



St Mary's County

Land Preservation, Parks, and Recreation Plan 2027

Draft



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1.0 Land Preservation, Parks, and Recreation Plan (LPPRP) Introduction

The St. Mary's County (County) LPPRP is the County's five-year planning document for public parks and recreation, natural resource land conservation, and agricultural land preservation. The 2027 update builds on the County's 2022 LPPRP while responding to the State of Maryland's updated 2027 LPPRP guidelines, which require each County and Baltimore City to provide baseline information about local geography, population and demographics, the public parks and recreation system, preserved natural resource lands, and agricultural preservation efforts.

The LPPRP serves several important purposes for St. Mary's County. It provides a current snapshot of recreation facilities, preserved lands, community needs, and long-term priorities. Additionally, the LPPRP encourages and supports coordination among the departments of Recreation and Parks, Land Use and Growth Management, Economic Development, agricultural preservation partners, and other County departments. Finally, LPPRP establishes a framework for future investment in parks, recreation facilities, open space, natural resources, and working agricultural landscapes. The plan also supports the County's continued eligibility to participate in Maryland Program Open Space, which provides funding for parkland acquisition and public recreation facility development.

1.1 Planning Context and Relationship to the 2022 LPPRP

The 2022 LPPRP identified the County's parks, recreation, natural resource conservation, and agricultural land preservation priorities and served as the County's master plan for park acquisition, facility development, recreation program needs, and open space protection. The 2027 update continues that role while reflecting changes in population, community preferences, recreation participation, facility needs, conservation priorities, and state planning requirements since the prior plan was prepared.

As required by the 2027 LPPRP guidelines, this update organizes the plan around three primary elements: Parks and Recreation, Natural Resource Land Conservation, and Agricultural Land Preservation. The Parks and Recreation element is a major focus of the St. Mary's County 2027 LPPRP and includes an overview of the system, measurement of user demand, level of service (LOS) analysis, goals, implementing programs and funding sources, and the capital improvement program (CIP). The Natural Resource Land Conservation element addresses protected lands, conservation goals, implementing ordinances and programs, and deficiencies and recommendations. The Agricultural Land Preservation Element Documents local preservation goals, acreage totals, program coordination, and related recommendations.

1.2 County Setting

St. Mary's County is located in Southern Maryland on a peninsula bordered by the Patuxent River, the Potomac River, and the Chesapeake Bay. The County's shoreline, rural landscapes, villages, waterfront communities, historic resources, farms, forests, and natural areas are

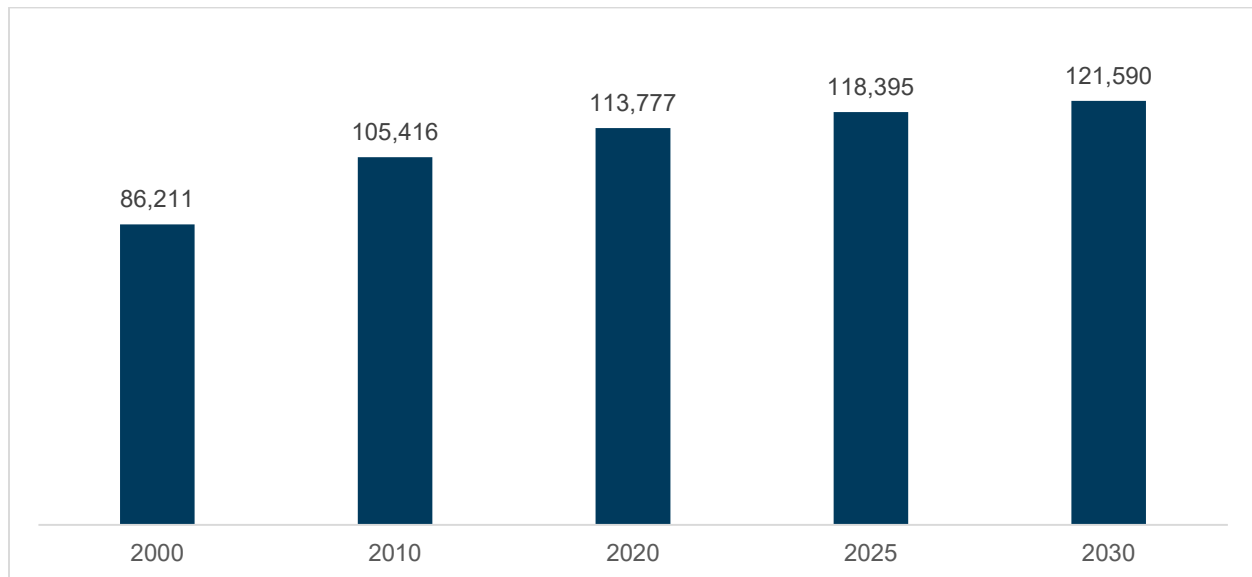
defining elements of local identity and quality of life. The Town of Leonardtown is the County's only incorporated municipality and serves as an important civic, cultural, and service center within the broader countywide planning context.

The County encompasses approximately 359 square miles and includes more than 500 miles of shoreline, creating significant opportunities and responsibilities related to water access, shoreline recreation, natural resource stewardship, resiliency, and habitat protection. The County's geography also creates a distinctive service delivery environment for Parks and Recreation, with community needs distributed across rural areas, waterfront communities, growth areas, and established population centers.

1.3 Population and Demographic Overview

The County has experienced steady population growth over the past two decades, increasing from 86,211 residents in 2000 to 113,777 residents in 2020. The County's population is projected to continue growing, reaching approximately 121,590 residents by 2030. This growth reinforces the need to monitor park access, facility capacity, program demand, and land preservation priorities as the County plans for future service needs.

Figure 1: Population Change (2000 – 2030)



The County's median age of approximately 37.9 reflects a balanced population profile, with youth and working-age adults representing significant portions of the community and older adult populations expected to increase over the next several years.

Table 1: Age Growth Expected (2025 – 2030)

Age by Category	Percent Change 2025 – 2030
Senior (75+ years)	1.1%
Adult (35 – 54 years)	0.8%

Age by Category	Percent Change 2025 – 2030
Young Adult (20 – 34 years)	-0.2%
Older Adult (55 – 74 years)	-0.5%
Youth (0 – 19 years)	-1.2%

Household income levels exceed state and national averages, while a portion of households continue to experience economic constraints. The County has also become more diverse over time, including growth in Hispanic residents and residents identifying as two or more races.

Figure 2: Median Household Income (2025)

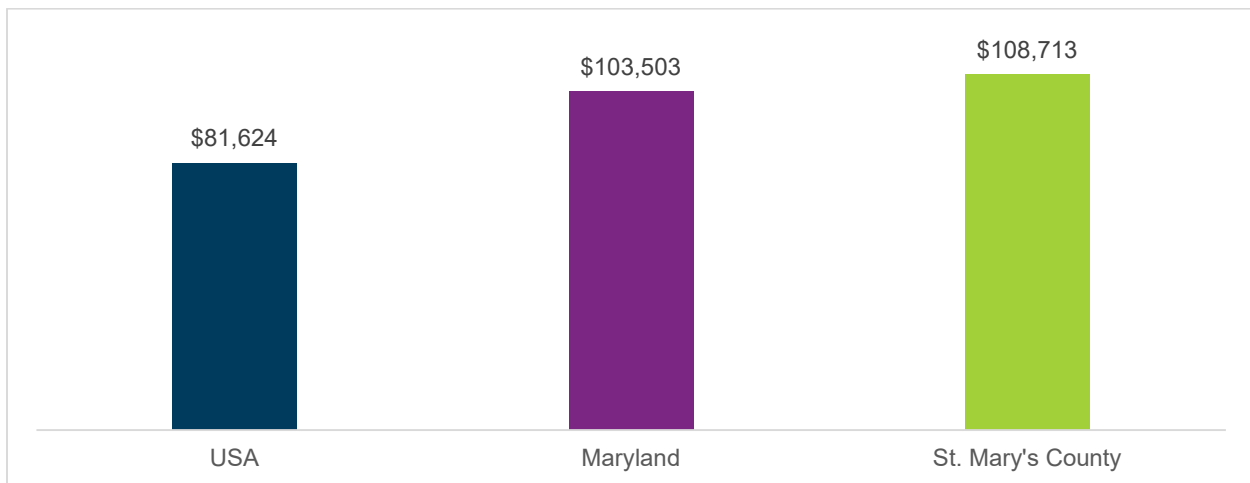


Figure 3: Racial Diversity (2010 – 2030)

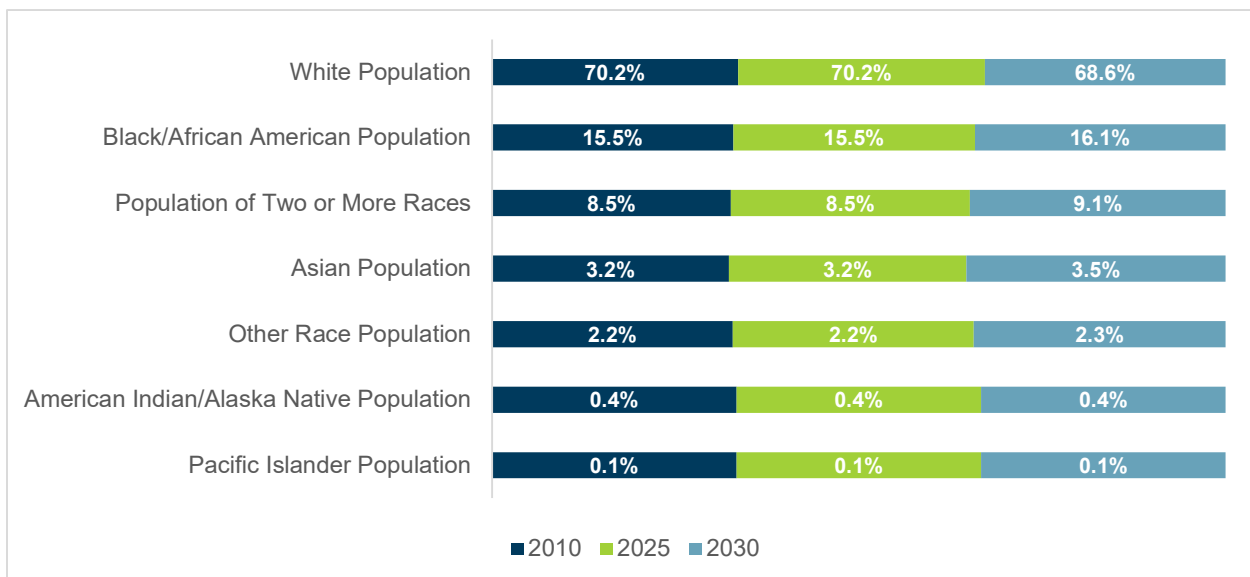
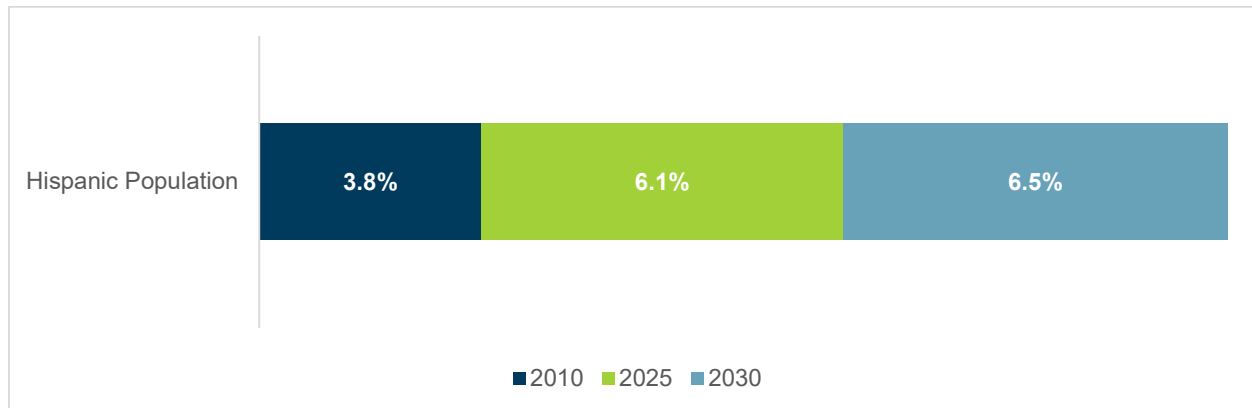


Figure 4: Hispanic Ethnicity Diversity (2010 – 2030)



St. Mary's County is also home to a notable Amish community. According to 2025 estimates compiled by the Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies at Elizabethtown College, the St. Mary's/Charles County Amish settlement is the largest in Maryland, consisting of approximately 11 districts and an estimated population of 1,620 residents. The community represents a distinct cultural presence within the County and contributes to the area's diverse population profile.¹

These demographic patterns support the need for parks, recreation facilities, programs, trails, water access, and preserved open spaces that are inclusive, accessible, geographically distributed, and responsive to residents of different ages, abilities, interests, and income levels.

1.4 Overview of the Parks, Recreation, and Preservation System

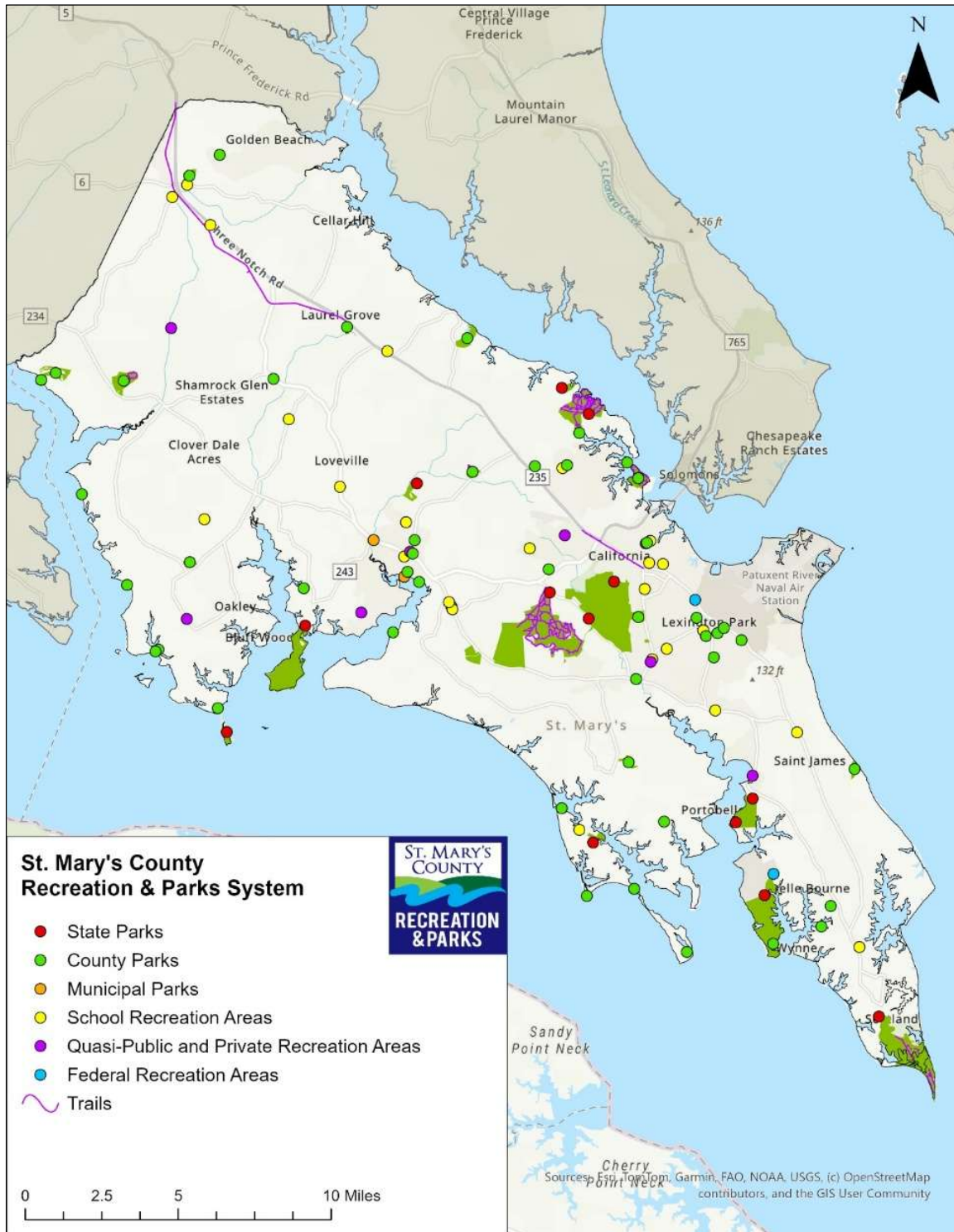
St. Mary's County Recreation and Parks provides public parks, recreation facilities, programs, museums, athletic facilities, special events, and community services that contribute to health, wellness, economic activity, environmental stewardship, and quality of life. The County's park system includes approximately 25 parks encompassing roughly 2,763 acres, along with public buildings, athletic fields, trails, water access locations, playgrounds, natural areas, and other community recreation assets. These facilities are supported by a combination of County staff, seasonal and part-time employees, partnerships, user fees, grants, and capital investments.

In addition to public Parks and Recreation facilities, St. Mary's County includes important natural resource lands and agricultural landscapes that support ecological health, scenic character, heritage, outdoor recreation, water quality, habitat protection, and the local economy. The County's agricultural land preservation program is certified by the Maryland Department of Planning and the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation, allowing locally

¹ Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies at Elizabethtown College. 2025. "Amish Population in the United States by State, County, and Settlement, 2025." Accessed May 6, 2026. <https://groups.etown.edu/amishstudies/statistics/amish-population-2025/>

maintained certification data and narratives to inform the agricultural land preservation element of this LPPRP.

Figure 5: St. Mary's County Recreation and Parks System



1.5 Planning Process and Community Input

The 2027 LPPRP planning process combines review of existing County plans and policies, analysis of demographic and recreation trends, inventory and mapping of parks and preserved lands, benchmarking against peer systems, staff and stakeholder coordination, community engagement, and review by County boards and decision-makers. Online engagement conducted from April through July 2026 provided residents with multiple ways to share feedback, including a survey, budget prioritization tool, interactive map, and ideas wall. The engagement site attracted 2,021 unique visitors and generated 576 contributions from 294 contributors.

In addition to online engagement, the 2027 LPPRP planning process also included a series of on-site engagement activities from June 4 to 6, 2026, including community meetings, stakeholder discussions, advisory committee sessions, library outreach events, and community engagement activities. Collectively, these efforts provided residents and community partners with multiple opportunities to share perspectives regarding parks, recreation services, natural resource conservation, and future community priorities. Feedback consistently highlighted strong appreciation for the County's parks, waterfront resources, trails, open spaces, historic assets, and recreation programming, all of which were identified as important contributors to quality of life and community character.

During the summer of 2026, ETC Institute mailed a survey packet to a random sample of households in St. Mary's. Each survey packet contained a cover letter, a copy of the survey, and a postage-paid return envelope. After the surveys were mailed, ETC Institute followed up with respondents to encourage participation. If respondents did not want to return the survey by mail, they were given the option to complete it online.

The goal was to collect a minimum of 400 surveys from randomly selected households. The goal was met with 444 surveys collected. The overall results for the sample of 444 surveys have a precision of at least +/- 4.6 at the 95% level of confidence.

Community feedback emphasized maintaining and improving existing Parks and Recreation facilities; expanding trails, water access, parks, and outdoor recreation opportunities; increasing indoor recreation options; addressing athletic field capacity and access; expanding recreation programs and services; and promoting equitable access across the County while continuing to preserve natural resources and community character. These themes provide an important foundation for the goals, strategies, and recommendations presented in later sections of this plan.

2.0 Parks and Recreation

2.1 Executive Summary and Overview of the Parks and Recreation System

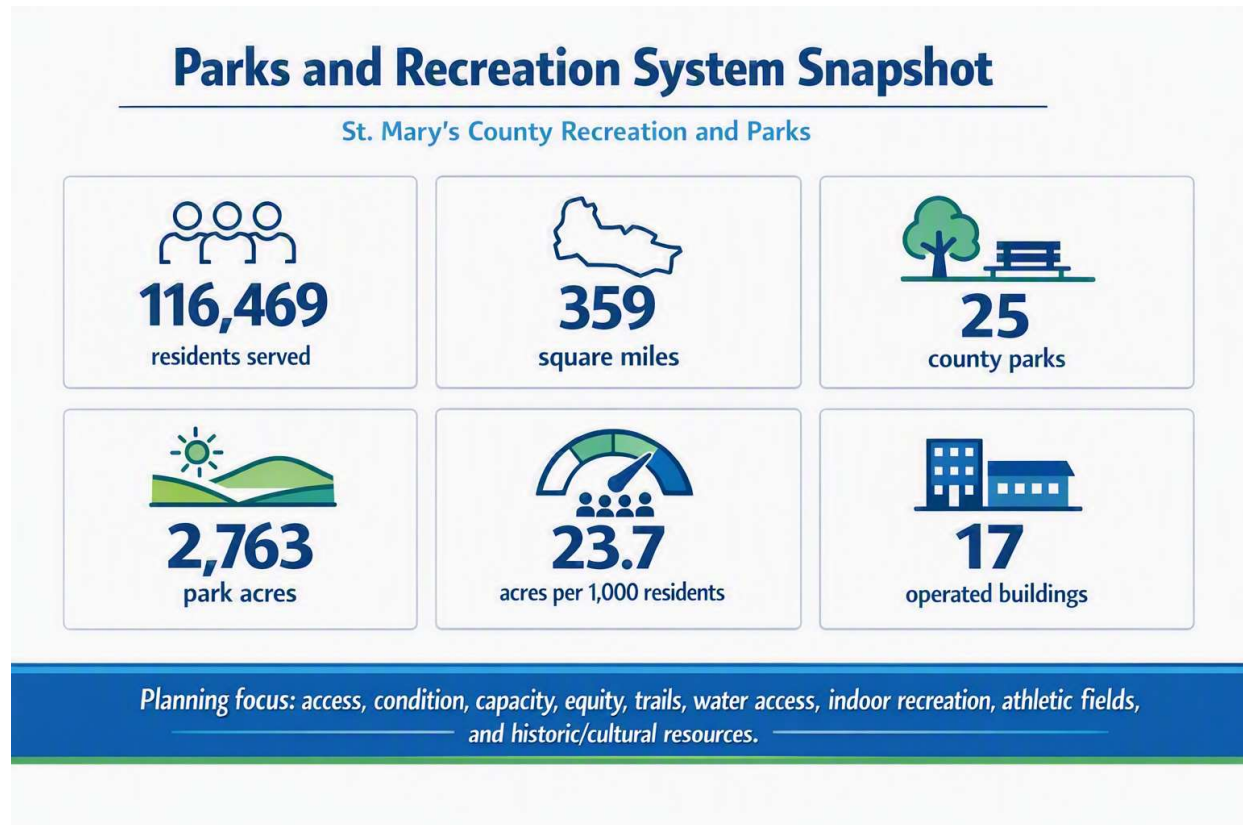
St. Mary's County Recreation and Parks provide a broad system of public parks, recreation facilities, programs, museums, athletic fields, trails, water access locations, special events, and community services that support quality of life for residents and visitors. The system contributes to public health, community connection, environmental stewardship, tourism, and local economic activity by providing places for physical activity, social gathering, youth development, lifelong learning, outdoor recreation, cultural interpretation, and access to the County's waterfront and natural resources.

