The Chesapeake Roving Ranger, the mobile visitor information center for the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network and a partnership program between the National Park Service Chesapeake Bay Office and the Chesapeake Conservancy, had a great season. From April through November 2019, the van visited 32 locations and events where the crew interacted with more than 4,800 people in Delaware, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. At a Pennsylvania Canoemobile event, they partnered with the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail staff to help get students on the water to learn about the Susquehanna River's role in the Chesapeake Bay. Over two days, they interacted with about 400 students from Title 1 schools.



NPS and Chesapeake Conservancy partnership staffers Daniel Salomon and Emily Sperling with the Roving Ranger at Sandy Point State Park in Annapolis. PHOTO BY MICHAEL BOWMAN

Conservancy Board & Staff News

Board member **Dr. Mamie A. Parker**, a principal consultant at EcoLogix Group, Inc., and transformational speaker, made history as the first African American elected as the chair of the Board of Commissioners of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF). Former Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe appointed her to the board in 2017. She served as both vice chair and finance committee chair. She is a retired fish and wildlife biologist who rose to the rank of assistant director for the US Fish and Wildlife Service and also served as chief of staff and chief of fisheries.



Board Member Dr. Mamie Parker
PHOTO BY PIERRE BAHIZI



New Chesapeake Conservancy staff (from left to right): Kumar Mainali, Reed Perry, Jessica Elliott, Mary Malloy, and Lisa Spallita PHOTO BY MICHAEL BOWMAN

Congratulations to **Patty Allen** for her promotion to director of administration and to **Louis Keddell** for his promotion to geospatial program manager.

We welcome the following new staff to the Chesapeake Conservancy team: **Kumar Mainali**, geospatial data scientist (see article page 6); **Mary Malloy**, geospatial analyst; **Reed Perry**, government relations specialist; **Lisa Spallitta**, accounting coordinator; and **Jessica Elliott**, Chesapeake Conservation Corps Member. Jessica will be working with Chesapeake Conservation Partnership Program Manager **John Griffin**. We bid a very fond farewell and our heartfelt thanks to **Carolyn Black**, trail partnership associate, who has taken a position with the National Park Service at Colonial National Historical Park.

Progress in Land Conservation

The Chesapeake Conservation Partnership recently released *Marking Milestones: Progress in Conserving Land in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed*, the most comprehensive survey of land conservation and funding in the watershed in a decade. The report showcases the tremendous value of the Chesapeake Bay watershed and the remarkable success stories of people working to protect the land that supports the region's quality of life. The report analyzes data showing that 1,358,456 acres of land throughout the watershed have been permanently protected since a previous report in 2010. This achieves 68 percent of the goal set in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement to protect an additional two million acres by 2025.

Marking Milestones not only reports land conservation progress but also presents a call to action to conserve the approximately 640,000 acres remaining to achieve the 2025 goal, as well as proposes additional goals for 2030 and 2050. The report is available at www.chesapeakeconservation.org.





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The Giving Tree

Thank you to all of our Giving Tree donors who help us grow our programs! Because of your support, Chesapeake Conservancy will be planting more than 27,000 live stakes in Pennsylvania's Susquehanna River watershed this fall and spring. The live stakes—shrub and small tree branches that root readily when planted—will help absorb runoff, protect streambanks from erosion, and provide wildlife habitat. To learn more about this project, please visit chesapeakeconservancy.org/giving-tree.

We'd especially like to thank the following donors for giving \$100 or more to this campaign:

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