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## Establishing the New Southern Maryland Woodlands National Wildlife Refuge

<b>Application Date</b>	6/3/2024		
<b>Applying Organization</b>	Chesapeake Conservancy	<b>Grant Type</b>	Member Directed
<b>Requested Amount</b>	\$50,000.00	<b>Project Name</b>	Establishing the New Southern Maryland Woodlands National Wildlife Refuge
<b>Contact Name</b>	Allison Anderson	<b>Project Location (State or Territory)</b>	MD
<b>Contact Title</b>	Director of Institutional Giving	<b>Project State/Province</b>	MD
<b>Contact Email Address</b>	aanderson@chesapeakeconservancy.org	<b>Project Multiple Locations</b>	The boundary of the proposed Southern Maryland Woodlands National Wildlife Refuge (SMWNWR) encompasses 577,000 acres across five southern Maryland counties, just south and east of Washington, DC.
<b>Notes</b>		<b>Status</b>	Submitted
		<b>Created By</b>	Allison Anderson, 5/30/2024, 12:26 PM

### Organization Details

<b>Organization Name</b>	Chesapeake Conservancy Inc.	<b>Annual Operating Budget</b>	\$12,691,508.00
<b>Applying Contact</b>	Allison Anderson	<b>Tax Status/Organization Type</b>	501c3 Organization
<b>Staff Size</b>	39	<b>Main Phone</b>	4435690090
<b>Total Membership</b>		<b>Website Address</b>	<a href="https://www.chesapeakeconservancy.org/">https://www.chesapeakeconservancy.org/</a>
<b>BIPOC-led</b>	No	<b>Address</b>	Earl Conservation Center 1212 West Street Annapolis, Maryland 21401 United States
<b>C-Suite Staff</b>			

### Proposal Questions

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| <p><b>1. Purpose/History Of Organization</b></p> <p>We believe the Chesapeake is a national treasure that should be healthy, accessible to everyone, and its watershed a place where people and wildlife thrive. Our mission is to conserve and restore the natural and cultural resources of the Chesapeake Bay</p> | <p><b>2. Final Success</b></p> <p>Success will be the acquisition and donation of the first parcel(s) to establish the Southern Maryland Woodlands National Wildlife Refuge, the first national wildlife refuge established in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed in 26 years.</p> |
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watershed for the enjoyment, education, & 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.

Our objective is to accelerate progress to conserve 30% of the Chesapeake watershed by 2030 by equitably connecting people to the Chesapeake while conserving and restoring priority lands and waters.

We partner with the National Park Service, Environmental Protection Agency's Chesapeake Bay Program, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Bureau of Land Management, US Geological Survey, as well as other federal, state and local agencies, private foundations and corporations.

### 3. Location Details

We are on the verge of something big in Maryland. Our project is to establish the first national wildlife refuge in Maryland since 1962, the first in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed since 1998, and the second largest refuge boundary in the entire Northeast Region. The boundary of the proposed Southern Maryland Woodlands National Wildlife Refuge (SMWNWR) encompasses 577,000 acres across five southern Maryland counties, making it a true landscape level initiative. The proposed boundary includes large unbroken forests important to 20 of Maryland's 22 species of nesting forest-dwelling birds. It is watershed based, providing migration corridors connecting new and existing conserved lands. It incorporates Maryland's Green Infrastructure and Targeted Ecological Areas, tidal and non-tidal wetlands and marsh migration corridors.

The National Wildlife Refuge System's priority conservation targets are: recovery of federally threatened and endangered species, conserving migratory birds of conservation concern, and implementing the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. Federally listed species that occur within the proposed boundary include the endangered dwarf wedgemussel. Cliffs and beaches along the Chesapeake Bay shoreline provide breeding and foraging habitat for the federally threatened Puritan and Northeastern beach tiger beetles. Extensive forests throughout the region provide roosting habitat for the federally threatened long-eared bat. In addition to meeting USFWS priorities for Refuge System growth, connectivity between existing conservation lands will be enhanced, opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependent

### 4. Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

Our strategy and timeline are straightforward. We intend to raise sufficient funds to purchase and donate land to the USFWS that will establish the SMWNWR as soon as the refuge boundary is approved. Chesapeake Conservancy is in discussion with several landowners within the project area to acquire the first lands for the new refuge. The most promising of those discussions has been with a willing seller that owns and manages the Nanjemoy Creek Preserve. While they own the lands within the preserve, they are not protected by easement or deed restriction. The owner has been considering divestment of these lands for some time. We are in discussion with the willing seller for the bargain sale of 307 acres, which would then be donated to USFWS, thereby establishing the refuge.

