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March 13, 2024

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



The Honorable John Sarbanes
U.S. House of Representatives
2370 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Support for the Chesapeake National Recreation Area (S.2620 & H.R. 5045)

Dear Senator Van Hollen and Representative Sarbanes:

Nature Forward is the oldest independent environmental organization in the DC metropolitan region. For 126 years, Nature Forward has inspired residents of the greater Washington, DC, area to appreciate, understand, and protect their natural environment through environmental education, advocacy, and outdoor experiences. In our conservation advocacy we prioritize human health & access to nature, biodiversity & habitats, fighting the climate crisis, and sustainable land use.

On behalf of Nature Forward and our 28,000 members and supporters, we thank you for your leadership to create the Chesapeake National Recreation Area (CNRA), a new unit of the National Park System in the Chesapeake watershed. Nature Forward sees the creation of the CNRA as a benefit for people and the environment. We strongly support the establishment of this new national recreation area, and we look forward to working with you to ensure that the Chesapeake is recognized for its natural and historic significance by inclusion in the National Park System.



When people get to experience the wonder of a unique, massive estuary like the Chesapeake Bay, they are more likely to respect and protect what they can appreciate. The first step in the process of connecting people to nature is having publicly available spaces with access open to everyone of different abilities and backgrounds. We strongly support the goals of the new recreation area to recognize the Chesapeake's national significance, conserve and interpret these resources, expand public access, enhance tourism and local economies, engage watershed communities, promote diversity and equity, improve water quality, and advance the conservation goals of the Chesapeake Bay Program and the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network.

Nature Forward serves and works with people of all ages across Maryland, DC, and Virginia. Within Nature Forward's Conservation Department, we have developed and created a watershed advocacy and educational program across the DMV. With the additional access created through this legislation, our members and supporters can expand their environmental exploration beyond just their watershed to connect with people and nature in the core of the Bay watershed.

We endorse the acquisition of land and land-based resources via willing donation, purchase from a willing seller, and/or exchange or transfer from another Federal Agency. And we support the requirements that nothing in the Act would impact or affect commercial or recreational fishing or enlarge or diminish the jurisdiction of each State, with respect to fish and wildlife management.

Establishing the CNRA will allow all stories of the watershed, its citizens, and its history to be shared with visitors from across the world. The creation of the CNRA will enhance public understanding of the Bay at participating National Park Service sites and partner sites to tell the story of the outstanding, remarkable, and nationally significant resources of the Bay watershed.



Thank you once again for introducing the Chesapeake National Recreation Area Act, S.2620 and H.R. 5045. We look forward to working with you to ensure final passage in the Congress to establish this new national recreation area in the Chesapeake.

Sincerely,

Lydia Lawrence

Conservation Director

Nature Forward

Denisse Guitarra

MD Conservation Advocate

Nature Forward

