



## Anne Arundel County and Chesapeake Bay Trust Create a **\$1 million Forest Protection Grant Program** to Encourage Conservation Easements

**Landowners can improve their neighborhoods, protect local streams and be well compensated.  
Scenic Rivers Land Trust stands ready to assist landowner in accessing these funds  
to protect their family land.**

In 2016, County Executive Steve Schuh announced an unprecedented \$1 million investment in forest protection for Anne Arundel County. Scenic Rivers Land Trust (SRLT) is honored to be part of the team that developed this new initiative.

Partnering with the Chesapeake Bay Trust, the county is using existing Forest Conservation Act funds for the innovative grant program to provide landowners with cash incentives to put conservation easements on forested properties or properties appropriate for tree planting. Forest Conservation Act funds come from fee-in-lieu payments from developers when trees must be cut down for development and cannot be replanted onsite.

Fast facts about the program:

- Payments of \$3,000+ per acre
- Landowners still own and enjoy their land
- Assistance provided for forest management
- No public access required
- Land must be placed in a perpetual conservation easement with a qualified land trust
- Reduction in remaining development rights probable

A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust that limits future development on the property in order to protect natural features. The easement requirements are permanent and travel with the deed upon any future sale of the parcel. Each easement is customized for a particular property and to meet the needs of the landowners and the land trust.

Along with this new incentive payment, an easement may qualify landowners for additional income tax deductions, reductions in property tax and lower estate taxes. Landowners will continue to own, manage and enjoy the land under the guidelines outlined in the easement. The incentive payment and tax reductions compensate the landowner for a portion of both forest management expenses and the value lost from relinquishing development rights.

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How the grant program works:

Landowners will partner with nonprofit community organizations to draft grant proposals in response to a Request for Proposals (RFP) issued by the Chesapeake Bay Trust. The first RFP attracted four proposals for over 130 acres and \$400,000. A second RFP is expected to have a mid-summer deadline. Landowners can review program details and RFP announcements at [www.cbtrust.org](http://www.cbtrust.org) or by contacting SRLT.

Landowners will work with a qualified land trust to negotiate a permanent conservation easement that will protect property that is currently in forest or appropriate for the planting of trees. The grant will fund a minimum of \$3,000 per acre for the landowner and will cover expenses for developing and implementing a forest management plan, surveying costs and easement drafting fees. In some cases, higher per acre payments can be negotiated based on a professional appraisal.

Along with protecting existing forests, the program will fund the planting of trees as long as there is an accompanying conservation easement that permanently protects the new forest. There are specific planting standards and a tree maintenance program will be required and funded. Many community organizations and commercial contractors are available to manage the planting.

This program is not complicated, but there are many details. SRLT can help walk landowners through the opportunity and help them decide if it matches their goals for their land. SRLT is happy to answer questions by phone or email. The most effective discussion will be through a walk-and-talk or back porch chat on the property. This program will not fit every property, but there is no obligation for taking advantage of this chance to learn more.

- While there is no specific limit, SRLT believes that this program is best suited to properties of 10 acres or more
- The property review, easement negotiation and grant process may well take 9 to 12 months
- The incentive payments are made directly to the landowner, but some expenses may be funded on a reimbursable basis
- As with any important transactions, landowners will be encouraged to consult with their own attorneys and tax professionals

Again, while there are many details to consider, landowners will be protecting their properties, improving their neighborhoods, and they will be well compensated. Much assistance is available at no cost. A simple conversation can help a landowner quickly decide if this is an opportunity they would like to pursue.

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