The SMWNWR proposal is the result of nearly 15 years of planning and analysis. The proposal encompasses a "landscape conservation design," which the USFWS defines as "a partnership-driven process that assesses current and anticipated future biological and socioeconomic conditions, depicts spatially-explicit desired future conditions, and produces a suite of management strategies for achieving those conditions on a landscape scale." The first planning meetings in the early 2010's attracted over 100 partners, and included representatives of local, state, tribal and federal governments.

Once the work of these partners was galvanized into a draft proposal, a stakeholder meeting in 2022 attracted 85 participants to discuss and review the collective body of work. Just prior to

recreational activities will be pursued, and any cultural resources or wetlands found within the refuge will be afforded maximum protection by the USFWS.

If protected, these watersheds will provide resilience to climate change, conserve waterfowl and other migratory bird habitat, aid in the recovery of listed threatened and endangered species and provide nearby outdoor recreational opportunities for the 10 million people who live and work in the Washington-Baltimore metropolitan region.

For all these positives to happen, the SMWNWR must first be “established” which only occurs when the first interest in land is acquired by USFWS. To expedite the laborious USFWS land acquisition process and keep momentum, this project will secure philanthropic support acquiring the first tract of land to establish the refuge and donate it to USFWS.

releasing the proposal for public review and comment, USFWS and Chesapeake Conservancy hosted three public listening sessions that drew an additional 100+ attendees in person and an unknown number viewing on-line. The official public comment period that ended on April 22, 2024, elicited 328 separate emailed written comments, while letters from the American the Beautiful for All Foundation, the Choose Clean Water Coalition, and the Chesapeake Conservation Partnership had multiple signatories from a total of 50 organizations. The comments were overwhelmingly supportive.

Martha Williams, Director of the USFWS, is expected to approve the new refuge boundary by mid-summer 2024. With all the energy and enthusiasm that has contributed to this project over the past 14 years, and especially over the past two years, we must seize the opportunity to establish the SMW NWR while the political will is present.

Recreational and economic impacts are well documented in the USFWS publication *Banking on Nature 2017: The Economic Contributions of National Wildlife Refuge Recreational Visitation to Local Communities*. The following excerpts are taken from the executive summary of that report:

With the 605 units of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS), the USFWS manages public lands in all 50 states and 5 U.S. territories and within an hour's drive of 100 major cities. This varied and abundant network of public lands and waters generates many individual and societal benefits. These include, but are not limited to, fish and wildlife conservation, open space, science and education, water quality improvement and flood resilience. The thriving fish and wildlife populations of the Refuge System also attract millions of recreational users. Some visitors take part in heritage sports such as hunting and fishing (consumptive). Others enjoy hiking, paddling, wildlife viewing or nature photography (non-consumptive). This report focuses on economic contributions associated with recreational visitation. As a result, these are conservative estimates and do not represent the refuge's total social and environmental contributions.

For FY 2017, the National Wildlife Refuge System estimated 53.6 million visitors to national wildlife refuges.

- Trip-related spending by recreational visits generated \$3.2 billion of economic output in local economies.
- As this spending flowed through the economy, it supported over 41,000 jobs

and generated about \$1.1 billion in employment income.

- About 86 percent of total recreation-related expenditures are generated by non-consumptive activities on refuges.
- On average, local visitors accounted for 17 percent of expenditures while visitors traveling more than 50 miles accounted for 83 percent of expenditures.
- Refuge recreational spending generated about \$229 million in tax revenue at the local, county, and state.”

It should be noted that every use on national wildlife refuges must first be determined in writing to be appropriate and compatible with the establishing purposes of the refuge, thereby disallowing uses that would detract from the refuge’s wildlife conservation objectives. Congress has determined that the six priority uses of the Refuge System (environmental education, fishing, hunting, interpretation, photography and wildlife observation) are automatically deemed to be appropriate uses.

#### 5. Key Decision Makers

USFWS - Chesapeake Conservancy has been in close communication and collaboration with USFWS throughout the entire 14-year project development. We have kept them informed of our intent and progress on securing and donating the establishing parcel(s) of land. They are in full support of our efforts.

Landowners - While we believe our partnership with the willing seller of the 307 acres offers the best opportunity to acquire the establishing parcel(s), we are in communication with other landowners within the proposed boundary who we might work with to acquire additional parcels. All the landowners we have approached have been enthusiastic about the refuge and the potential to be a part of making it a reality.