The 2027 LPPRP builds on the 2022 LPPRP by updating the County's understanding of Parks and Recreation needs in light of population growth, changing recreation trends, public engagement findings, benchmarking, facility inventory information, and the State of Maryland's updated 2027 LPPRP Guidelines. Since the prior LPPRP, the County has continued to maintain a diverse recreation system while also facing ongoing challenges related to aging assets, geographic access, indoor recreation capacity, trail and water access demand, athletic field availability, and the need to balance new investment with maintenance of existing facilities.

St. Mary's County maintains a broad network of Parks and Recreation properties that support active recreation, outdoor recreation, water access, cultural experiences, and community use. The County system includes regional, community, and neighborhood parks, as well as public landings, recreation facilities, trails, natural resource areas, museums, and other specialized recreation properties.

Figure 6 summarizes the core system metrics used as the starting point for the Parks and Recreation analysis. These figures establish the County's current service population, land base, park acreage, building inventory, and primary access considerations. Together, they demonstrate that St. Mary's County has a substantial public recreation land base but that future planning should focus on how well the system serves residents by location, facility type, condition, capacity, and accessibility.

Figure 6: Parks and Recreation System Snapshot Infographic



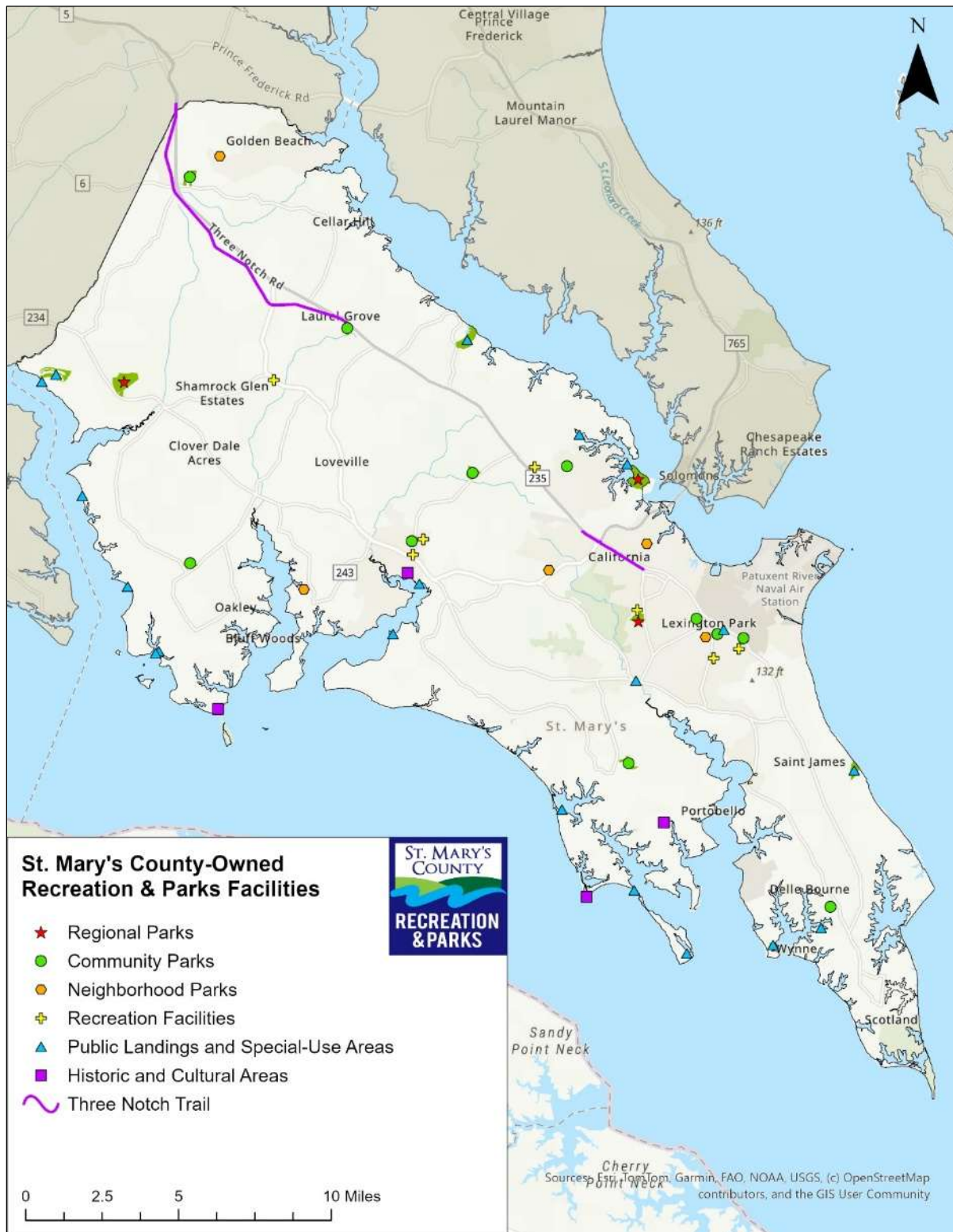
The system snapshot reinforces the need for a balanced approach to investment. Park acreage per resident is an important indicator, but it does not fully describe whether residents can conveniently reach the types of facilities they need. For this reason, the remainder of this section evaluates the system through community demand, peer benchmarking, LOS mapping, asset condition, and capital planning priorities.

2.2 Overview of Parks and Recreation Facilities

The County's Parks and Recreation system include regional parks, community parks, neighborhood-scale facilities, athletic complexes, trails, waterfront access sites, playgrounds, indoor recreation spaces, historic and cultural facilities, golf, and other specialized recreation assets. These resources collectively support organized sports, informal recreation, fitness, nature-based recreation, water access, cultural programming, tourism, and community events.

Major recreation assets include parks and facilities such as Chancellors Run Regional Park, Dorsey Park, the Three Notch Trail, the Wellness and Aquatics Center, Wicomico Shores Golf Course, Leonard Hall Recreation Center, Fifth District Park, Chaptico Park, Baggett Park, and other parks and community facilities distributed throughout the County. The system also includes museums and cultural resources that contribute to education, heritage tourism, and community identity.

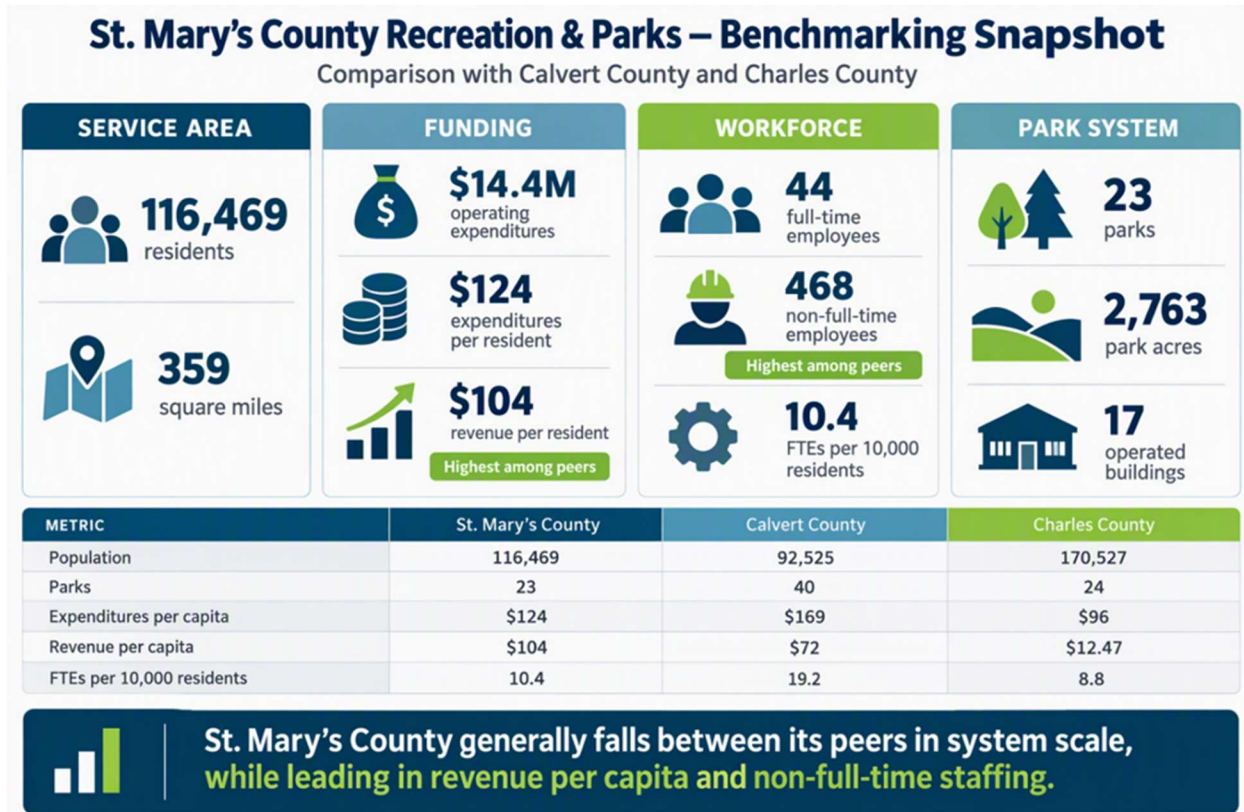
Figure 7: St. Mary's County-Owned Recreation and Parks Facilities



2.3 Benchmarking

Benchmarking provides additional context for understanding St. Mary's County's Parks and Recreation system relative to nearby peer counties. Figure 8 compares selected operating, staffing, acreage, revenue, and facility indicators for St. Mary's County, Calvert County, and Charles County. This comparison aims to identify relative strengths, constraints, and service delivery patterns that could inform future investment and staffing decisions.

Figure 8: St. Mary's County Recreation and Parks Benchmarking Snapshot



The benchmarking results suggest that St. Mary's County operates a sizeable park acreage base with comparatively strong revenue generation while relying on fewer full-time employees and a larger non-full-time workforce than the benchmark systems. This staffing and operating pattern should be considered when evaluating future program expansion, facility maintenance expectations, athletic field needs, and the operational impacts of new capital projects.

2.4 Measuring User Demand

User demand for Parks and Recreation was measured through multiple sources, including online engagement, community survey responses, interactive mapping, budget prioritization, ideas wall comments, staff and stakeholder input, demographic and recreation trend analysis, benchmarking, and review of existing County plans and facility information. This multi-source

approach helps identify which facilities and programs residents value as well as where access, capacity, awareness, timing, and affordability might affect participation.

2.4.1 Online Engagement

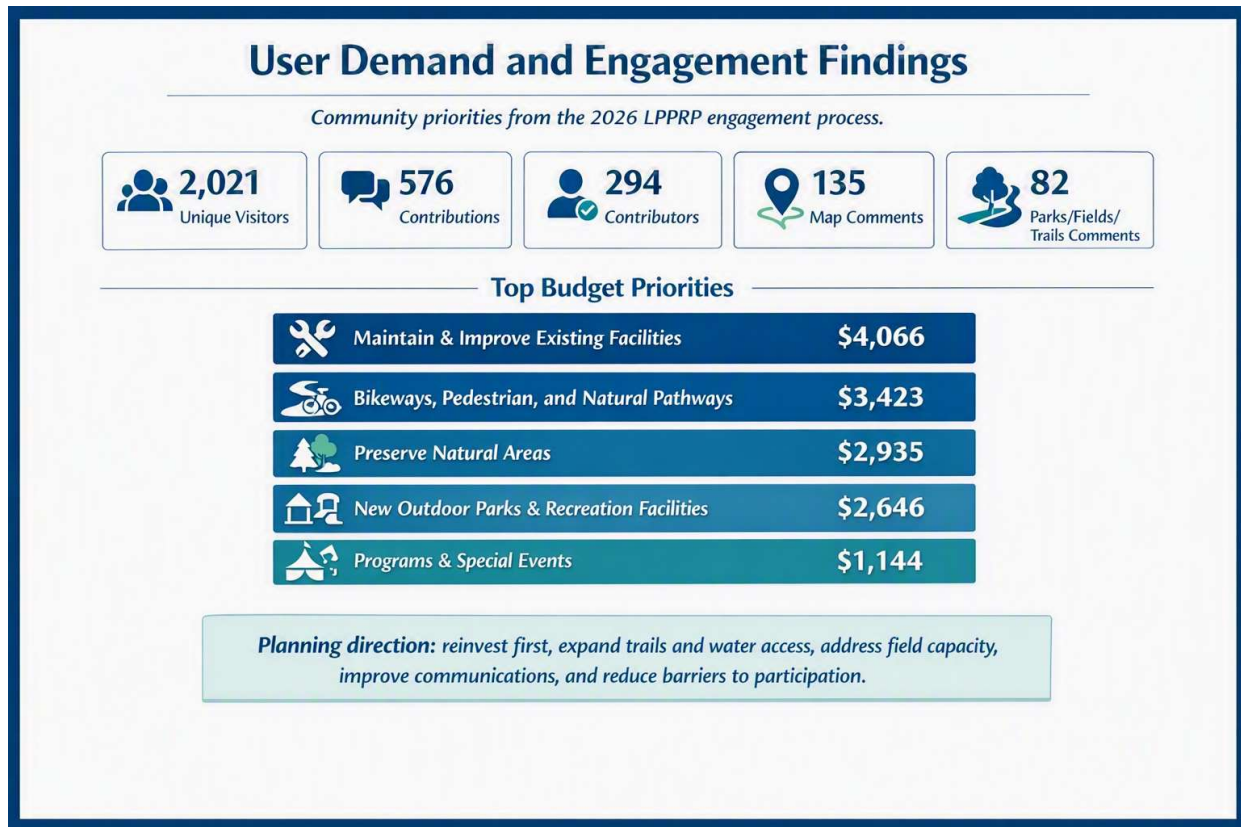
The 2026 online engagement process attracted 2,021 unique visitors and generated 576 contributions from 294 contributors. Participants provided feedback through a survey, budget prioritization tool, interactive map, and ideas wall. Engagement findings emphasized maintaining and improving existing Parks and Recreation facilities; expanding trails, bikeways, pedestrian and natural pathways; preserving natural areas; adding new outdoor recreation facilities; improving athletic field capacity and access; expanding water access; increasing indoor recreation opportunities; and broadening recreation programs and services for different ages and abilities.

Survey respondents generally rated Recreation and Parks facilities, spaces, and programs positively, with affordability, cleanliness, proximity, and maintenance receiving strong ratings. However, respondents also identified barriers to participation, including lack of information or awareness, lack of time, lack of options, proximity, affordability, accessibility, transportation, scheduling conflicts, program capacity, field availability, and the need for more evening and weekend opportunities.

Budget prioritization results showed the strongest support for improving and maintaining existing Parks and Recreation facilities, followed by adding bikeways and pedestrian or natural pathways, preserving natural areas, adding new outdoor Parks and Recreation facilities, and enhancing programs and special events. Water access preferences placed the greatest priority on kayak and canoe access, splash pads or swimming pools, and beach swimming. Ideas wall and interactive map comments reinforced demand for trails, athletic fields, indoor recreation, aquatics, water access, shade, restrooms, lighting, accessibility, parking, and improved maintenance.

Figure 10 consolidates the major themes from the public engagement process and translates them into planning implications. The findings are organized by input source so that survey results, budget priorities, interactive map comments, and open-ended feedback can be considered together. This approach helps connect public preferences directly to the plan's goals, LOS analysis, and capital improvement framework.

Figure 9: User Demand and Engagement Findings Infographic



Taken together, the online engagement findings indicate that residents place the greatest priority on maintaining and improving the existing system while also expanding access to trails, natural areas, outdoor recreation, water access, and indoor recreation opportunities. The findings also show that barriers to participation are not limited to facility availability; communication, affordability, transportation, scheduling, accessibility, and capacity all influence how residents use the system.

2.4.2 Public Meetings

To support the update of the LPPRP, a series of on-site engagement activities were held from June 4 to 6, 2026. As summarized in Table 3, the engagement process included community engagement sessions, stakeholder meetings, advisory committee discussions, library outreach events, and community outreach activities throughout the County. These activities provided residents, community organizations, and local partners with multiple opportunities to share their perspectives on the County's parks, recreation system, natural resources, and future priorities. Interactive polling and comment cards were also used throughout the engagement process to gather additional feedback and encourage participation from a broad cross section of the community.

The on-site engagement process generated valuable discussion regarding the strengths of the County's Parks and Recreation system, opportunities for future investment, and the importance

of balancing recreation, conservation, and growth. While participants represented a variety of interests and backgrounds, several consistent themes emerged across engagement activities. The following sections summarize key findings from the engagement process and highlight recurring themes that will help inform recommendations within the updated LPPRP.

Table 2: On-Site Engagement Schedule

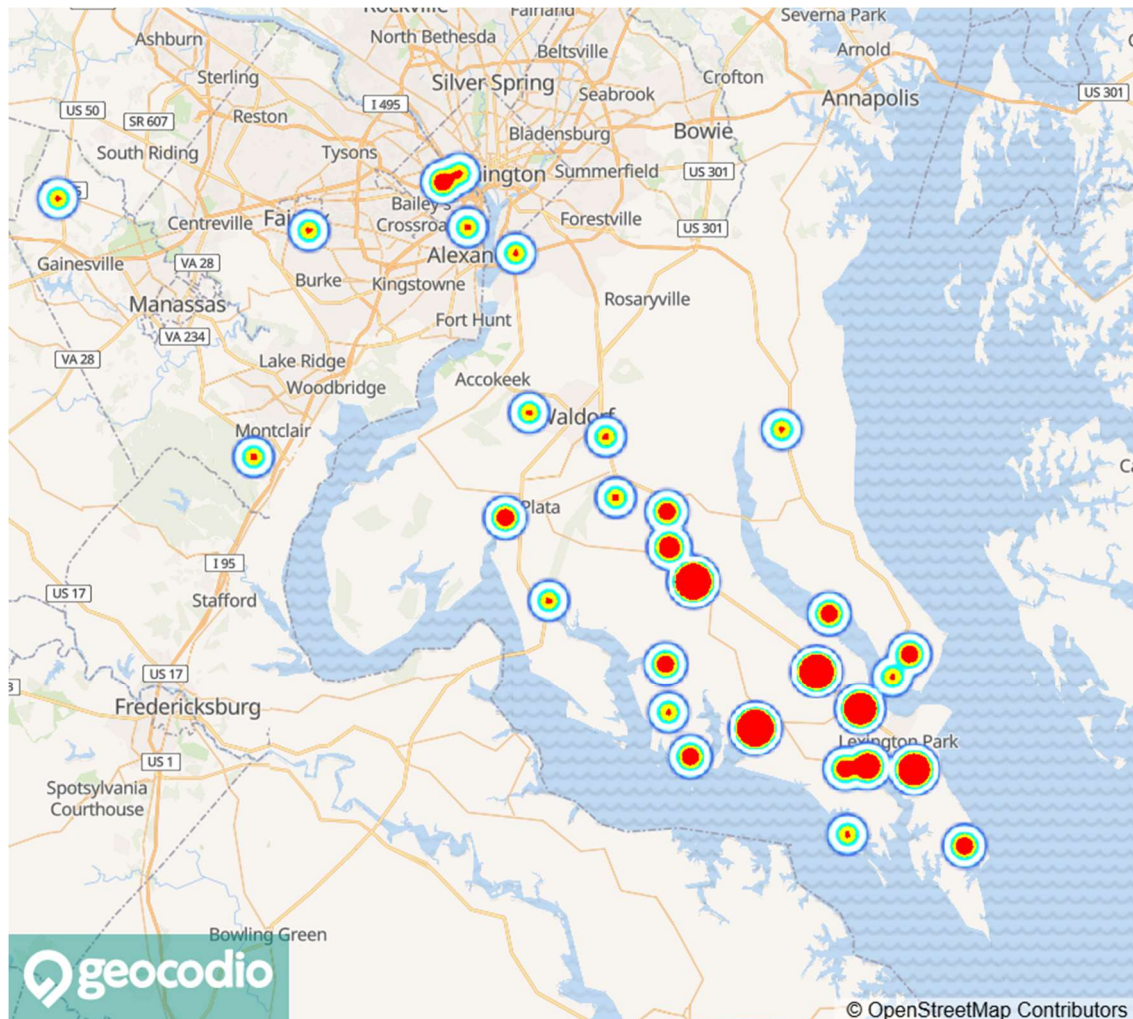
Date	Time	Activity	Location
June 4, 2026	9:30 – 11:00 a.m.	Community Engagement Session	Gymnastics Academy
	12:00 – 1:00 p.m.	Stakeholder Meeting	Gymnastics Academy
	1:30 – 2:30 p.m.	Stakeholder Meeting	Gymnastics Academy
	5:30 – 6:30 p.m.	LPPRP Overview Presentation	Recreation & Parks Advisory Board Meeting
June 5, 2026	9:30 – 11:00 a.m.	Community Engagement Session	Charlotte Hall Library
	12:00 – 1:30 p.m.	Community Engagement Session	Leonardtown Library
	2:00 – 3:00 p.m.	Stakeholder Meeting	Leonardtown Library
	3:00 – 4:00 p.m.	Stakeholder Meeting	Leonardtown Library
	5:00 – 7:00 p.m.	Community Engagement Session	Old Jail Museum & First Friday Event
June 6, 2026	7:30 – 9:00 a.m.	Community Outreach	Wicomico Shores Golf Course
	9:15 – 10:15 a.m.	Community Engagement Session	Wicomico Shores Golf Course
	10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.	Community Outreach	Charlotte Hall Farmers Market
	1:00 – 2:30 p.m.	Community Outreach	Snow Hill Park & Beach

2.4.3 Comment Cards

During on-site engagement activities, participants were invited to complete comment cards to provide additional feedback regarding the importance of Parks and Recreation, barriers to participation, and future recreation priorities. Responses complemented discussions held throughout the engagement process and provided additional insight into community preferences. The following figures summarize responses received through the comment cards.

