

Chesapeake Bay Foundation - Clean Water Action - Environment Maryland - Homebuilders Association of Maryland - Maryland League of Conservation Voters Education Fund - 1000 Friends of Maryland - Partners for Open Space - Patuxent Riverkeeper

PRESS RELEASE

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Marylanders Ask Governor O'Malley, Legislators to Fix State's Environmental Deficit as They Address Budget Deficit

*Polls Show Marylanders Support Funding for Bay Clean-up and Land Conservation;
Environmental Groups Launch Grassroots and Media Campaign to Mobilize Voters*

ANNAPOLIS, MD—Today environmental organizations stepped up their efforts to pass a dedicated funding source for the Chesapeake Bay and protect land conservation programs during the special session with the launch of a new radio spot and a Halloween-themed ad in the *Baltimore Sun*. In preparation for hearings this week, environmental groups are mobilizing tens of thousands of their constituents to contact Governor O'Malley and state legislators to ask for funding for environmental protection. There are no new dollars for Chesapeake Bay clean-up or the environment in Governor O'Malley's revenue proposal, though polling shows a majority of Marylanders support the "Green Fund" and land conservation programs.

The "Maryland is for Hot Dogs?" radio spot that began airing today in the Baltimore and Washington, D.C., media markets can be heard online at: <http://www.marylandconservation.org/issues/marylandisforhotdogs>

Cindy Schwartz, of the Maryland League of Conservation Voters Education Fund, said, "Maryland taxpayers are being asked to make sacrifices — but we sure better be getting something for our investment. In addition to our budget deficit, we also have an environmental deficit that our leaders must address. We cannot leave the environment behind in this debate."

According to a recent poll released by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, 81 percent of registered Maryland voters believe that cleaning up the Chesapeake Bay and its rivers should be a funding priority. Nearly two-thirds said they would be willing to pay an additional \$20 per year to fund programs that improve Maryland's rivers, streams, and the Bay.

"When we talk about Maryland's future and leaving a legacy, we must talk about protecting our natural resources," said Kim Coble, Maryland Executive Director of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

A hearing on the "Green Fund" (HB 23) proposal to reduce pollution and restore healthy, clean water across the state, sponsored by Chairwoman Maggie McIntosh, will be held this Friday, November 2nd, at 11 a.m. in the House Environmental Matters Committee.

A hearing on Governor O'Malley's proposal to close the transfer tax "LLC loophole" (SB 2 / HB 2) will be held today at 1 p.m. in the Joint Hearing Room.

Advocates are watching the state's budget closely to make sure Program Open Space funds are not diverted from land conservation. They support closing the loophole that allows business entities to avoid paying the real estate transfer tax and want to ensure that a portion of those new funds go to supplement the state park operating budget.

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Marcia Verploegen Lewis, of Partners for Open Space, said: “Voters are clear in poll after poll that they support land preservation. Marylanders want these programs fully funded and not diverted.”

Maryland’s Environmental Deficit

- The Chesapeake Bay is in “critical condition” and has a dead zone that can consume as much as 40 percent of the Bay’s volume each year.
- Per the Chesapeake Bay Agreement, Maryland committed to reducing its nitrogen pollution by 2010 but is currently only halfway to meeting its goal.
- This year, hundreds of thousands of fish died in Maryland’s waters, and the blue crab population is at its lowest point since World War II.
- Since 2002, more than \$480 million have been diverted from Program Open Space; park operations have been cut by 46 percent; and staffing at the Maryland Departments of Environment and Natural Resources is at an all-time low.
- Land development is currently outpacing land preservation, resulting in a loss of environmentally important lands and much needed park and recreation areas.
- Current reports identify a shortfall of \$500 million to address existing needs for our hugely popular local parks and recreation facilities.

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