Donors - We are excited about the initial reactions we have received from potential donors.

We have explained that the opportunity to help establish a new refuge in the Chesapeake Bay watershed has not arisen in nearly 3 decades and now that opportunity is upon us. We have also highlighted the need to move quickly while the political momentum is favorable. We have received significant interest by several potential funders to support land acquisition to establish the refuge.

#### 6. Elevate Voices

Chesapeake Conservancy and the USFWS are both core members of the Southern Maryland Conservation Alliance (SMCA) (Southern Maryland Conservation Alliance (actweb.org)), coordinated by the American Chestnut Land Trust. Since 2021, the SMCA has served as “a network of partners who work to conserve and restore Southern Maryland’s landscapes, waterways, and shorelines that are special to its people, fundamental to its economy, reflected in its culture, and vital for its native fish, wildlife, and plants, on which we rely.” They boast over 50 core and affiliate members representing a wide range of interests including land conservation, outdoor recreation, history and culture, soil and water conservation, watershed protection and more. SMCA members were consistently supportive of the new refuge proposal and were instrumental in ensuring favorable public review from grassroots members.

The USFWS Draft proposal (draft-land-protection-plan-and-environmental-assessment-establishment-of-a-new-southern-maryland-woodlands-national-wildlife-refuge.pdf (fws.gov) includes a Park Equity analysis conducted by Maryland Department of Natural Resources. The analysis “is built upon the combination of four data layers, and prioritizes areas in need of park space by the high concentration of children under the age of 17, high concentration of populations below the poverty line, high population density, and low access to public park space. This analysis was developed to provide a quantitative tool

to help expand public access to nature for underserved communities.” The map USFWS shows in their proposal indicates “many communities within the AOI have either medium or high need of additional open recreational space in the form of parkland.”

**7. Measurable On-Ground Outcomes**

- \* USFWS Director approves final boundary
- \* Option Agreement for first parcel(s) executed
- \* Sufficient funds are secured to purchase the parcel(s)
- \* First national wildlife refuge in the Chesapeake Bay \*
- Watershed is established in the last 26 years via donation
- \* Partners gather to celebrate!

**8. Evaluate Your Progress**

Within the proposed 577,000-acre refuge boundary, the USFWS is seeking authority to purchase 40,000 acres from willing sellers in fee or via conservation easements, and will work with partners to conserve more priority areas within and adjacent to the boundary. USFWS acquisition funds will come from the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund. It can easily take 12-18 months to access these funds. To wait that long to establish the refuge risks the loss of momentum and the potential waning of political support, which is now strong.

We will evaluate our success through our ability to raise sufficient funds to purchase and donate land to USFWS prior to September 30, 2024, thereby establishing the refuge. Land currently owned by a willing seller as part of the Nanjemoy Creek Preserve would make an outstanding establishing acquisition and the owner has expressed a strong willingness to partner in this effort.

**9. TCA Funding Plan**

Funding will be pooled with other private donations to complete all phases of acquiring and donating the parcel(s) to establish the new refuge. We are in final discussions with the owner about the amount of an expected bargain sale of 307 acres in four contiguous high-priority parcels. We have secured pledges from donors, one of which includes a match requirement. This increases the value and importance of this TCA member-directed grant. The workflow will include negotiating the bargain sale, environmental site assessment, settlement costs, and related staffing.

**10. JEDI Efforts and Impact**

Chesapeake Conservancy believes innovation in conservation begins with Diversity and Inclusion in perspective and practice. We began intentional DEIJ work in 2019 and created a DEIJ Staff committee. Meeting monthly, the committee conducted an annual staff survey, set goals, led peer-to-peer learning sessions and more. Charter documents and an Organizational DEIJ statement were adopted in December 2019.

Our ongoing commitments include creating welcoming and safe places for people to experience and protect the Chesapeake, land protection of culturally indigenous landscapes, democratizing data for conservation to support transparency and accountability in decision making. Internally, our actions include organizational investments that value an inclusive organizational culture, supporting the learning and growth of staff through workshops/trainings, affinity groups and open conversations integrating DEIJ into organizational goals, hiring, board recruitment, and partnerships.

**11. Confidential Items**

Given the confidential nature of real estate transactions while in negotiations, mentions of an exact location for any parcel or landowner names would not be appropriate at this phase. Highlighting the impressive boundary of the new

**Other Relevant Application Details**

National Wildlife Refuge showing the landscape geography of the project, and that negotiations with willing sellers are progressing well, is hopefully enough information for your member company employees to grasp the significance of our efforts.

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