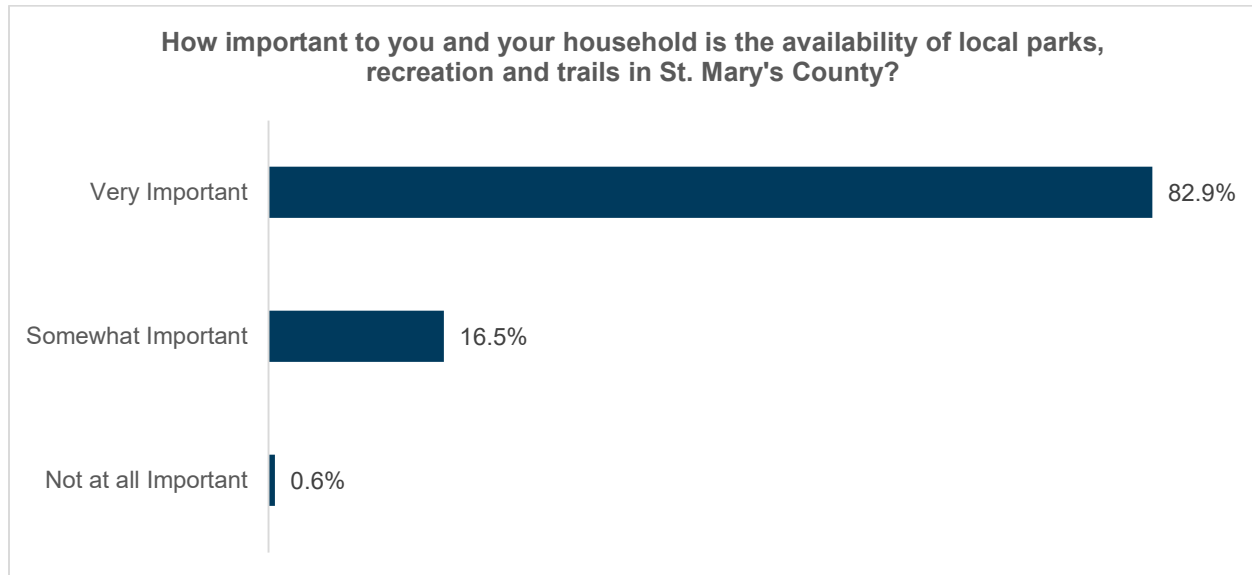
The geographic distribution of comment card responses indicates that participants represented communities throughout St. Mary's County, with responses received from both northern and southern portions of the County. A smaller number of responses were also submitted by

Figure 10: Comment Card ZIP Code Engagement Map



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Figure 11: Comment Card Question – How important to you and your household is the availability of local parks, recreation and trails in St. Mary's County?



2.4.4 Leadership and Stakeholder Interviews

Leadership interviews and 360-style input conducted in April 2026, as part of the St. Mary's County Recreation & Parks LPPRP update. A summary of key themes was provided, rather than by individual respondents, to support elected official review, senior leadership discussion, and plan alignment. Findings were grounded directly in the draft document as well as shared priorities and strategic implications.

Figure 12: Leadership and Stakeholder Interview Key Themes Infographic



2.4.5 Survey

ETC Institute administered a community survey to St. Mary's County during summer 2026. The results from the survey will help determine parks, facilities, and recreation priorities for the community. A survey packet was mailed to a random sample of households in St. Mary's. Each survey packet contained a cover letter, a copy of the survey, and a postage-paid return envelope. After the surveys were mailed, ETC Institute followed up with respondents to encourage participation. If respondents did not want to return the survey by mail, they were given the option to complete it online.

The goal was to collect a minimum of 400 surveys from randomly selected households. The goal was met with 444 surveys collected. The overall results for the sample of 444 surveys have a precision of at least +/- 4.6 at the 95% level of confidence.

2.4.5.1 Major Findings

Use of Facilities. Most respondents (89%) visit parks offered by St. Mary's County during a typical year, with 37% indicating that they visit parks weekly. Eighty-seven percent of respondents rated the physical condition of the St. Mary's parks they have visited as either "excellent" (24%) or "good" (63%). Respondents indicated that the most common barriers to visiting parks and facilities offered by St. Mary's County were:

- Lack of time to visit parks or facilities (33%)
- Not aware of parks or facilities (25%)

- Parks or facilities lack amenities they want (21%)

Program Participation. Forty-five percent of respondents indicated that they have participated in recreational programs offered by St. Mary's County, with 84% rating the overall quality of the programs they have participated in as either "excellent" (31%) or "good" (53%). The most common barriers respondents selected were:

- Not aware of programs offered (44%)
- Lack of time to participate in programs (32%)
- Classes are full (21%)

Transportation to Facilities. Respondents were given a list of facility types and asked to indicate the ways they would be willing to travel to each facility. For each facility, most respondents indicated they would prefer to take a car, with walking receiving the second highest number of selections for each facility.

Agreement with Statements. Respondents were given a list of statements related to Parks and Recreation in St. Mary's County and asked to rate their level of agreement with each of the statements. The most agreed with statements, based on "strongly agree" and "agree" percentages, were:

- "Parks and recreation services improve the overall quality of life in St. Mary's County" (79%)
- "I live within a reasonable distance of a park, trail, or recreation facility" (77%)
- "I feel welcome and included when using St. Mary's County parks, recreation facilities or programs" (74%)

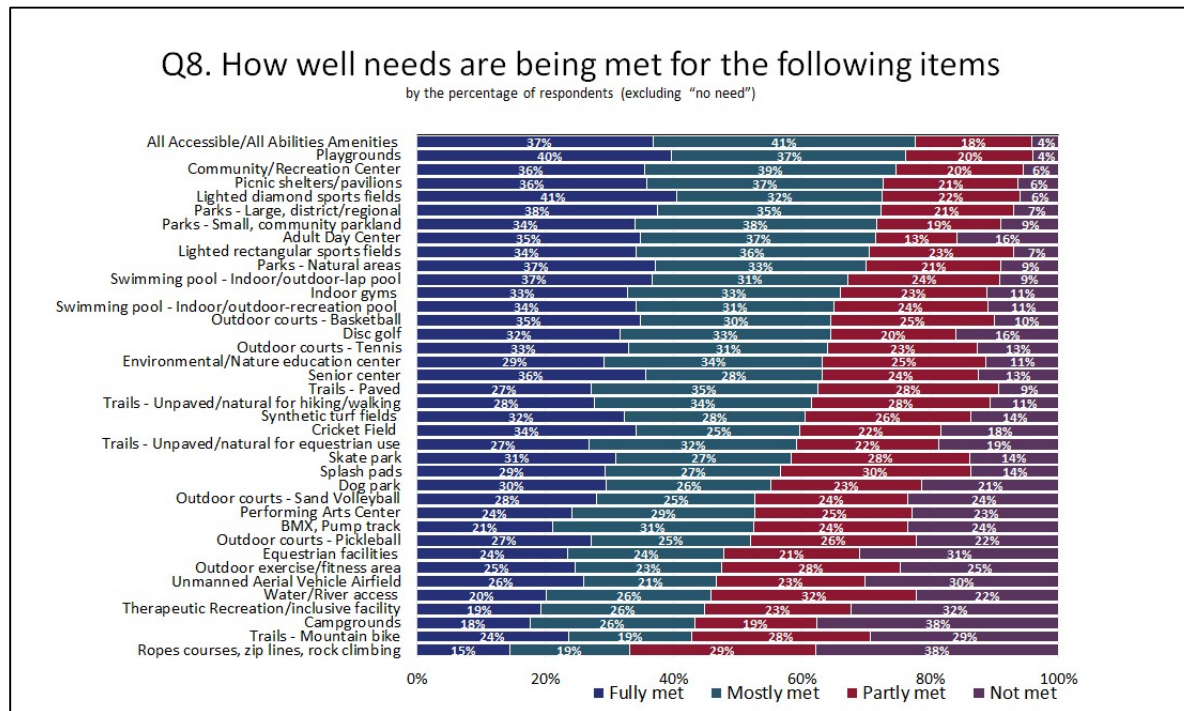
2.4.5.2 Recreation Facility and Amenity Needs and Priorities

Facility/Amenity Needs: Respondents were asked whether their household needed any of 36 different facilities or amenities and how well those needs are currently being met. Using their responses, ETC Institute estimated how effectively each person's needs for these facilities and amenities are being satisfied.

The following four amenities were identified as meeting needs either fully or mostly:

1. Sports fields, diamonds
2. Playgrounds
3. Sport fields, rectangular
4. Disc golf

Figure 13: Q8. How well needs are being met for the following items:



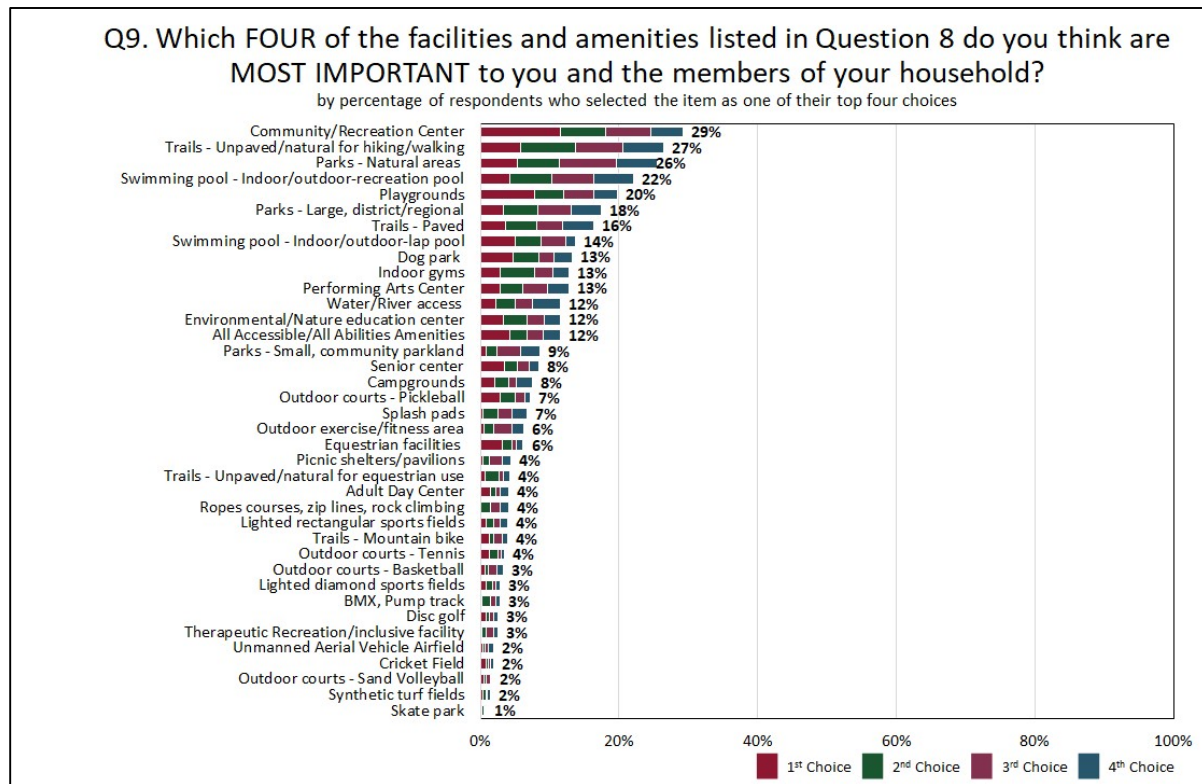
The percentage of how well each amenity needs are being met is shown in the chart above.

Facility/Amenity Importance: In addition to assessing the needs for each amenity, ETC Institute also assessed the importance respondents placed on each item. Based on the sum of respondents' top four choices, these were the four amenities ranked most important to residents:

1. Nature areas and wildlife habitats
2. Natural-surface trails
3. Fishing/Crabbing piers
4. Multi-paved trails

The percentage of respondents who selected each amenity as one of their top four choices is shown in the chart below.

Figure 14: Q9 Which FOUR of the facilities and amenities listed in Question 8 do you think are MOST IMPORTANT to you and the members of your household?



2.4.5.3 Priorities for Facility Investments

The **Priority Investment Rating (PIR)** was developed by ETC Institute to provide governments with an objective tool for evaluating the priority that should be placed on parks and recreation investments. The PIR was developed by ETC Institute to identify the facilities and programs residents think should receive the highest priority for investment. The PIR reflects the importance residents place on items (sum of top four choices) and the unmet needs (needs that are only being partly met or not met) for each facility/program relative to the facility/program that rated the highest overall.

(Unmet Needs Rating) + (Importance Rating) = PIR

[Details regarding the methodology for this analysis are provided in Section 2 of this report.]

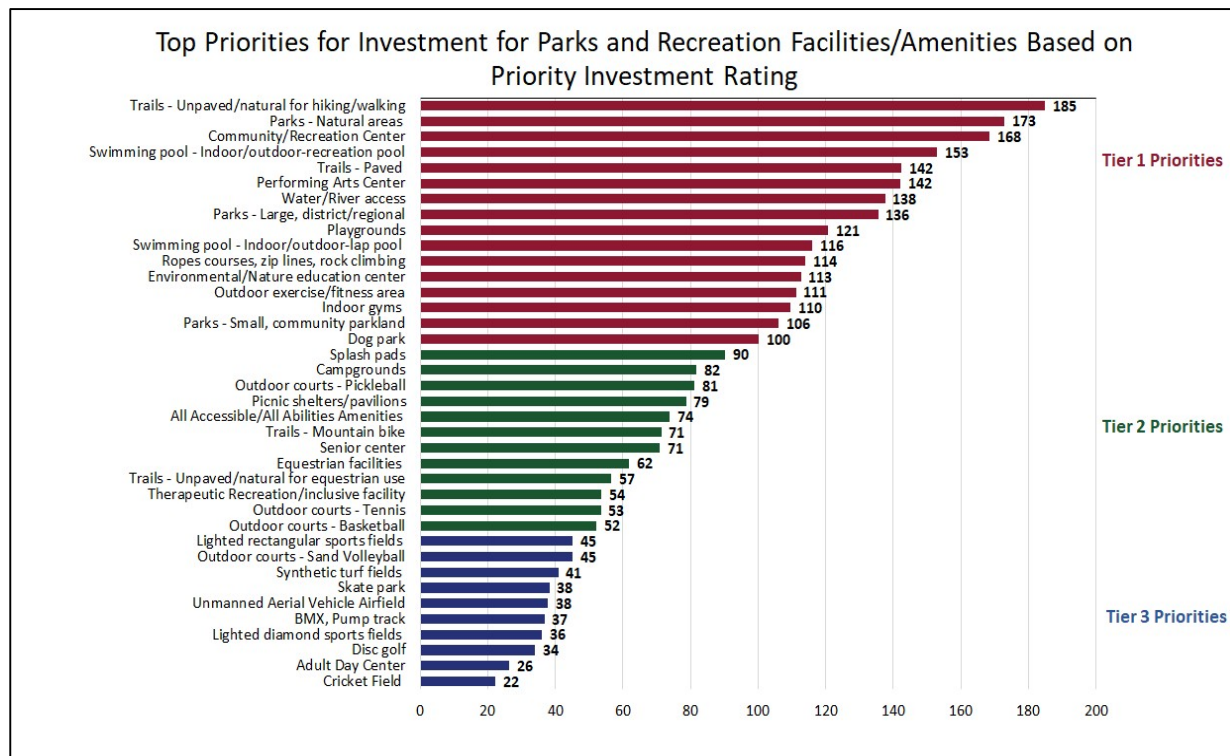
Based on the PIR, the following amenities were rated as Tier 1 priorities for investments:

- Natural areas and wildlife habitats (PIR=175)
- Miniature golf (PIR=164)

- Swimming pools (PIR=162)
- Natural-surface trails (PIR=162)
- Multi-use paved trails (PIR=161)
- Ice skating rink (PIR=142)
- Fishing/Crabbing piers (PIR=134)
- Water activities (PIR=132)
- Public access to water (PIR=128)
- Community gardens (PIR=127)
- Fitness equipment indoor (PIR=127)
- Community centers (PIR=119)
- Gyms (PIR=117)
- Nature centers (PIR=115)
- Fitness equipment outdoor (PIR=105)
- Dog parks (PIR=104)

The chart below shows the PIR for each of the 36 amenities/facilities assessed on the survey.

Figure 15: Top Priorities for Investment for Parks and Recreation Facilities/Amenities Based on Priority Investment Rating



2.4.5.4 Recreation Program Needs and Priorities

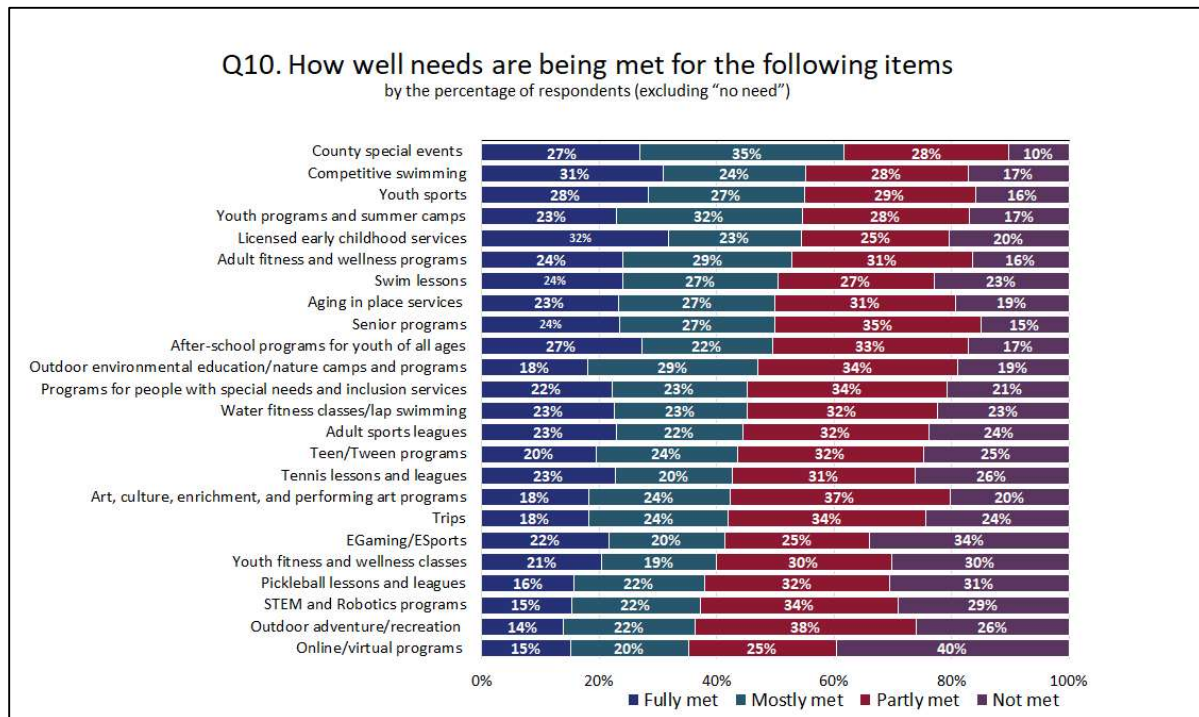
Program Needs: Respondents were asked whether their household needed any of the 26 programs and how well those needs are currently being met. Using their responses, ETC Institute estimated how effectively each person's needs for these programs and activities are being satisfied.

The following four programs were identified as meeting needs either fully or mostly:

1. Computer and Wi-Fi access
2. After school programs
3. e-Sports
4. Gymnastics

The percentage of how well the need for each program is being met is shown in the chart on the following page.

