



July 6, 2023

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
730 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Sarbanes
2370 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Van Hollen and Representative Sarbanes,

Since our creation in 1919, the non-partisan National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) along with our 1.6 million members and supporters, including over 150,000 in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, has worked to protect and enhance our country's national parks for present and future generations.

On behalf of NPCA, I'm writing to thank you both for your leadership to create the Chesapeake National Recreation Area (CNRA), a new unit of the National Park system in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. As an organization who has worked to protect and establish national park units in iconic American landscapes—from Glacier to the Great Smoky Mountains and Everglades—we believe this legislation holds immense promise for the conservation and enjoyment of the Chesapeake region's nationally significant natural and cultural treasures.

The Chesapeake Bay is a vital ecosystem, rich in biodiversity and steeped in history that stretches back to the early Paleo-Indians over 10,000 years ago. The establishment of a National Recreation Area would provide much-needed recognition within the National Park System and encourage new partnerships between local, state, and federal entities for further protection of Chesapeake Bay shoreline and expanded public access. These resources would offer enhanced recreational opportunities for local community residents and visitors alike, fostering a deeper connection to nature and encouraging sustainable outdoor recreation.

A Chesapeake National Recreation Area would complement existing efforts to enhance the Bay's health and expand public access, such as the Chesapeake Bay Program and Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network. By coordinating management of the National Park Service programs within one unit, this legislation would establish a framework for collaborative stewardship that would make it easier to create partners and provide funding to local and state partners.

The establishment of a Chesapeake National Recreation Area would also have a significant economic impact. National parks and protected areas consistently generate substantial economic activity, supporting local businesses, creating jobs, and attracting tourism revenue. This new, forward-thinking national park unit will focus on

partnerships that will enhance consistent interpretation of the Bay's ecology, Indigenous cultures, and provide resources to educational partners for programming that contributes to the vitality of the entire region.

We support the acquisition of land and land-based resources to establish the Chesapeake National Recreation Area via willing donation, purchase from a willing seller, and/or exchange or transfer from another Federal Agency. We also support the requirements that nothing in this legislation would impact or affect commercial or recreational fishing or enlarge or diminish authority of each State, with respect to fish and wildlife management.

We applaud your leadership, as the process to inform this legislation as been a fantastic model of collaborative, community-driven conservation. We appreciate your transparent approach and willingness to review and listen to the thousands of comments and robust feedback from not only your constituents, but from those who live and work throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

For a generation, voices throughout the watershed have called for a national park unit for the Chesapeake Bay and this legislation represents a crucial step towards achieving this goal. We look forward to working with you on bill introduction and urge other members of Congress to both visit the Chesapeake Bay and support the establishment of the Chesapeake National Recreation Area to further protect the Bay for future generations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Edward Stierli". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "E".

Edward Stierli
Mid-Atlantic Senior Regional Director