Figure 16: Q10. How well needs are being met for the following items

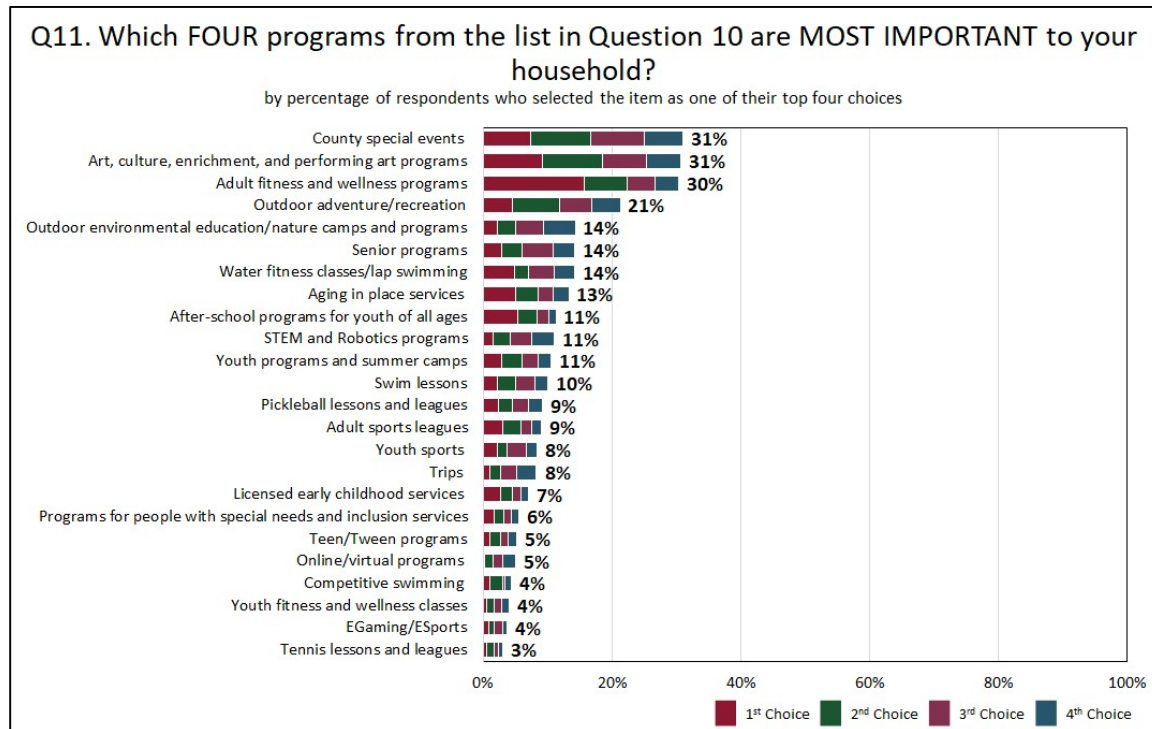


Program Importance: In addition to assessing the needs for each program, ETC Institute also assessed the importance respondents placed on each item. Based on the sum of respondents' top four choices, the following four programs were ranked most important:

1. Nature and outdoor programs
2. Fitness and wellness
3. Aquatics
4. Senior programs

The percentage of respondents who selected each program as one of their top four choices is shown in the chart on the following page.

Figure 17: Q11. Which FOUR programs from the list in Question 10 are MOST IMPORTANT to your household?

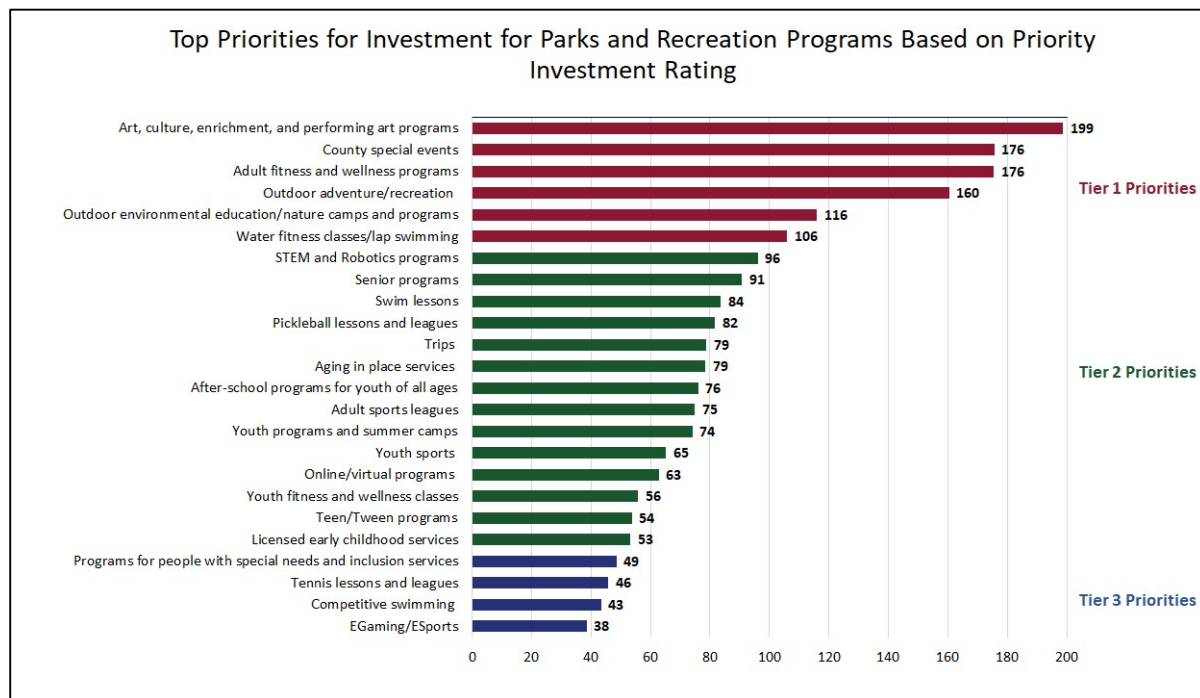


Based on the PIR, the following programs were rated as Tier 1 priorities for investments:

- Nature and outdoor programs (PIR=193)
- Fitness and wellness (PIR=168)
- Aquatics (PIR=152)
- Special events and community events (PIR=147)
- Arts programs (PIR=138)
- Opportunities for socializing (PIR=130)
- Senior programs (PIR=123)
- Sports—outdoor recreation (PIR=120)
- Bus trips (PIR=119)
- Environment education (PIR=118)

The chart on the following page shows the PIR for each of the 26 programs assessed on the survey.

Figure 18: Top PIR for Parks and Recreation Programs Based on Priority Investment Rating

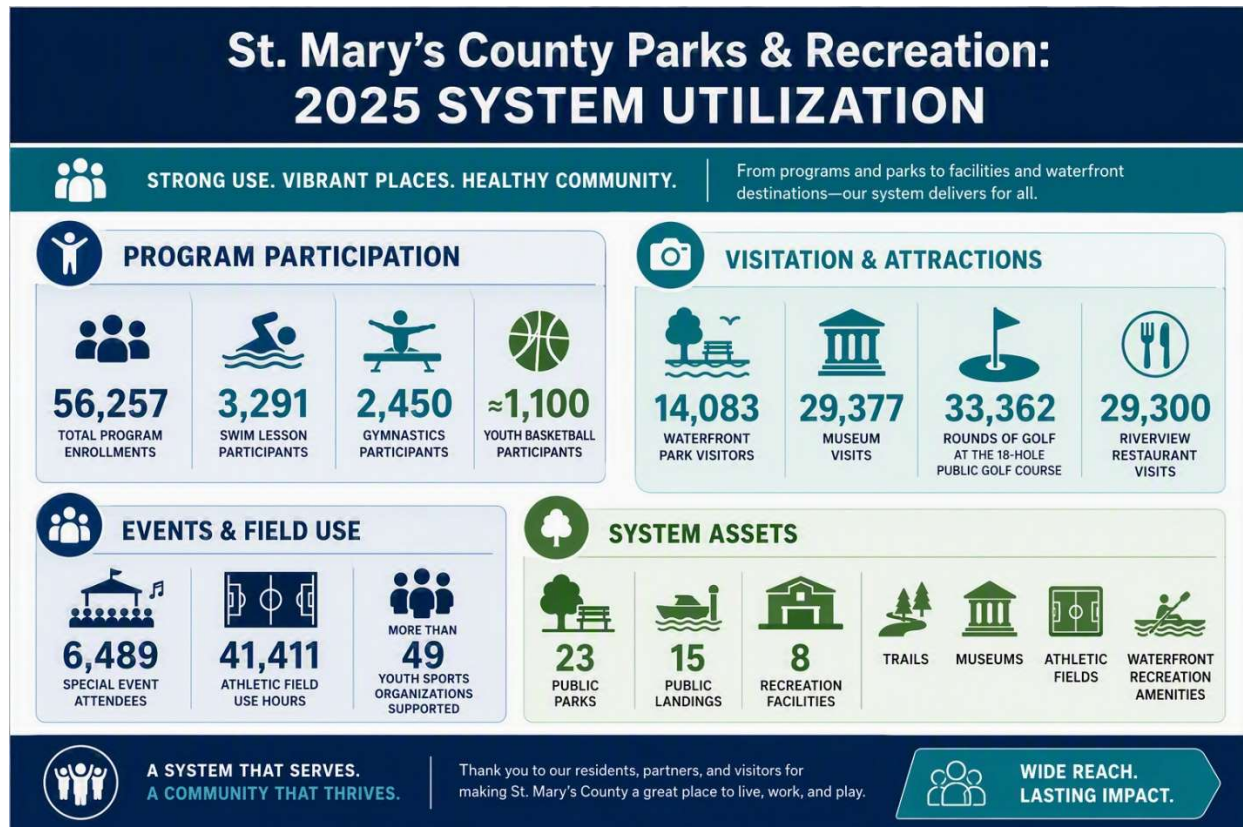


2.4.6 Data on Usage, Demand and Participation Rates

For the LPPRP, the data on usage, demand, and participation rates was gathered from available materials provided by St. Mary's County to help document existing Parks and Recreation system use. This included identifying known and estimated levels of community demand and supporting future planning priorities. Sources reviewed include the County's 2025 Annual Report, the statistically valid community survey, and the open-link public engagement survey. Together, these materials provide a balanced foundation of quantitative participation and facility-use data, as well as qualitative community input regarding recreation needs, access barriers, desired amenities, and opportunities. This information intends to support the LPPRP's broader purpose of assessing current conditions, identifying unmet needs, and guiding future investment in parks, recreation facilities, land preservation, and public access.

The County's parks, programs, facilities, and recreation amenities demonstrated strong community use in 2025, with more than 56,000 program enrollments, substantial visitation across waterfront parks, museums, golf, and dining facilities, and extensive athletic field use supporting youth sports organizations countywide.

Figure 19: St. Mary's County Parks & Recreation 2025 System Utilization



While participation and visitation records document many organized activities, they do not fully capture the extensive casual use occurring throughout the park system. The County's annual participation figures reflect more than 56,000 program enrollments and over 41,000 athletic field use hours, but many park visits occur without registration or formal tracking. Residents regularly utilize playgrounds, bike trails, dog parks, waterfront areas, public landings, open spaces, walking paths, and park amenities on an informal basis. The County maintains 2,763 acres of parkland, 11 miles of bike trails, four dog parks, 19 playgrounds, and numerous waterfront access points that support daily recreational use that is largely unrecorded. Community engagement findings further indicate that parks, trails, and recreation facilities are highly valued community assets, suggesting that actual system use is substantially greater than documented attendance and registration data alone. The level of use required to support over 90,000 annual staff work hours and the contributions of 1,074 volunteers providing 9,311 volunteer hours further indicate a broad and active user base extending beyond formally tracked participation.

Although participation statistics demonstrate strong community engagement, public outreach and needs assessment findings indicate that demand continues to exceed existing capacity in several areas. Residents identified needs for additional indoor recreation opportunities, expanded aquatic facilities, more athletic fields and field lighting, trail connectivity improvements, increased waterfront access, pickleball courts, disc golf, and additional recreation programming for youth, adults, seniors, and individuals with disabilities. The County's

commitment to investing more than \$100,000 in accessibility improvements and awarding approximately \$30,000 in program scholarships reflects an ongoing effort to address barriers to participation and improve equitable access. Community feedback also identified challenges related to facility availability, program capacity, geographic access, scheduling, and awareness of recreation opportunities. While current participation levels are strong, public input suggests there is additional latent demand for recreation facilities, programs, and amenities that is not fully reflected in enrollment, visitation, or usage statistics. Future planning efforts should continue to focus on expanding recreational opportunities, enhancing accessibility, and addressing capacity constraints in high-demand areas.

2.4.7 Recreation Trends

National participation and industry insights were informed by the Sports and Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) and the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA). Demographic and expenditure data were sourced from the most recent U.S. Census and Esri Business Analyst estimates available at the time of analysis. St. Mary's County served as the primary geographic area of focus, with state and national comparisons included where appropriate for context. Together, the data provides a high-level understanding of the factors that might shape recreation priorities, service delivery, and future investment decisions.

Local participation patterns generally align with statewide trends, with walking for exercise, swimming, and weightlifting representing the most common fitness activities and hiking, bicycling, and fishing leading outdoor recreation participation. Golf, basketball, and pickleball show the highest engagement among traditional sports.

National trends further indicate continued growth in racquet sports, strength training, group fitness, and experiential programming, along with increasing demand for adult and multi-generational offerings. Together, these findings suggest that St. Mary's County is well positioned to prioritize accessible, diverse, and fitness-oriented programming while planning facilities that respond to both local participation patterns and broader industry trends.

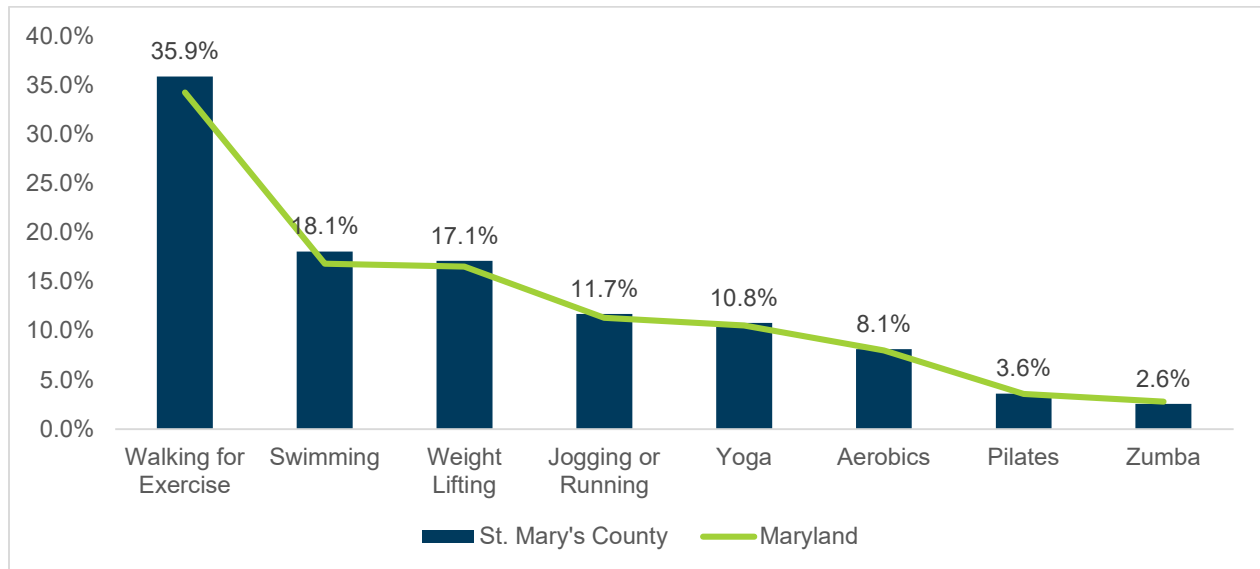
2.4.7.1 Local Participation

The following data specific to St. Mary's County is sourced from Esri Business Analyst.² Figures 22, 23, and 24 compare the estimated level of adult participation in fitness, sport, and outdoor activities among St. Mary's County residents to participation rates across Maryland, illustrating generally consistent trends between the local and statewide levels.

Walking for exercise is by far the most popular fitness activity at 35.9%, followed by swimming at 18.1% and weightlifting at 17.1%.

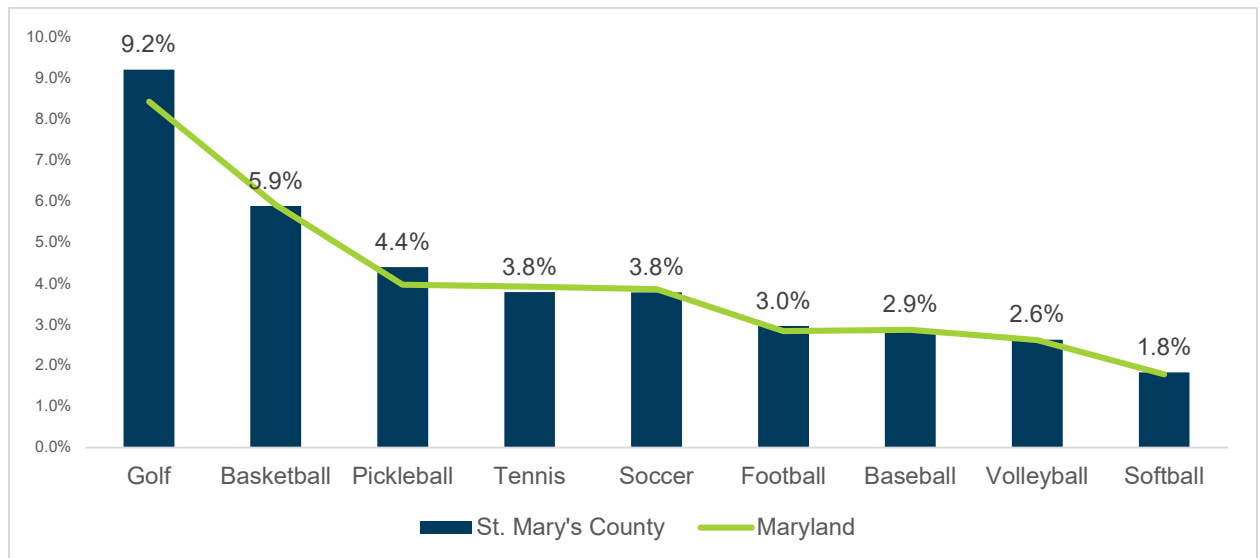
² Esri. 2026. "Esri Business Analyst Data." Esri. Accessed April 18, 2026. <https://www.esri.com>

Figure 20: Local Participation in Fitness Activities, 2025



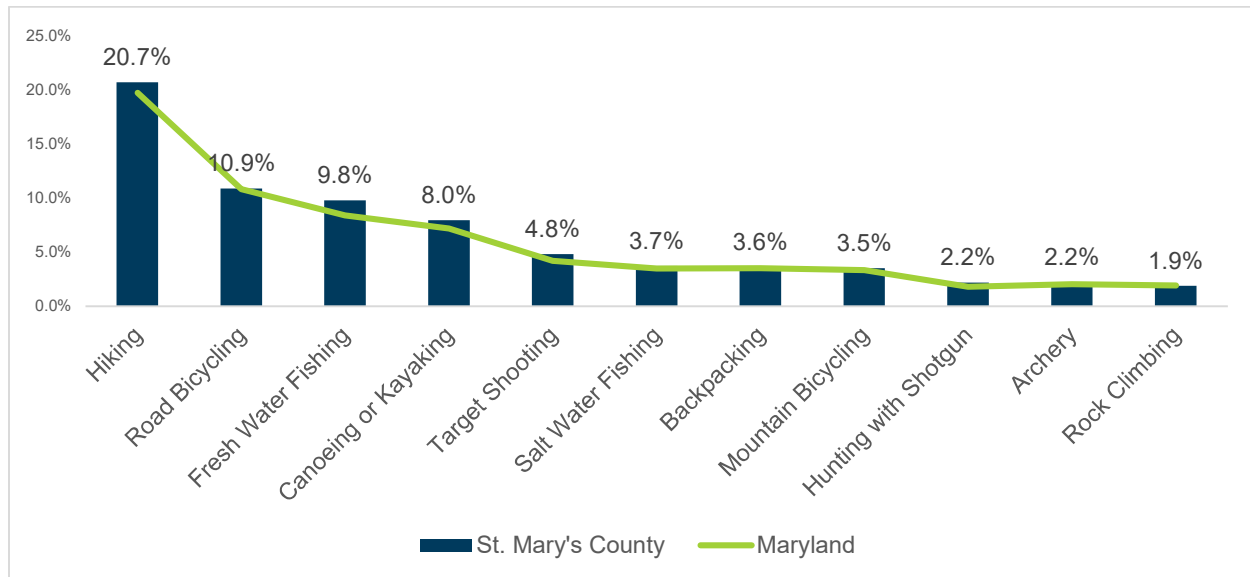
Golf leads participation among traditional sports in St. Mary's County at 9.2%, followed by basketball at 5.9% and pickleball at 4.4%.

Figure 21: Local Participation in Sport Activities, 2025



Hiking is the most common outdoor activity among St. Mary's County residents at 20.7%, followed by road bicycling at 10.9% and freshwater fishing at 9.8%.

Figure 22: Local Participation in Outdoor Recreation, 2025



2.5 LOS

The 2027 LPPRP uses a locally defined LOS framework, consistent with State guidance, to evaluate whether St. Mary's County has adequate Parks and Recreation land, facilities, and access to meet current and future needs. Rather than relying solely on a single acreage standard, the analysis considers multiple dimensions of service, including acreage per 1,000 residents, park proximity, geographic distribution, equity considerations, facility type, user demand, asset condition, growth trends, and the operational capacity needed to maintain and program existing and future assets.

The County's current park acreage provides an important foundation for service delivery, but acreage alone does not fully capture local needs. St. Mary's County's rural geography, peninsula setting, shoreline resources, growth areas, and dispersed communities require attention to drive time, walking and biking access, water access, trail connections, indoor recreation availability, and the location of facilities relative to population centers and underserved areas. As a result, the County should consider additional acquisition or partnerships where land, facility, or access gaps are identified through proximity mapping, community input, and capital planning.

The LOS analysis evaluates how well St. Mary's County's existing system of public Parks and Recreation resources provides access to recreation opportunities. The analysis also identifies geographic areas where additional investment might be warranted.

2.5.1 Proximity Analysis

St. Mary's County is predominantly rural, and residents generally rely on automobiles to access Parks and Recreation facilities. Consistent with the approach used in the 2022 LPPRP, geographic access is evaluated using **5- and 15-minute drive times**. Areas within a five-minute

drive are considered to have strong access to a recreation resource, while areas between five and 15 minutes have reasonable access. Areas located more than 15 minutes from a recreation resource are evaluated further to determine whether they represent a meaningful service gap based on population distribution, development patterns, and the availability of other recreation opportunities.

The 2027 LOS analysis uses the updated Parks and Recreation inventory and current population data to evaluate access to the **overall Parks and Recreation system, public water, and trails**. These proximity findings are considered together with the required equity analysis and user demand information to identify potential deficiencies and inform the County's determination of future parkland acquisition and facility needs.

The County's LOS analysis is designed to meet the 2027 LPPRP guidelines while reflecting local conditions. Table 4 identifies the service categories, resources, and measures used to evaluate access. By applying travel-time measures and equity overlays, the analysis moves beyond a simple acreage calculation and provides a more meaningful understanding of how well residents can reach parks, water access, trails, and cultural resources.

Table 3: LOS Analysis Framework

LOS Component	Resources Included	Measure	How Results Inform the LPPRP
Parks and recreation system	Publicly accessible County, municipal, state, federal, educational, and qualifying quasi-public Parks and Recreation resources.	5- and 15-minute drive times.	Identifies areas with strong, reasonable, or more limited access to the overall recreation system.
Water access	Public beaches, swimming areas, boat ramps, canoe and kayak launches, fishing access, public landings, and other qualifying waterfront access.	5- and 15-minute drive times.	Highlights opportunities to improve public access to the County's shoreline and waterways.
Trails	Public trailheads and approved access points for paved and natural-surface trails.	5- and 15-minute drive times.	Identifies gaps in trail access and supports recommendations for trailheads, connections, and pathway expansion.
Historic and cultural areas	Publicly accessible County, state, and federal sites with an educational, historic, or cultural focus.	5- and 15-minute drive times.	Supports interpretation, wayfinding, tourism, education, and partnership strategies.
Equity	Access results compared with median household income and minority population by Census block group.	Geographic overlay and gap analysis.	Determines whether areas with more limited access overlap with populations that may face greater barriers to recreation.

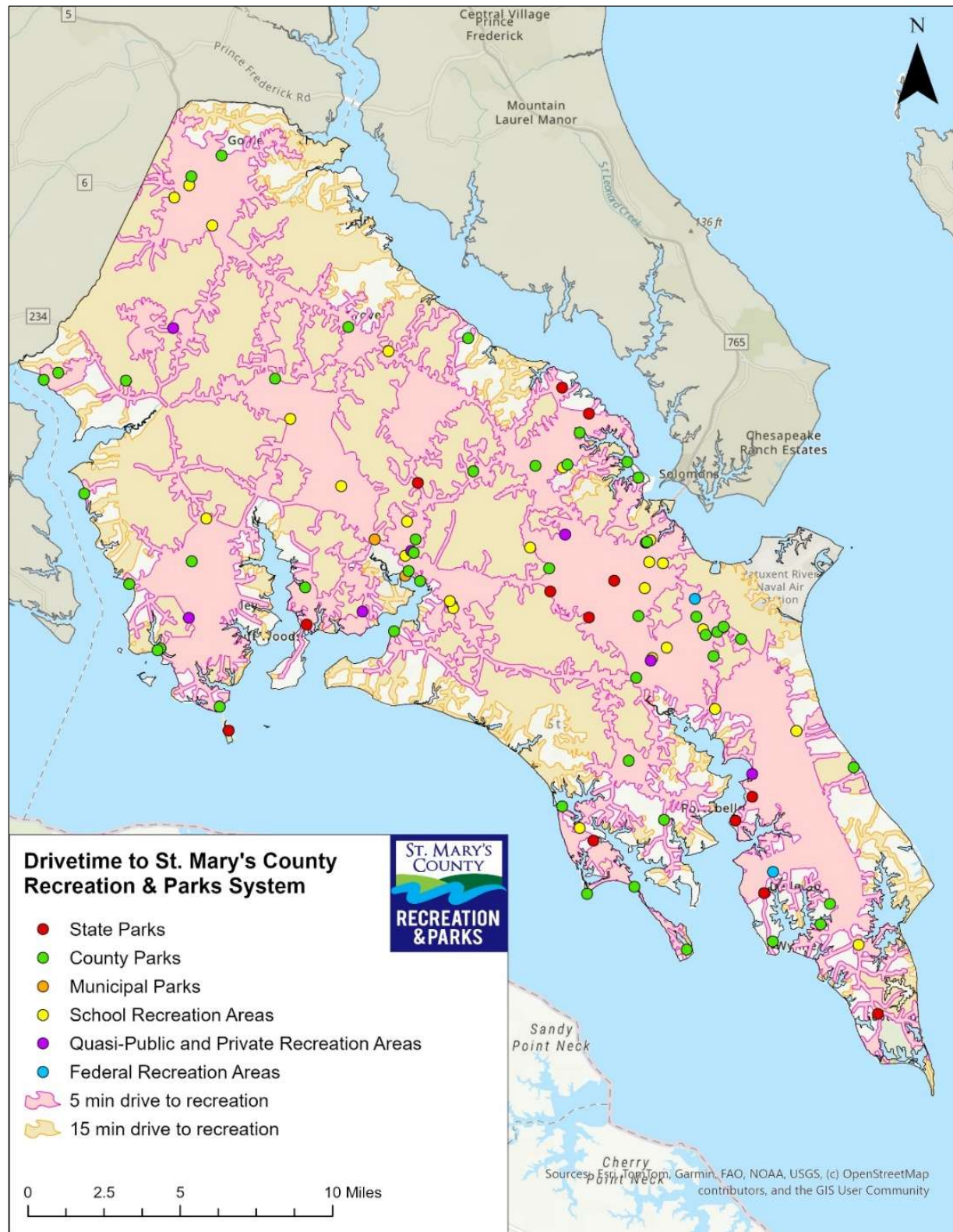
The Parks and Recreation system proximity analysis evaluates access to the full range of publicly accessible recreation resources in St. Mary's County, including qualifying County, municipal, state, federal, educational, and quasi-public properties.

The distribution of Parks and Recreation resources provides broad geographic coverage throughout St. Mary's County. Approximately 92% of residents are located within a 15-minute drive of at least one public park or recreation resource, with the strongest access occurring near the County's more developed population centers.

Areas outside the 15-minute service area are primarily located in lower-density rural and coastal portions of the County. When considered in relation to population distribution and development patterns, these areas do not represent a significant geographic deficiency in access to the overall Parks and Recreation system.

Therefore, the analysis indicates that **the existing system continues to provide an adequate geographic LOS and does not identify a need for broad parkland acquisition to address overall park access.**

Figure 23: Parks and Recreation System Proximity Analysis



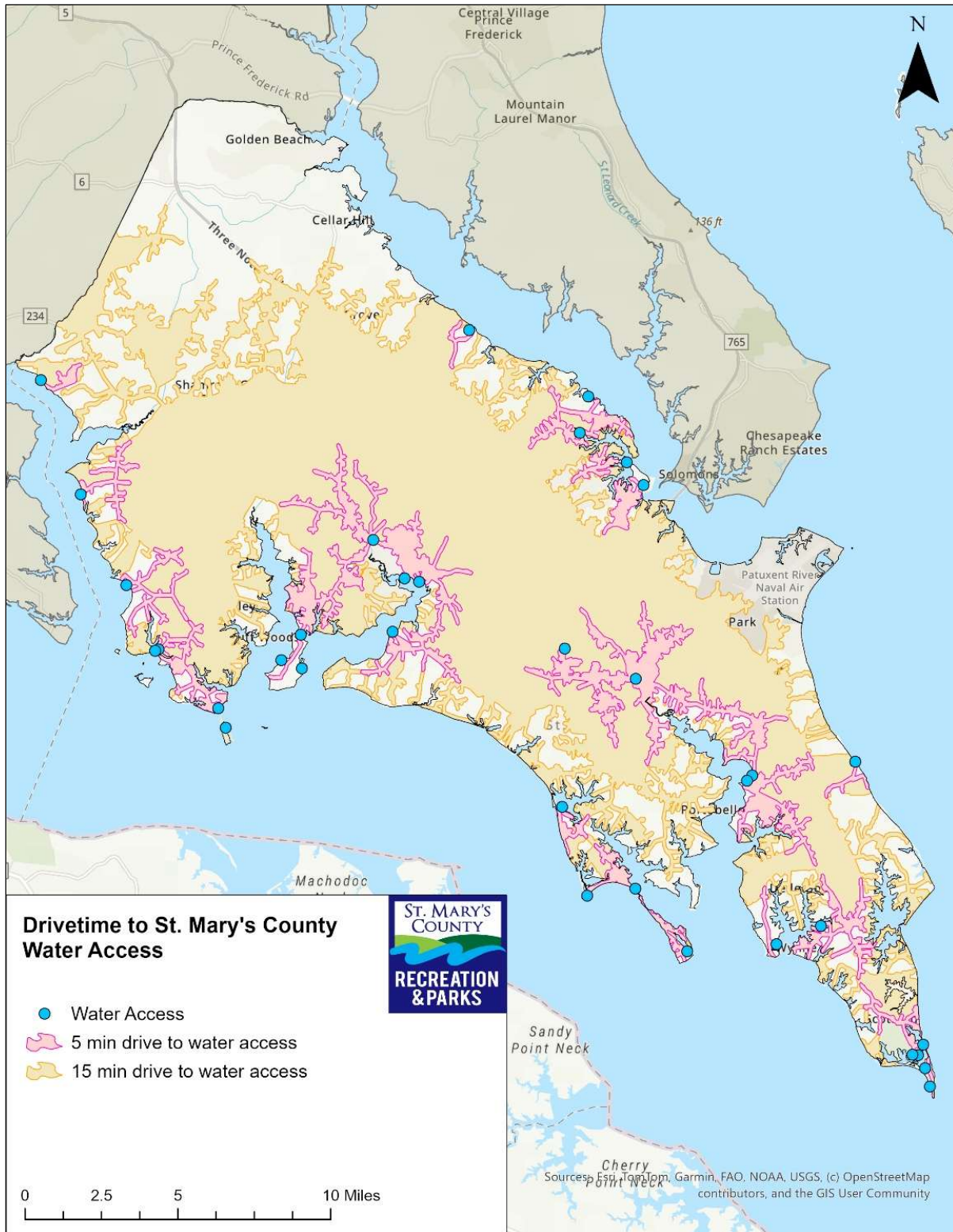
Public water access is an important component of recreation in St. Mary's County because of the County's extensive shoreline along the Potomac River, the Patuxent River, Chesapeake Bay, and their tributaries. Existing public landings, waterfront parks, beaches, boat ramps, fishing areas, and canoe/kayak launches provide a range of opportunities to access these resources.

Public water access sites are distributed along the County's major waterways, although the location and type of access vary. The proximity analysis indicates that approximately 66% of St. Mary's County residents have reasonable access to at least one public water access opportunity. Only the northern portion of the County presents a potential gap, but this area might be served by neighboring counties.

The availability of water access is not determined solely by proximity. Existing sites provide different types of opportunities, including access for trailered boats, canoes and kayaks, fishing, swimming, and shoreline recreation. Accordingly, future improvements should focus on the type, capacity, and quality of public water access in addition to geographic distribution.

The analysis does not identify a critical geographic deficiency in water access. However, because waterfront property is limited and public access remains an important recreation resource, the County might continue to pursue strategic opportunities to expand or enhance public water access where appropriate.

Figure 24: Water Access Proximity Analysis

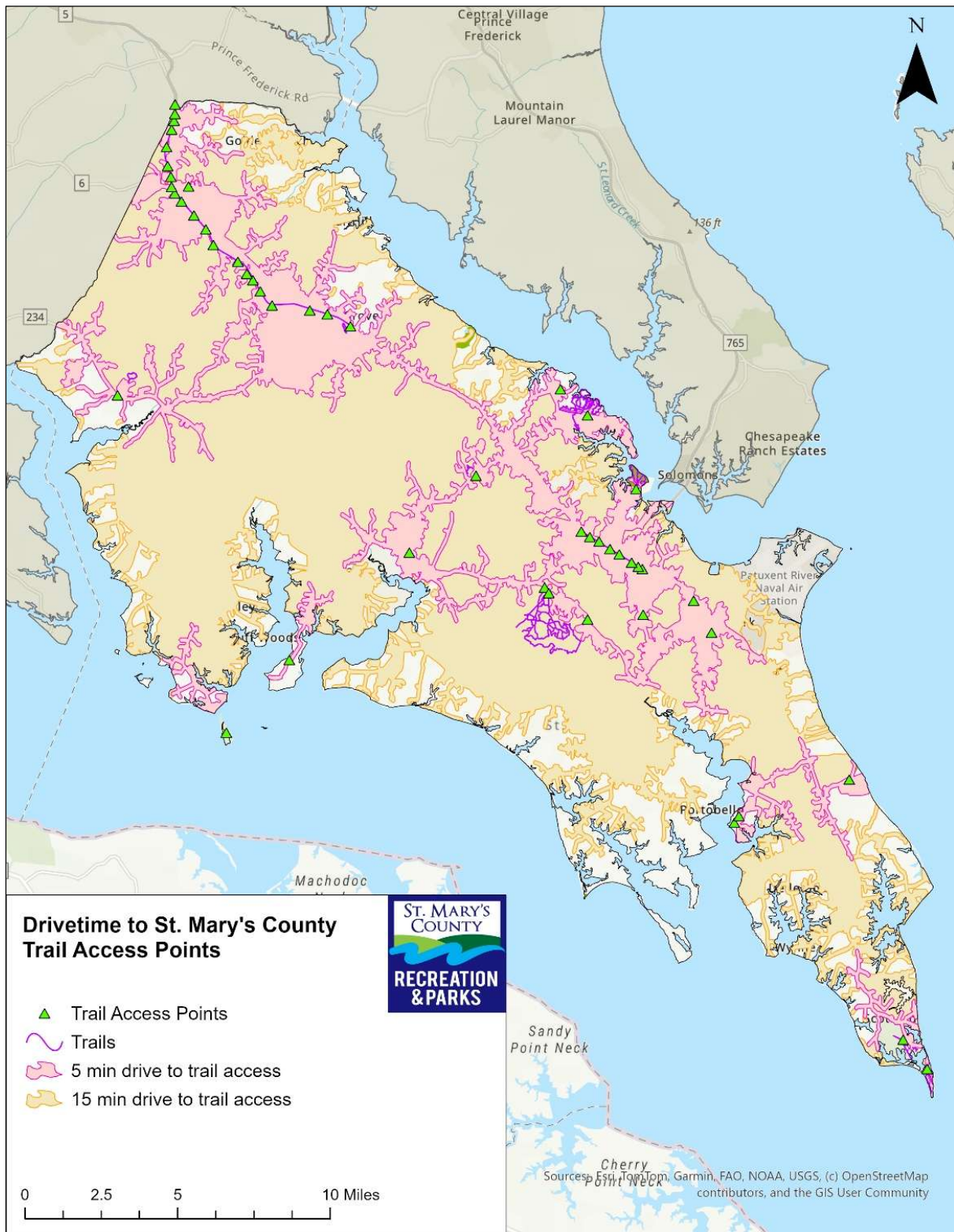


Public trail opportunities in St. Mary's County are provided through the Three Notch Trail and trails located in County parks, state parks and forests, natural resource areas, and other publicly accessible recreation properties. Consistent with state guidance, trail proximity is evaluated from managed trailheads and approved public access points.

The trail proximity analysis indicates that public trail opportunities are accessible by 90% of residents within 15 minutes. Areas with more limited access are primarily located in lower-density portions of the County and do not, by themselves, demonstrate the need to acquire additional trail areas.

Overall, the existing system provides broad geographic access to public trail opportunities. Future trail needs may be addressed through extensions of existing trails, connections between existing facilities and communities, additional trail access points, and easements or targeted property acquisition where necessary to complete a planned connection. These improvements can increase trail access without establishing a general countywide parkland acquisition need.

Figure 25: Trail Proximity Analysis



St. Mary's County offers a diverse network of historic and cultural destinations that preserve and interpret the County's unique heritage, including sites associated with colonial history, African American history, maritime heritage, military aviation, and local cultural traditions. Key public historic and cultural resources include Historic St. Mary's City, Historic Sotterley, the Drayden African American Schoolhouse, the Old Jail Museum, the Patuxent River Naval Air Museum, the African American Monument and Freedom Park, Piney Point Lighthouse & Historic Park, St. Clement's Island Museum, and the United States Colored Troops Memorial Monument.

The historic and cultural areas proximity analysis indicates that these destinations provide broad geographic access to heritage and cultural experiences throughout much of the County. Based on a 15-minute service area, approximately 68% of County residents can access a major historic or cultural destination, demonstrating strong overall coverage. The primary area with comparatively limited access is in the northern portion of the County, where fewer historic and cultural sites are concentrated.

Overall, the existing system provides broad geographic access to historic and cultural resources. While the current distribution of sites serves most residents, future opportunities could include enhancing interpretation and programming at existing facilities, strengthening connections between historic destinations, expanding public awareness and wayfinding, and pursuing partnerships to preserve and share additional cultural resources. These strategies can improve access to and appreciation of the County's heritage while complementing the existing network of historic and cultural attractions without establishing a general countywide acquisition need.

Figure 26: Historic and Cultural Areas Proximity Analysis

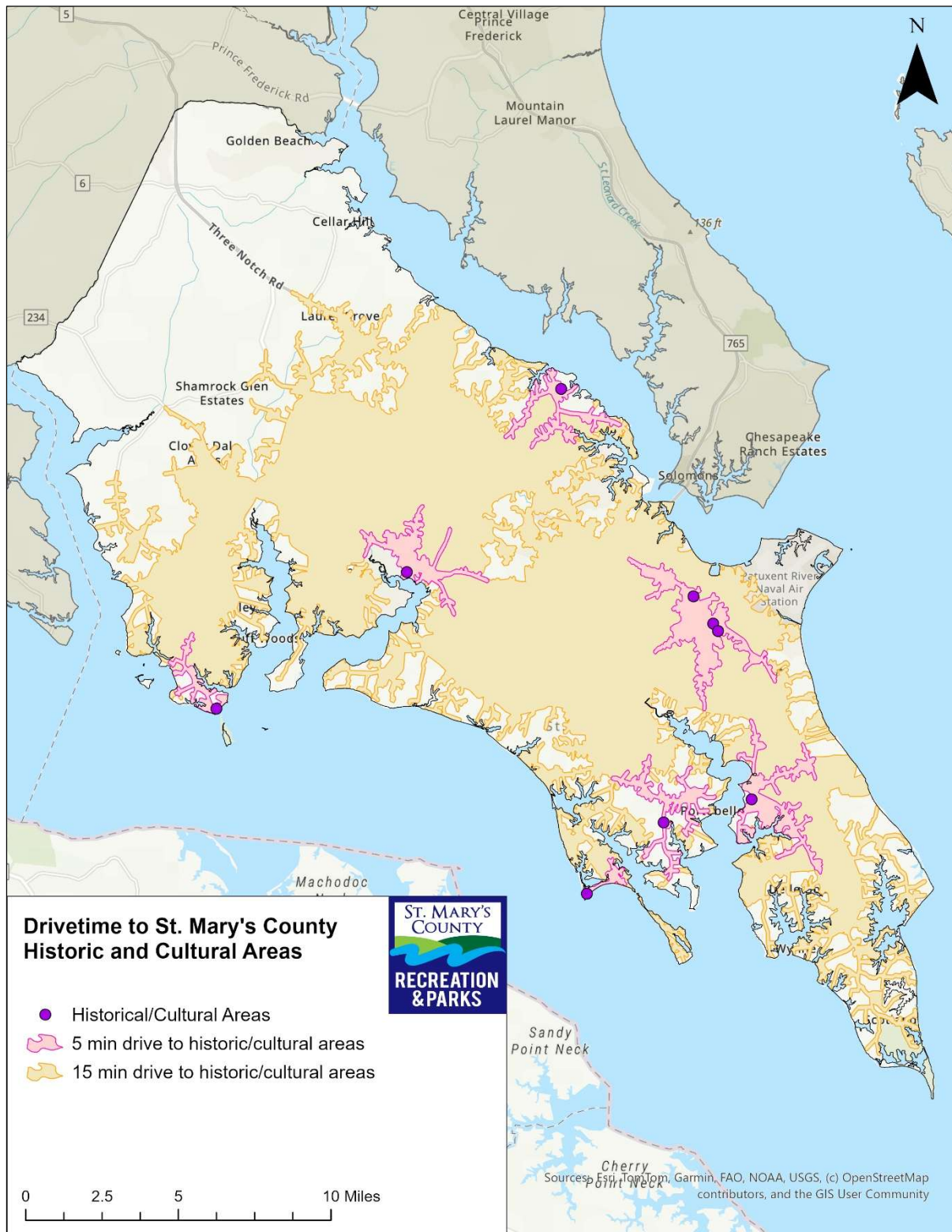
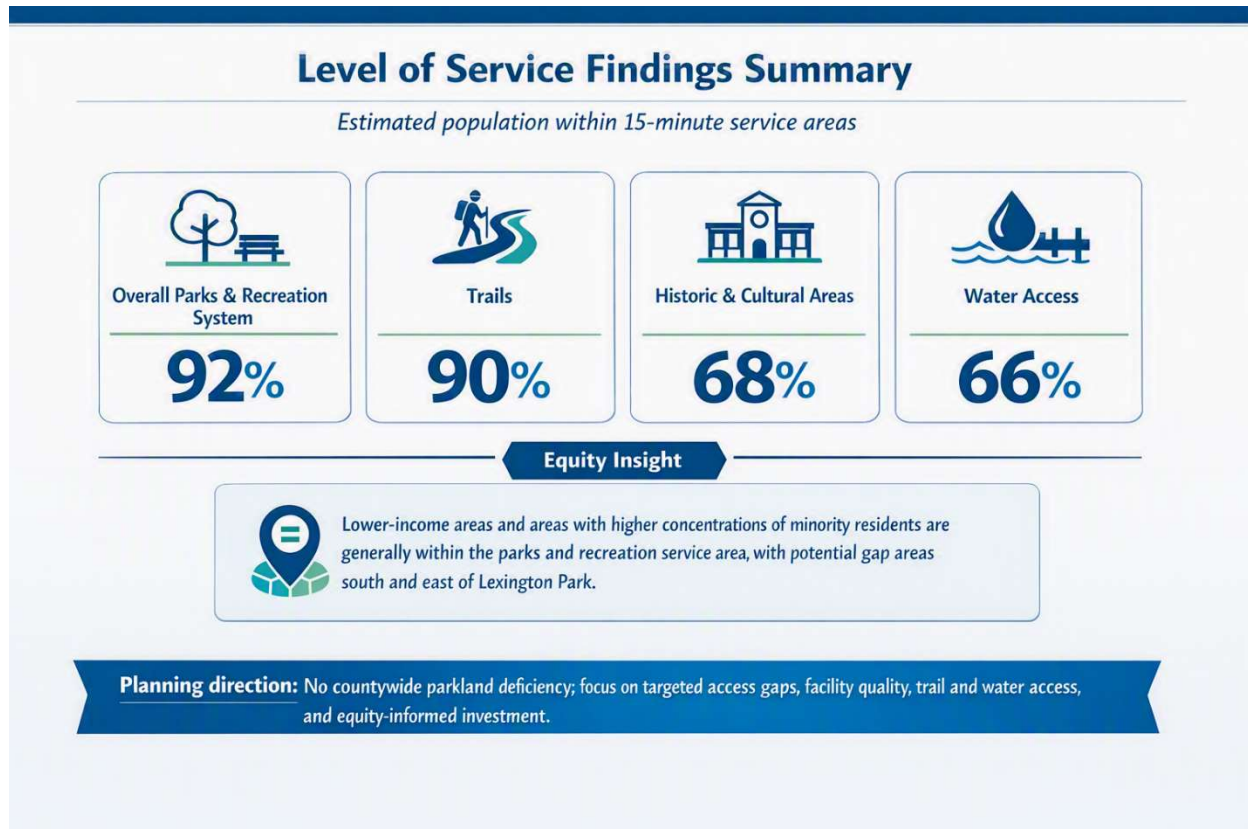


Figure 20 summarizes the major findings from the LOS analysis. The results indicate that the overall Parks and Recreation system provides broad access for most residents, while water access and historic or cultural resources are less universally accessible. These findings should be interpreted alongside the County's rural geography, shoreline setting, growth patterns, and differences in facility type, quality, and capacity.

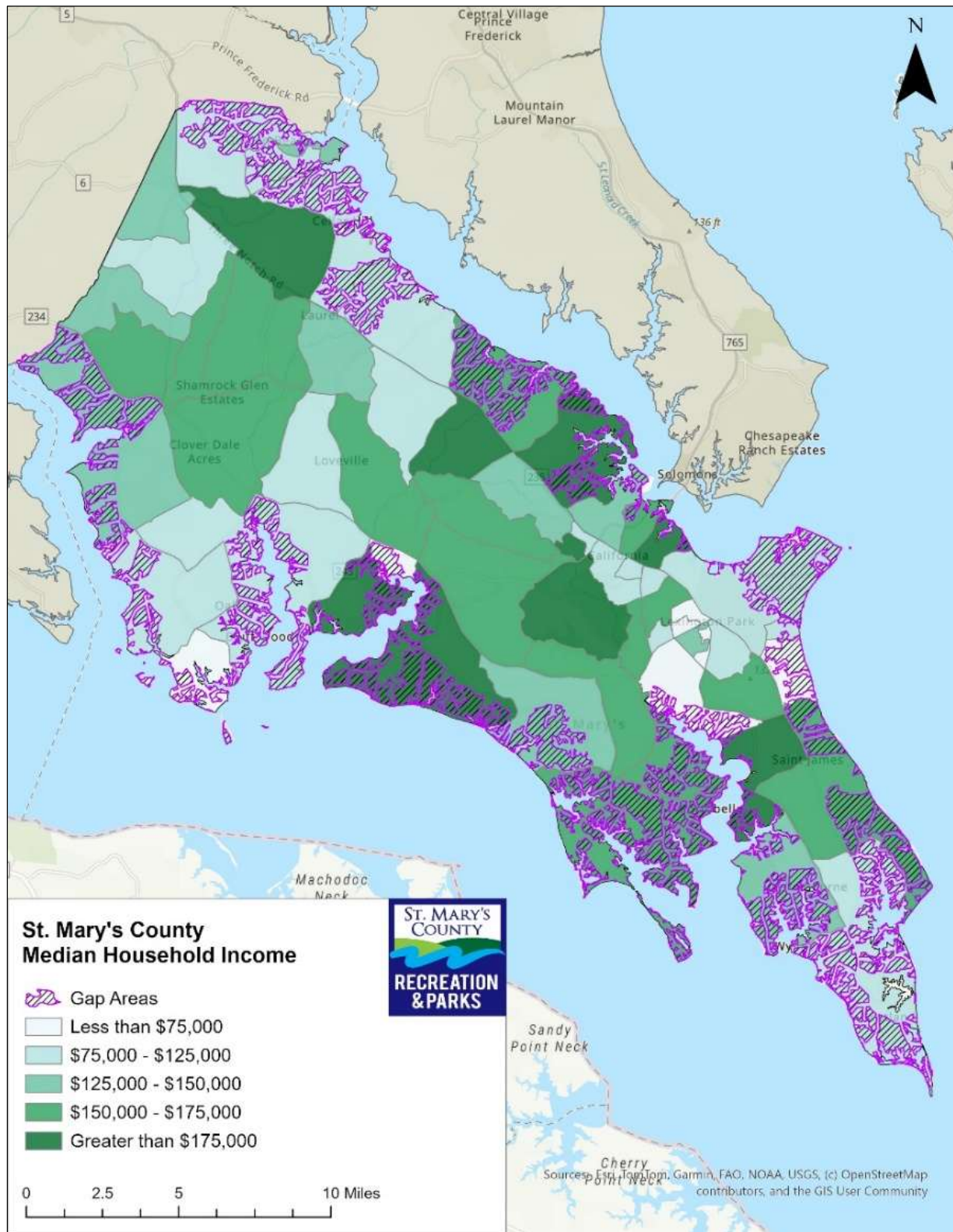
Figure 27: LOS Findings Summary Infographic



2.5.2 Equity Analysis

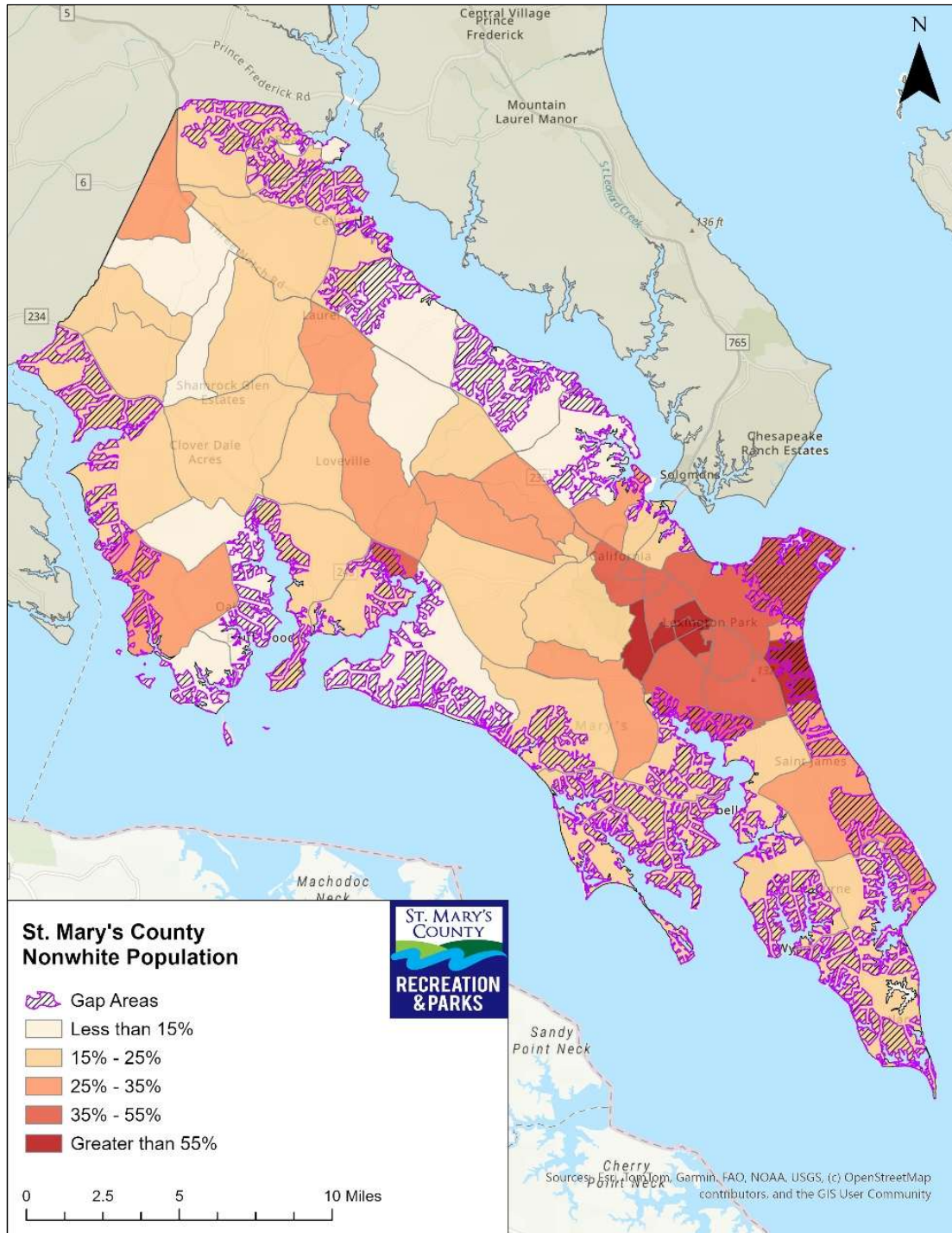
Median household income was evaluated to determine whether lower-income areas of the County experience comparatively limited geographic access to Parks and Recreation resources. **The analysis indicates that most gap areas fall in moderate- or high-income areas, with the only potential gaps occurring south and east of Lexington Park.**

Figure 28: Park Access and Median Household Income



Minority population was also evaluated to determine whether areas with higher concentrations of minority residents experience comparatively limited geographic access to Parks and Recreation resources. One coastal block group southeast of Lexington Park has a minority population exceeding 55% and falls mostly within a gap area.

Figure 29: Park Access and Minority Population



Together, the analyses indicate that most low-income and minority residents have access to Parks and Recreation within 15 minutes and do not identify a significant equity-related geographic deficiency in the distribution of Parks and Recreation resources. However, areas to the south and east of Lexington Park present potential equity-based opportunities for acquisition and development.

2.5.3 Amenity Assessment

Condition assessment findings provide a practical bridge between community priorities and capital investment decisions. Table 5 summarizes the condition ratings for evaluated amenities and helps distinguish between assets that need routine maintenance, medium-term reinvestment, near-term repair, or full replacement. This information is especially important because community engagement placed the highest priority on maintaining and improving existing Parks and Recreation facilities.

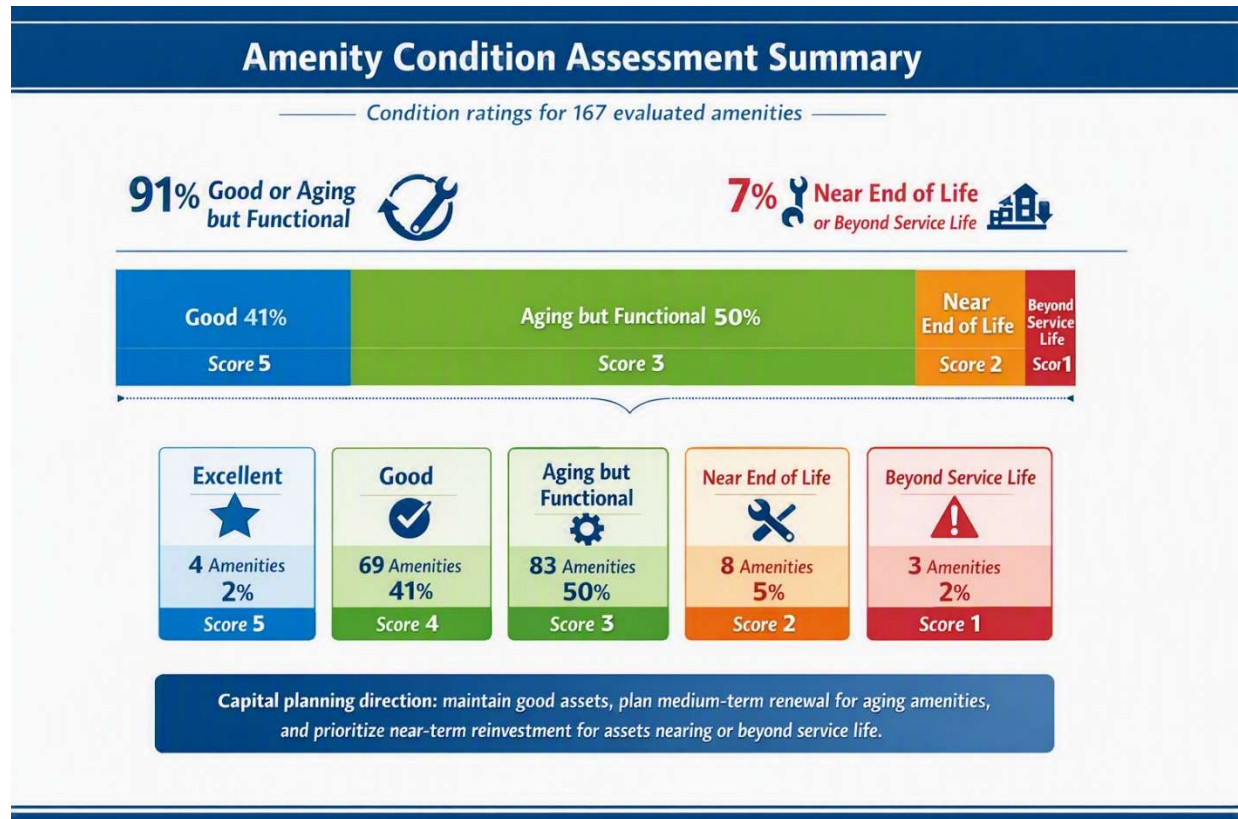
Individual park amenities were evaluated to provide a more detailed understanding of their condition, functionality, and remaining service life. The evaluation included playgrounds, athletic fields and courts, shelters, trails, restrooms, parking areas, and other supporting infrastructure throughout the St. Mary's County park system. Each amenity was assigned an **age and performance rating** using a standardized five-point scale to help identify current conditions and anticipated reinvestment needs. Table 5 summarizes rating standards used in the assessment.

Table 4: Amenity Age and Performance Rating Standards

Overall Score	Quality Rating	Description
5	Excellent	New or like new with no visible deficiencies.
4	Good	Minor wear; fully functional and well maintained.
3	Fair	Moderate wear but functional; future reinvestment should be anticipated.
2	Poor	Significant wear or functional deficiencies; rehabilitation or replacement should be planned.
1	Very Poor	End of useful life or no longer functional; replacement is recommended.

The assessment evaluated 167 amenities across the park system. As shown in Figure 33, most amenities remain in good condition, with relatively few assets approaching the end of their useful life. These findings indicate that future capital investment should focus on targeted replacement and rehabilitation rather than systemwide reconstruction.

Figure 30: Amenity Condition Assessment Summary Infographic



The following 10 amenities were identified as the highest priorities for capital reinvestment based on age and performance:

- **Bocce Courts at Chancellor's Run Regional Park (Score: 1):** Replace broken wooden dividing walls to restore court condition and continued playability.
- **Pier at Snow Hill Waterfront Park (Score: 1):** Repair damaged pier structure and inspect weathered components prior to reopening.
- **Basketball Court at St. Andrew's Estates Park (Score: 1):** Replace aging basketball hoops and nets; repaint peeling poles to improve court condition.
- **Diamond Field at Cardinal Gibbons Park (Score: 2):** Clear overgrowth and improve field maintenance to restore playability.
- **Diamond Field at Miedzinski Park (Score: 2):** Repair or replace rusty fencing to improve field condition and safety.
- **Horseshoe Court at Baggett Park (Score: 2):** Install a backstop and replace or extend the short stake to improve court functionality.
- **Horseshoe Court at Dorsey Park (Score: 2):** Replace rusty stakes and evaluate options to expand the undersized court.

- **Rectangular Field at Chancellor's Run Regional Park (Score: 2):** Improve poor turf conditions through turf rehabilitation or replacement.
- **Rectangular Field at Fifth District Park (Score: 2):** Rehabilitate poor turf conditions by addressing dirt and weed coverage.
- **Volleyball Court at Fifth District Park (Score: 2):** Install court lines and replace fading, sagging posts and net to restore playability.

The condition summary shows that most evaluated amenities remain functional but many are aging and will require planned reinvestment during the LPPRP planning period. Using condition data in combination with demand, equity, and safety considerations will help the County prioritize projects in a transparent and defensible manner.

2.6 Goals for Parks and Recreation

The following goals guide the Parks and Recreation element of the 2027 LPPRP and intend to complement statewide goals while responding to local community needs, demographic trends, and engagement findings.

1. **Maintain and reinvest in existing parks and facilities.** Prioritize life cycle maintenance, accessibility, safety, comfort amenities, restroom improvements, lighting, shade, parking, and asset renewal to protect existing public investments.
2. **Expand equitable access to parks, trails, water, and recreation facilities.** Use proximity, equity, and demand analysis to identify geographic gaps and guide future land acquisition, facility development, partnerships, and transportation connections.
3. **Strengthen trail, bikeway, pedestrian, and natural pathway networks.** Continue expanding the Three Notch Trail and related connections while improving wayfinding, safety, trailheads, and access to natural areas.
4. **Increase water access and waterfront recreation opportunities.** Improve kayak, canoe, fishing, swimming, beach, and shoreline access in ways that balance recreation, environmental stewardship, resiliency, and public safety.
5. **Address athletic field and outdoor facility capacity.** Improve field quality, lighting, scheduling, maintenance, and availability while evaluating the need for additional baseball, softball, rectangular fields, courts, disc golf, pickleball, and other high-demand amenities.
6. **Plan for indoor and year-round recreation needs.** Evaluate opportunities for aquatics, indoor courts, multipurpose recreation space, fitness, climbing, ice or specialty facilities, and community recreation space, particularly in areas with limited access.
7. **Expand inclusive recreation programs and services.** Continue developing programs that serve youth, adults, older adults, families, individuals with disabilities, neurodivergent youth, and residents with financial or transportation barriers.

8. **Preserve natural resources while supporting outdoor recreation.** Align park planning with conservation, habitat protection, shoreline resiliency, environmental education, and stewardship of the County's forests, farms, waterways, and scenic landscapes.

2.6.1 Implementing Ordinances, Programs, and Partnerships

Implementation of the Parks and Recreation element will require coordination among County departments, advisory boards, partner agencies, community organizations, schools, athletic associations, nonprofit groups, state agencies, and private or institutional partners. Relevant implementation tools include the County Comprehensive Plan, zoning and subdivision regulations, capital budgeting, Program Open Space, grants, user fees, facility agreements, partnerships, land dedication or acquisition opportunities, maintenance planning, and program development.

The County should continue using a coordinated implementation approach that links community priorities, operations, maintenance needs, facility assessments, land acquisition opportunities, and capital projects. This approach will help ensure future investments are practical, fiscally responsible, aligned with available resources, and responsive to identified service gaps.

Table 7 translates the Parks and Recreation goals into an implementation matrix. The matrix identifies representative actions, potential partners or tools, and general time frames for each goal area. This format is intended to support follow-through by connecting broad policy direction to specific types of projects, programs, partnerships, and operational strategies.

Table 5: Implementation Matrix for Parks and Recreation Goals

Goal Area	Representative Actions	Potential Partners or Tools	Time Frame
Maintain and reinvest in existing parks and facilities	Prioritize life cycle maintenance, accessibility improvements, restrooms, shade, lighting, parking, and asset renewal.	County CIP, Program Open Space, operating budget, grants, facility assessments.	Short-term and ongoing
Expand equitable access	Use LOS, proximity, and equity mapping to target investments in underserved areas and address specific access gaps.	GIS analysis, County departments, community partners, land acquisition tools.	Short- to mid-term
Strengthen trails and pathways	Advance Three Notch Trail connections, trailheads, wayfinding, active transportation links, and natural-surface trail opportunities.	Transportation planning, state grants, school and community partnerships.	Mid- to long-term
Increase water access	Improve kayak, canoe, fishing, swimming, and shoreline access while balancing environmental stewardship and resiliency.	Waterfront partners, Department of Natural Resources (DNR), conservation partners, shoreline planning.	Mid-term

Goal Area	Representative Actions	Potential Partners or Tools	Time Frame
Address athletic field and outdoor facility capacity	Improve field condition, lighting, scheduling, maintenance, and availability; evaluate new fields or court facilities where demand supports investment.	Athletic associations, schools, user groups, County maintenance staff.	Short- to mid-term
Plan for indoor and year-round recreation	Evaluate aquatics, indoor courts, multipurpose space, fitness, climbing, ice, and community recreation options.	Feasibility studies, partnerships, private providers, capital planning.	Mid- to long-term
Expand inclusive programs and services	Broaden programs for youth, adults, older adults, individuals with disabilities, neurodivergent youth, and residents with financial or transportation barriers.	Recreation programming, schools, nonprofits, health partners, scholarships.	Short-term and ongoing
Preserve natural resources while supporting recreation	Coordinate outdoor recreation with habitat protection, shoreline resiliency, conservation, and environmental education.	Planning, land preservation partners, conservation easements, environmental grants.	Ongoing

The implementation matrix should be revisited regularly as projects advance, funding opportunities change, and new community needs emerge. It also intends to support coordination across County departments and partners so that recreation, conservation, accessibility, transportation, and capital planning decisions reinforce one another.

2.6.2 CIP Framework

The CIP should translate the 2027 LPPRP findings into phased, fundable projects that address maintenance, access, safety, capacity, and community priorities. Projects should be evaluated using criteria such as health and safety need, asset condition, public demand, geographic equity, readiness, partnership potential, operating impact, eligibility for Program Open Space or grant funding, and alignment with countywide planning goals.

Near-term priorities should emphasize reinvestment in existing parks and facilities, accessibility improvements, comfort amenities, athletic field maintenance and lighting, trail and water access enhancements, and planning or feasibility work for larger indoor or specialized recreation needs. Mid- and long-term priorities should address larger capital projects, land acquisition or partnership opportunities, systemwide trail connectivity, indoor recreation capacity, and major park redevelopment or expansion needs identified through the LOS analysis.

Table 8 provides a prioritization framework for evaluating future capital projects. Because available funding and staffing resources are limited, the County should use consistent criteria to determine which projects should move forward first. The framework emphasizes health and safety, asset condition, public demand, geographic equity, readiness, funding eligibility, operating impact, and strategic alignment.

Table 6: CIP Prioritization Framework

Evaluation Criterion	High-Priority Indicators	Application to CIP Sequencing
Health and safety	Addresses code, accessibility, safety, structural, lighting, parking, or circulation concerns.	Advance projects that reduce risk or resolve urgent deficiencies.
Asset condition	Responds to amenities rated near end of life or beyond service life.	Prioritize replacement, rehabilitation, or major repair of failing assets.
Public demand	Supported by survey results, interactive map comments, staff input, or documented use patterns.	Move high-demand projects into near- or mid-term capital planning.
Geographic equity and access	Improves service in areas with limited access, underserved populations, or identified LOS gaps.	Use equity and proximity analysis to balance investment countywide.
Readiness and feasibility	Project has site control, planning progress, cost estimates, permitting pathway, or partnership support.	Sequence ready projects earlier while advancing planning for complex long-term projects.
Funding eligibility	Eligible for Program Open Space, state/federal grants, partnerships, donations, or user-supported funding.	Coordinate timing with grant cycles and leverage outside funding.
Operating impact	Considers staffing, maintenance, utilities, programming, scheduling, and life cycle costs.	Prioritize projects with sustainable operating plans and realistic resource commitments.
Strategic alignment	Advances LPPRP goals, County plans, conservation priorities, recreation trends, and adopted capital objectives.	Use alignment as a final screen for prioritizing limited capital resources.

Applying these criteria will help the County move from a list of needs to a phased and fundable capital program. Near-term projects should generally address safety, accessibility, failing assets, and high-demand improvements, while mid- and long-term projects should focus on larger facility development, land acquisition, trail connectivity, water access expansion, and indoor recreation opportunities that require additional planning, partnerships, or funding.

2.6.3 Key Findings Summary

The Parks and Recreation analysis identify a strong foundation for service delivery in St. Mary's County supported by substantial park acreage, broad system access, active community use, and diverse facilities and programs. At the same time, the findings point to the need for targeted reinvestment, expanded access to high-demand amenities, and a more deliberate approach to prioritizing capital projects based on condition, demand, equity, readiness, and long-term operating impact.

- **St. Mary's County has a substantial public recreation land base.** The County maintains approximately 25 parks and 2,763 acres of parkland, equating to

approximately 23.7 acres per 1,000 residents. This acreage provides a strong base for recreation service delivery, but acreage alone is not sufficient to determine future needs.

- **Access is generally strong but targeted gaps remain.** The LOS analysis indicates broad access to the overall Parks and Recreation system, while water access, historic and cultural resources, and some rural or coastal areas have more limited access. Future investments should address specific geographic and facility type gaps rather than assume a generalized countywide parkland shortage.
- **Community priorities emphasize reinvestment first.** Engagement findings show the strongest support for maintaining and improving existing Parks and Recreation facilities. Residents also expressed strong interest in trails, bikeways, natural pathways, natural area preservation, outdoor recreation, water access, athletic fields, indoor recreation, aquatics, and accessible amenities.
- **Many amenities are functional but aging.** The condition assessment shows that most evaluated amenities are in good or aging-but-functional condition, while a smaller share are near or beyond the end of service life. Planned reinvestment will be necessary to help prevent functional assets from becoming major capital liabilities.
- **Trails and active transportation are major system priorities.** Public input, LOS findings, and the County's geography all support continued investment in the Three Notch Trail, trailheads, pedestrian and bicycle connections, wayfinding, and safe access to parks and natural areas.
- **Water access is a defining opportunity and need.** The County's shoreline setting creates significant recreation potential, but access varies by location and type. Future improvements should focus on kayak and canoe access, fishing, swimming, beaches, boat access, shoreline resilience, and partnerships that expand public access while protecting natural resources.
- **Athletic field and outdoor facility capacity require continued attention.** Public feedback identified needs related to fields, lighting, restrooms, parking, maintenance, scheduling, and field access. The County should continue evaluating field condition, allocation, maintenance intensity, and opportunities for capacity improvements.
- **Indoor and year-round recreation demand should be evaluated further.** Community feedback indicates interest in aquatics, indoor courts, multipurpose recreation space, fitness, climbing, ice or specialty facilities, and other year-round options. These needs should be studied through feasibility, partnership, and operating impact analysis before major capital commitments are made.
- **Equity should guide targeted investments.** Lower-income areas and areas with higher concentrations of minority residents are generally within the Parks and Recreation service area, but potential access gaps remain in portions of the County. Future projects should use proximity, equity, transportation, and program access data to guide investment decisions.

- **Implementation should be phased and resource conscious.** The County should prioritize projects that address safety, accessibility, asset condition, high public demand, geographic access, funding readiness, and sustainable operating impacts. This approach will help convert community priorities into a practical and fundable CIP.

3.0 Natural Resource Land Conservation

3.1 Introduction and Overview of St. Mary's County Conserved Natural Resource Lands

Natural resource lands contain forests, wetlands, floodplains, stream buffers, and other sensitive natural features that help define the rural character of St. Mary's County. The County's adopted 2010 Comprehensive Plan identifies the protection of forest resources, sensitive natural lands, and the stewardship of watersheds and waterfront lands as important priorities. The County is currently preparing its 2050 Comprehensive Plan, which continues to emphasize the protection and enhancement of natural resources, water quality, and rural character.

Benefits of Natural Resource Lands in St. Mary's County:

- Ecosystem services filter air and water and support biodiversity
- Outdoor recreation opportunities
- Natural resource-based industries
- Community character
- Conservation of Chesapeake Bay

The benefits of natural resource lands include defining rural character, maintaining the attractiveness of existing developed areas, providing wildlife habitat, natural filtration systems for pollutants, and opportunities for resource-based recreational pursuits. These lands provide the natural framework around which the built environment is planned and developed. Publicly accessible natural resource areas create opportunities for direct interaction between people and the natural environment, offering economic benefits for eco-tourism and enhanced quality of life for visitors and residents. St. Mary's County's abundant natural resource lands are places where the "bonds between people and the natural world create a pattern of connectedness."

An ongoing focus of natural resource conservation is helping the County meet Clean Water Act requirements and Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) goals for nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment reduction. The conservation of natural filters, including forests, floodplains, wetlands, and other natural resource lands, together with effective management of development and stormwater runoff, remains one of the most cost-effective approaches to protecting and improving water quality.

Prior to 2027, St. Mary's County has preserved:

- 4,514 acres through transfer of development rights
- 2,930 acres through Maryland Historical and Environmental Trusts

St. Mary's County continues to implement its Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Permit and Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) strategies to reduce pollutant loads in developed areas. As of 2025, documented restoration projects have exceeded the County's required impervious area restoration target, with additional stormwater retrofit, living shoreline, stream restoration, and watershed improvement projects in progress or planned through 2030. In rural areas, TMDL goals are advanced through resource management, agricultural land

preservation, habitat enhancement, watershed protection, and other conservation practices that help maintain water quality and ecological health.

3.2 Goals for Natural Resource Land Conservation

The following section discusses the interrelationship between the State's and County's goals for natural resource conservation and describes the rationale behind County goals.

3.2.1.1 State Goals

Appendix A lists the state's goals for conservation of natural resource lands. As described below, St. Mary's County's goals are consistent with, and supportive of, Maryland's statewide goals for Natural Resource Land Conservation.

3.2.1.2 County Goals

The Comprehensive Plan provides the framework for the County's natural resource conservation efforts. The plan's natural resource conservation goals form the basis for policies, regulations, and programs that implement a comprehensive strategy for protecting natural resource lands and achieving state conservation goals. These goals reflect the longstanding vision expressed by County residents and continue to guide conservation efforts throughout St. Mary's County.

"Preserve and enhance the quality of life by recognizing and protecting the unique character of St. Mary's County as a rural Chesapeake Bay peninsula."

Residents' opinions have guided the vision and goals for Natural Resource Land Conservation in updates of the County's Comprehensive Plan since 1994. At a 1994 community character workshop soliciting resident input for updating the Comprehensive Plan, residents favored the concept of designing development around the natural environment



using clustering, agricultural overlay zones or an Amish overlay zone, and conservation of sensitive environmental areas. Residents also favored providing open space linkages, greenways, and additional public water access points. In 1996, Comprehensive Plan update meetings and an associated citizen survey determined that residents favored maintaining rural

character, clustering growth, minimizing the breakup of farmland and open space, and implementing a transferable development rights (TDR) program. These priorities continue to be reflected in the County's ongoing comprehensive planning efforts and natural resource conservation programs. The County's natural resource conservation goals remain consistent with the vision for Environmental Protection and Resource Conservation established in the Comprehensive Plan and reflected in ongoing planning efforts. These goals include:

- **Environmental protection:** Carefully manage land and water resources, including the Chesapeake and coastal bays, to restore and maintain healthy air and water, natural systems, and living resources.
 - Land and natural features important to maintaining the environmental health of the County—which present constraints for development and which are critical to reducing damage to the Chesapeake Bay—are preserved from disturbance and enhanced to increase the effectiveness of their benefits for erosion control, filtering of sediments and nutrients, and provision of essential habitat for wildlife.
 - In return, residents receive the benefits of reduced construction costs, minimization of erosion and flood events, improved water quality for drinking and recreation, and increased property values from a more scenic living environment.
- **Resource conservation:** Conserve waterways, forests, agricultural areas, open space, natural systems, and scenic areas.
 - Farms and forest resources are preserved from urban or suburban encroachment, and the rural character and attributes of the County are maintained and enhanced. Landowner equity and property values have been enhanced by an active program of purchase and transfer of development rights.
 - Protection of the rural countryside and traditional economies and activities (fishing, farming, and forestry) are recognized as important components of the community and the County's rural character. This rural character is worth maintaining not only for its scenic beauty but also because of its attraction as a setting for technology and service industries, which are concentrated near Naval Air Station Patuxent River.
 - A coordinated cross-County network of greenways and scenic easements is established, and waterfront access is enhanced to provide passive and active recreation and a heightened natural environment.
 - Large contiguous tracts of sensitive areas are outside designated growth areas and zoned for rural or resource protection. Specifically, the McIntosh Run natural area is excluded from the Leonardtown development district, and the St. Mary's watershed natural area and lands westward thereof are excluded from the Lexington Park Development District.

Many of the environmental protection and natural resource conservation priorities identified in the 2010 Comprehensive Plan remain relevant today and continue to guide County policies, programs, and conservation initiatives, including:

- Continue to evaluate the Annual Growth Policy and periodically adjust as needed to discourage excessive development of rural areas.
- Acquire environmentally sensitive areas and properties that may be used for passive recreational activities. Carefully develop County-owned properties constrained by sensitive areas to provide appropriate public passive recreational activities.
- Continue to identify and protect sensitive areas, including streams and their buffers; 100-year floodplains; habitats of threatened and endangered species; and steep slopes, tidal wetlands, submerged aquatic vegetation, waterfowl areas, colonial bird nesting sites, shorelines, tidal and nontidal floodplains, nontidal wetlands and their buffers, anadromous fish spawning areas, groundwater, mineral resources, and wildlife corridors. Also, identify and protect agricultural land (Green Infrastructure gaps, buffers, open space, forest conservation mitigation) and forest lands (Green Infrastructure and forest interior dwelling species [FIDS] habitat) intended for resource protection and conservation as required by the state legislature.
- Consider hazard mitigation in the early stages of development and balance development goals with avoidance of known high-risk areas, such as floodplains, coastal erosion zones, and areas of known high-risk due to natural hazards.
- Work to increase understanding of the watershed resources and the impacts on those resources that result from the activities of people who live, work, and recreate in the watershed.
- Require, when necessary, and promote, when possible, the stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay, its tributaries, and the land and watershed resources by using:
 - Regulatory programs (Critical Area Program, forest conservation regulations, stormwater regulations, requirements for open space conservation and clustering, etc.)
 - Tax and funding incentive programs (agricultural districts, Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation [MALPF] easements, a TDR program, installment purchase agreements, etc.)
 - Planning programs (Breton Bay and St. Mary's Watershed Restoration Action Strategies)
- Continue to develop and implement ordinances and programs that adequately protect sensitive areas; set and measure progress in meeting goals for preservation; enforce limitations on the allowable loss of resources; and work to ensure that mitigation for unavoidable impacts is the responsibility and duty of those who benefit from the impact.

3.3 Implementing Ordinances and Programs

A major component of the County's implementation program is natural resources conservation, including conservation of the farms and large minimally developed residential tracts where natural resource lands predominate.

3.3.1 Comprehensive Planning Process

The Comprehensive Plan establishes the countywide framework and foundation for planning and regulatory functions related to natural resource conservation and land use. This framework has four basic elements:

1. Concentrating development in designated development districts, town centers, and village centers.

Growth areas continue to comprise about 20% of the County's land area. Concentrating development in these areas will limit the sprawl pattern of development into rural areas. *Figure 31* shows the primary areas where growth is directed: two development districts of Lexington Park and the Town of Leonardtown (both priority funding areas [PFAs]); four town centers of Hollywood, Mechanicsville, New Market, and Charlotte Hall (County-designated PFAs along Maryland Route 5); and the fifth town center of Piney Point. These areas are designated receiving areas for TDRs.

2. Preserving open space, scenic, and rural character.

The 178,000-acre Rural Preservation District (RPD) contains prime farms and timberlands and low-density non-farm residential developments. Rural areas are to be preserved from urban or suburban encroachment to maintain the County's rural character and attributes, which are identified as important in attracting the service and technology industries located primarily in the Lexington Park Development District. Limited commercial and rural service centers are designated at major rural crossroads. Since 2007, each parcel in the RPD may be developed by-right with a single dwelling (subject to meeting all other zoning criteria). A landowner wishing to create additional homes on an RPD parcel must purchase additional TDRs or pay a fee-in-lieu of TDRs, as part of a proposal for the additional development.

3. Protecting sensitive areas.

Figure 28 shows natural resource lands in St. Mary's County protected by regulations. These lands contain sensitive areas (steep slopes, floodplains, wetlands, stream corridors, hydric soils, and natural habitats) where development would be detrimental or hazardous. These areas are designated sending areas for TDRs. *Figure 28* also shows boundaries of areas where federal and state laws may impose limits on development due to requirements for maintaining water quality and protecting habitats.

4. Preserving and conserving large contiguous natural areas.

The County has several large and contiguous areas that contain both sensitive natural features and important habitat for rare, threatened, and endangered species (RTES). The five largest areas are:

- Portions of the St. Mary's River Watershed
- McIntosh Run Watershed
- Chesapeake Bay Critical Area (CBCA)

- Huntersville Rural Legacy Area
- Mattapany Rural Legacy Area

In addition to preserving natural landscapes within these areas, the County works to promote sustainable agricultural land practices and conservation techniques with the local farming communities.

Figure 29 shows the relationship of the areas planned for development, and areas of focus for Natural Resource Land Conservation, including the St. Mary's River State Park and Wildland; the 8,950-acre Huntersville RLA; the 13,703-acre Mattapany RLA; other parklands; conservation easements; and the CBCA. Such areas contain significant natural, cultural, and historic resource areas that could be subject to loss or harm resulting from significant development, alteration, or inadequate protection from off-site development impacts. These are also sending areas for TDRs.

Figure 30 illustrates Green Infrastructure in relation to both developed lands and the County's designated conservation areas. Since the Green Infrastructure mapping was completed, several areas have either been developed or approved for future development, compromising some of the connectivity important to retaining the value of Green Infrastructure.

Maryland's DNR Green Infrastructure assessment identifies the largest Green Infrastructure hubs in St. Mary's County:

- St. Mary's River Wildland and State Park
- Lands adjacent to Three Notch Road in the 1st Election District
- Areas west and south of Maryland Route 6 near Huntersville
- Huntersville Rural Legacy Area
- McIntosh Run watershed northwest of the Town of Leonardtown

3.3.2 Climate Resilience and Natural Resource Conservation

St. Mary's County emphasizes the protection of environmentally sensitive areas, water resources, agricultural lands and other significant natural resources. As development progresses within designated growth areas, consideration of flood risk and other environmental constraints can help ensure that the future growth of the County remains consistent with its conservation objectives.

The County's existing planning and conservation framework provides multiple tools for balancing growth and resource protection. Development Districts and Growth Areas help concentrate development in appropriate locations, while Rural Legacy Areas, Priority Preservation Areas, conservation easements, and other protected lands help preserve important natural resources and open space. Together, these programs support the County's goals for protecting water resources, environmentally sensitive areas, and rural character while accommodating future growth.

Figure XX shows existing patterns of development and their relationship to conservation priorities, and areas of flood risk. By viewing these factors together, the County can better understand where future development could be influenced by environmental constraints and where existing conservation efforts already support natural resource protection and hazard mitigation goals.

The County's growth management and land conservation framework can also support climate resilience objectives by directing growth toward established Development Districts and Town Centers while protecting environmentally sensitive areas, waterways, agricultural lands, forests, and other significant natural resources.

Figure XX shows the relationship between designated Growth Areas, existing developed lands, conservation priorities, protected lands, and areas of flood risk. The figure highlights areas where growth objectives, environmental constraints, and conservation priorities intersect, while also illustrating how existing conservation programs and protected lands already help support natural resource protection and resilience goals.

1. Areas of Concern

- Proximity of Growth Areas to Floodplains/Water Resources: Growth centers, most notably the Lexington Park and Leonardtown Development Districts, are located adjacent to tidal waters, tributary streams, and low-lying drainage areas, creating potential conflicts for planned development and water quality protection.
- Low-Lying Coastal Communities Face Flood Risks: Some coastal communities and designated growth areas, such as Piney Point Town Center, appear to overlap with mapped flood-prone areas. As one of the County's TDR receiving areas, Piney Point and those alike might warrant additional consideration when evaluating growth and flood risk.
- Fragmentation of Green Infrastructure: Development pressures and approved projects along the County's major travel corridors continue to encroach upon undeveloped lands, threatening the continuity of identified Green Infrastructure hubs and corridors, including those in the McIntosh Run and St. Mary's River watersheds. This could also impact natural drainage corridors within the County.
- Development Pressure on Rural Landscapes: Designated Growth Areas and state Priority Funding Areas are concentrated in eastern corridors, physically separated from the large Agricultural Focus Area in western St. Mary's County. Developed lands and impervious cover are predominantly clustered within Leonardtown and along the MD 5 and MD 235 highway corridors. Land development growth in the northern and rural sections of the County threatens productive farms and forests. This risks destroying open space and natural infiltration resources.

2. Constraints

- Extensive Network of Regulated Sensitive Areas Reduces Developable Land: Streams, wetlands, steep slopes, and other environmentally sensitive areas are mapped

throughout much of St. Mary's County, forming an interconnected network across undeveloped lands throughout the County. These features reduce the amount of land available for development and may require projects to be designed around protected environmental resources.

- **Designated Sensitive Areas Restrict Growth Centers:** A large area north and northwest of Leonardtown (along MD-5) is identified as both a Tier II Catchment and a Stronghold Watershed within the McIntosh Run basin. These designations create additional constraints on growth and development as the County will need to consider protecting water quality and aquatic habitat resources within these areas.
- **CBCA:** The CBCA extends along much of the County's shoreline, including the Patuxent River, Potomac River, and Chesapeake Bay areas. This affects the existing communities and designated growth areas adjacent to them. As a result, future waterfront development will conflict with mandatory shoreline buffers and state use regulations.

3. Opportunities

- **Connecting Green Infrastructure Hubs Through Rural Legacy Programs:** Large Green Infrastructure hubs correspond closely with Rural Legacy Areas in the north (Huntersville RLA) and south (Mattapany RLA), and the Natural Resource Focus Area appears to function as a connection between them. This suggests that the County can target permanent conservation easements within these overlapping areas to protect these forest parcels, which can help prevent habitat fragmentation, protects natural stormwater managing landscapes, and preserves the rural character of St. Mary's County.
- **Improve Coordination Between State and County Preservation Grants/Programs:** Maryland GreenPrint and BioNet lands align closely with the County's designated Agricultural and Natural Resource Focus Areas. This overlap creates opportunities to coordinate state grant funding and local preservation programs in the same priority areas, helping protect agricultural soils, forests, and other natural resources from future development pressure.
- **Expand Existing Conservation Areas Along Sensitive Watersheds:** Existing protected lands and Rural Legacy Areas already encompass portions of the McIntosh Run and St. Mary's River watersheds. This creates an opportunity to expand conservation efforts to preserve adjacent undeveloped lands, helping to establish larger continuous buffers along sensitive waterways while protecting areas that contribute to flood storage and water quality.
- **Infill Growth Centers by Utilizing Development Rights:** The Leonardtown and Lexington Park Development Districts contain the County's primary growth centers and designated TDR receiving areas. This creates an opportunity to direct future development toward already developed areas while transferring development potential away from environmentally sensitive sending areas, reducing pressure on rural lands and protected natural resources.

4. Strengths

- **Established Rural Legacy Areas Guide Conservation Investments:** The County maintains designated Rural Legacy Areas in the northern County around Huntersville and in the southern peninsula around Mattapany, along with a proposed expansion area. These established conservation areas provide clear targets for state and local preservation funding, helping focus land protection efforts on large, contiguous tracts of agricultural land, forests, and other natural resources rather than isolated parcels.
- **Clear Separation Between Growth Centers and Agricultural Focus Areas:** Designated Growth Areas and state Priority Funding Areas are concentrated along the County's central growth corridors and remain geographically separated from the large Agricultural Focus Area in western St. Mary's County. This separation allows the County to direct future growth toward established development areas while reducing development pressure, parcel fragmentation, and infrastructure expansion within active agricultural areas, helping preserve working farms and rural character.
- **Concentrating Growth Along Established Development Corridors:** Developed lands and impervious surfaces are concentrated within Leonardtown and along the MD 5 and MD 235 corridors rather than being dispersed throughout the County. This existing development pattern has helped maintain large blocks of undeveloped agricultural, forest, and natural resource lands by directing growth toward established corridors and away from more rural portions of the County.

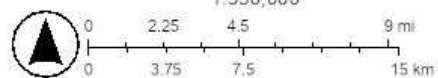
Figure 31: Important Natural Resource Lands

The map shows the Chesapeake Bay area. A red box highlights the study area, which is further detailed in the inset map. The inset map shows the study area in more detail, with labels for the Chesapeake Bay, the Potomac River, and the study area. The study area is located in the northern part of the Chesapeake Bay, near the Potomac River. The map also shows the location of the study area relative to the Chesapeake Bay and the Potomac River.

NC Tier 1 High Quality Reserve - Tier 1 Asset-Lite Capacity Catchments
 Available Capacity Remaining
 No Available Capacity Remaining
 NC Streamhead - Streamside Watershed Edge
 Service Splice Point Review Area
 Green Infrastructure - Maryland Green Infrastructure - Green Infrastructure Hub Corridor
 Urban Core
 Medium Density
 Aquatic Habitat
 Urban Corridor - Rural
 Maryland Watershed - Zoned and Stream - Density - River and Stream - Rural

MD Worksheet - Wetlands - Polypier / Department of Natural Resources
☒ 1 section
☒ Polypier
☒ Barren

MD Worksheet - Wetlands - Polypier / Special State Garden
☒ 1 section
☒ Polypier



Creator: Maryland Department of the Environment, Water and Science Administration (MDE WSA)
Assessment Data: Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Monitoring and Non-tidal Assessment Division, Maryland Biological Stream Survey Program (DNR MBSS), MDE WSA, Baltimore County Department of

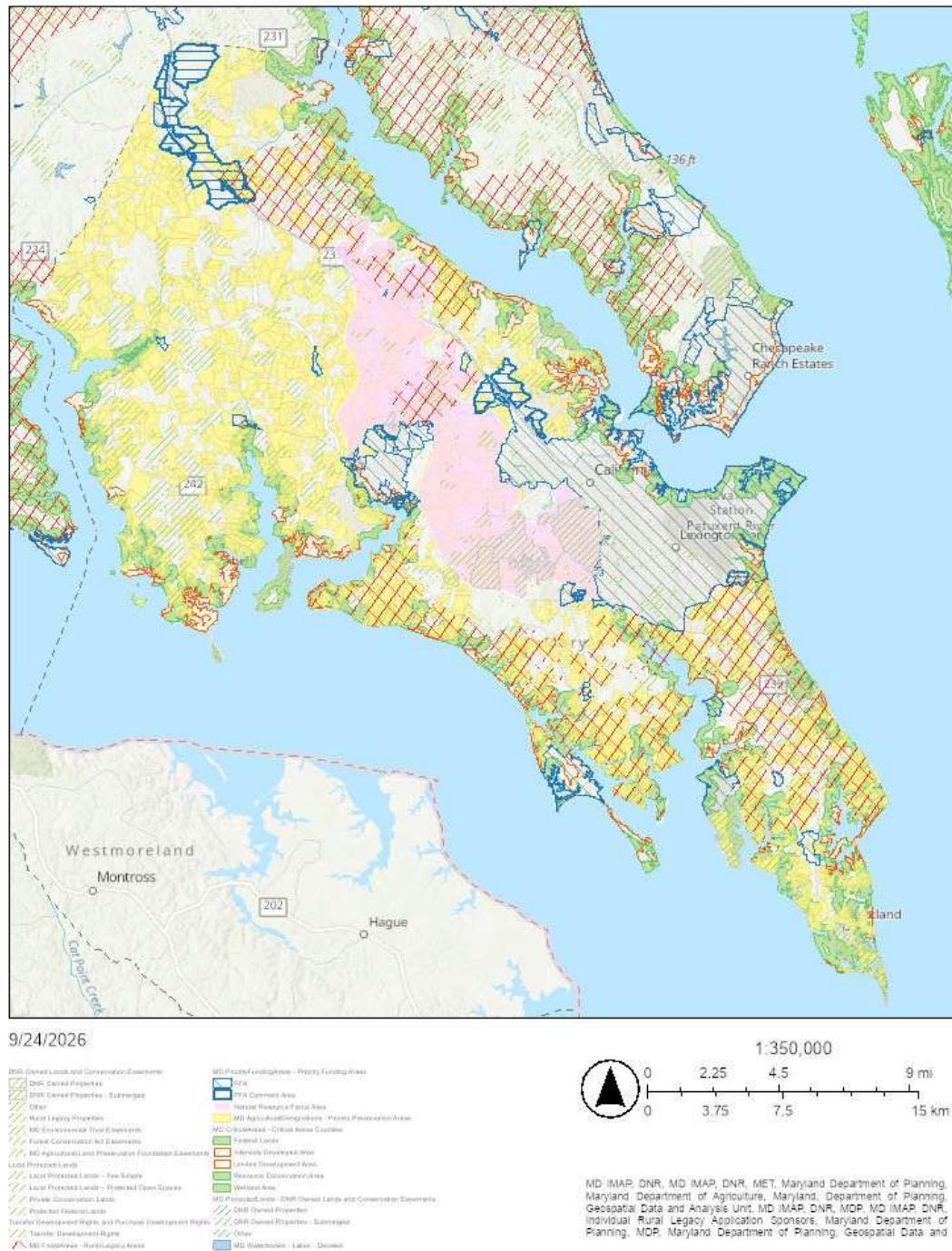
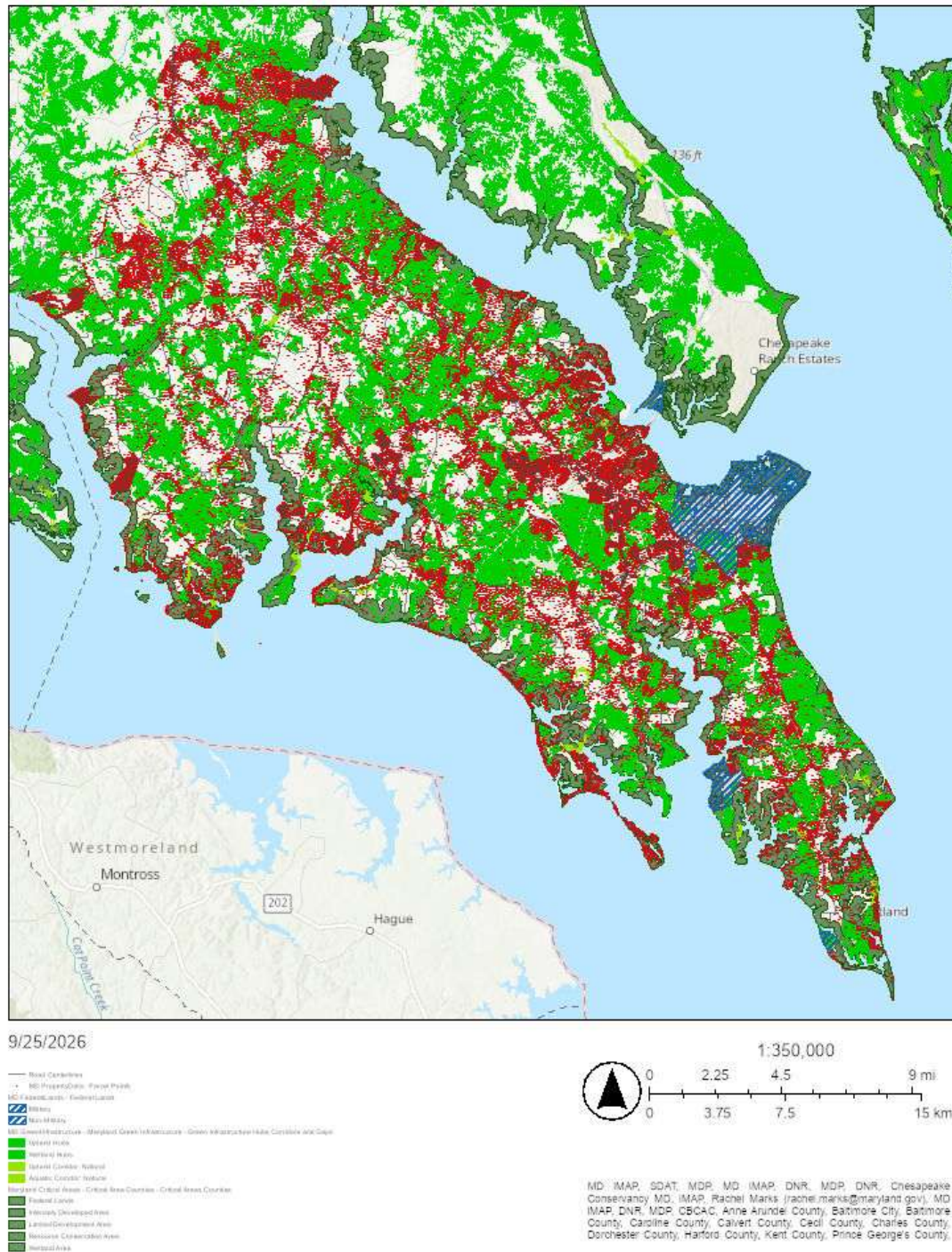


Figure 33: Development Lands and Green Infrastructure

Development Lands and Green Infrastructure



3.3.2.1 Use of Resource Data and Inventories

County planners and development reviewers are required to use available state and County data inventories of land cover, natural resource lands, conservation areas, protected lands, and other environmental features for plan and project analysis. The County maintains a comprehensive GIS-based inventory of areas and information relevant to lands of natural resource significance, land use, and environmental planning. The County accesses the Maryland iMap GIS servers and the Maryland iMap data portal to download local copies of updated environmental resource datasets used for project and land preservation proposal analysis. Maryland iMap also provides information about Maryland's four most active state-operated land conservation programs: Program Open Space Stateside, the MALPF, the Maryland Environmental Trust, and the Rural Legacy Program.

The County used two important data sets for preservation planning. The first is the Maryland DNR GreenPrint, which includes Targeted Ecological Areas, lands, and watersheds of high ecological value identified as conservation priorities. The Green Infrastructure assessment is cited in the Zoning Ordinance (*Article 7, Section 71.8 4.d [8]*) in reference to preserving FIDS habitat and at *Section 71.8.7.a.(3)*, which requires minimized disturbance in forested areas by clustering development and maintaining corridors of existing forest or woodland to provide connections between wildlife habitat areas. GreenPrint information must be consulted and used to identify areas, at a minimum, where these natural resource corridors should be maintained.

The second data set is the Biodiversity Conservation Network (BioNet) of Maryland, which systematically identifies and prioritizes ecologically important lands to conserve Maryland's biodiversity (i.e., plants, animals, habitats, and landscapes). This data set aggregates numerous separate data layers hierarchically according to the BioNet Criteria Matrix. The BioNet assessment was developed to provide decision support for Maryland's DNR' species and land conservation programs.

These data provide the state and conservation partners with critical information to efficiently identify key lands for potential protection, and to improve land planning efforts. BioNet data allows agencies to maximize the influence and effectiveness of public and private conservation investments, promote shared responsibilities for land conservation between public and private sectors, and guide and encourage compatible land uses and land management practices.

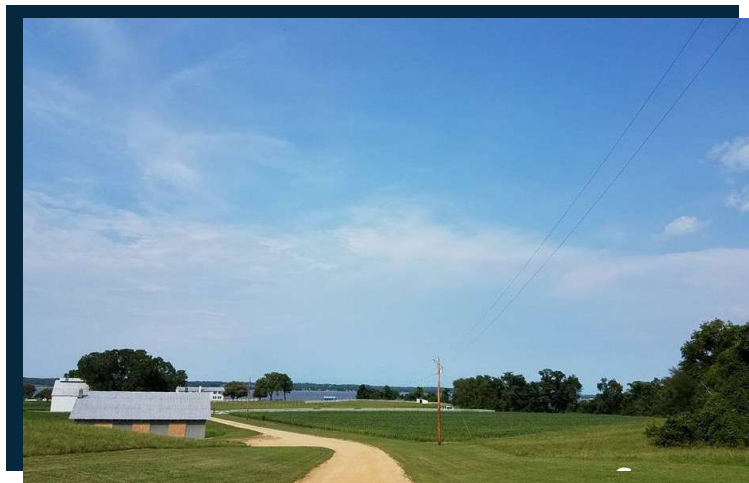
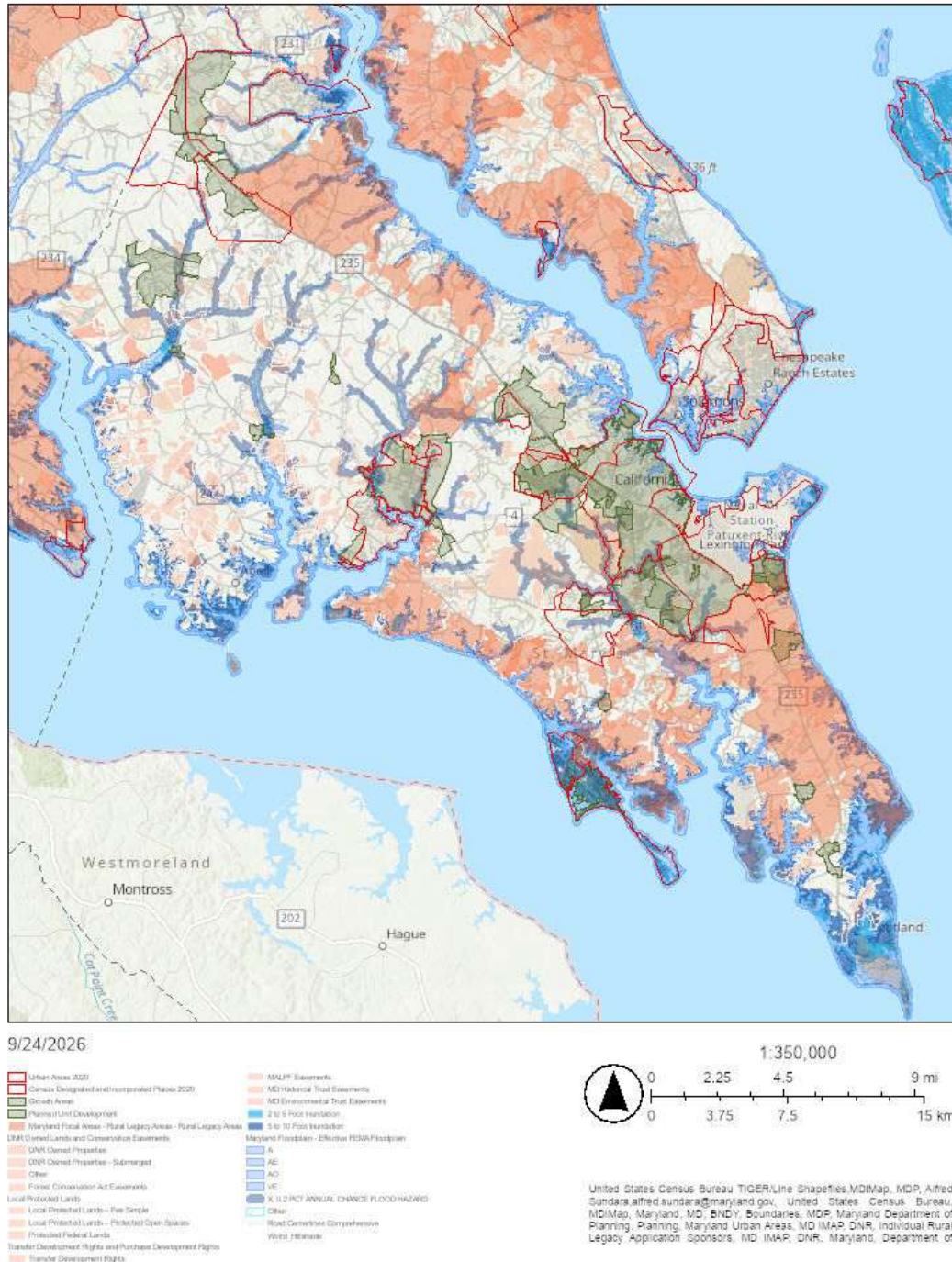


Figure 34: Climate Vulnerability and Risk Assessment Map

Climate Vulnerability and Risk Assessment Map



3.3.3 Designated Conservation and Other Natural Resource Areas

The areas defined by St. Mary's County for natural resource preservation encompass a significantly larger area than is defined in GreenPrint mapping. This larger defined area is supported by County goals, policies, and programs and Maryland planning requirements.

The County has established a goal to retain St. Mary's County's rural character and economy through preserving 80% of the County's land area in its current rural state and focusing development in specified districts that total the remaining 20%. Growth areas are intended to enhance the quality of life and offer a small-town or urban character as appropriate for the County's "high-tech" economy. The County uses regulations to concentrate development in suitable areas planned for growth, and to achieve protection of important rural resource lands through requirements for sensitive areas conservation, mandatory open space and clustering provisions, CBCA program, and use of TDRs to permanently set aside large blocks of resource lands.

County programs to protect resource lands are intended to achieve wide-scale rural land conservation with minimal demand for local, state, or federal funding. To make best use of available funding, County- designated conservation areas have been adopted to target funding for specific purposes in specific areas. These areas are shown in *Figure 35* and include:

- Huntersville RLA, which protects natural, cultural, and agricultural resources in the north County area
- Mattapany RLA, which protects natural, cultural, and agricultural resources and minimizes conflicts with Department of Defense operations in the southern County
- Agricultural Focus Area, which protects the County's highest concentrations of actively farmed parcels, including those in Amish and Mennonite communities
- Natural Resource Focus Area (described in detail below)
- The Natural Resource Focus Area links the St. Mary's River Wildland and State Park to the Huntersville RLA and encompasses large portions of the McIntosh Run sub-watershed. This area includes one of the most heavily forested watersheds in Southern Maryland and habitat for several RTES. The Natural Resources Focus Area includes important hubs mapped by GreenPrint and areas that are priorities for preservation by federal agencies and conservation organizations. The Natural Resources Focus Area offers an opportunity to maintain forest and riparian habitats connecting the Potomac and Patuxent watersheds and provides a defined greenspace between the County's two development districts in Leonardtown and Lexington Park. The Natural Resources Focus Area also contains key landscapes identified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's "Landscape Conservation Design (LCD) for a Proposed Patuxent Waters Conservation Area."

The County's designated conservation areas are generally consistent with the state's GreenPrint conservation priorities (*Figure 3-4*). The most noticeable differences between County- and State identified Natural Resource Land Conservation priority areas are:

- Where the large central Targeted Ecological Area extends east of Loveville Road/Point Lookout Road and the County's Natural Resources Focus Area, which starts east of the roads but also extends north of Three Notch Road

- Along the St. Mary's/Charles County border, where GreenPrint has a Targeted Ecological Area that is not a County-designated area

The County has not completed a standalone assessment of its Green Infrastructure network. However, a considerable amount of natural resources, watershed, habitat, and conservation planning work has been completed and continues to be expanded through ongoing environmental planning efforts. This work, together with the State's GreenPrint mapping, provides a strong foundation for implementing the County's natural resource protection and land conservation goals. *Table X* summarizes this work.

Table x: LPPRP Updates

Watershed	Report/Date /Author	Description, Findings, and Recommendations
Sensitive Lands (RTES) – Countywide	Natural Resource Conservation Summary for St. Mary's County, Maryland – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, January 2003	• This document inventories potential conservation resources and is part of a series of investigations focused on watershed management and restoration in the county, as part of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers St. Mary's River Feasibility Study. Three types of conservation resources are investigated: RTES; wetlands located beyond the limits of regulatory controls within the Lexington Park and Leonardtown Development Districts; and contiguous forest areas within the county. • This document inventories potential conservation resources as part of the Corps of Engineers St. Mary's River Feasibility Study (25 sites of rare, threatened, and/or endangered species and their habitats; wetlands in the Lexington Park and Leonardtown development districts; and contiguous forest using 1995 Department of Natural Resources forest inventory map), including the St. Mary's River Watershed and McIntosh Run Protection Area. • This document identifies countywide green infrastructure areas (hubs, corridors) and major forest blocks in the St. Mary's River Watershed and McIntosh Run Protection Area. • Findings: 1. McIntosh Run warrants highest level of protection from land use impacts. 2. St. Mary's River Bottomland needs its 5,000 acres of forest, open land, and aquatic habitat protected. 3. Use contiguous forest mapping inventory during development review to maintain connections between hubs and corridors.
		• Clean water action plans are required by the federal government to identify watersheds not meeting clean water and other natural resource goals for purposes of developing restoration strategies. All Maryland watersheds were examined using a standard classification system to evaluate conditions and develop watershed restoration, protection, and

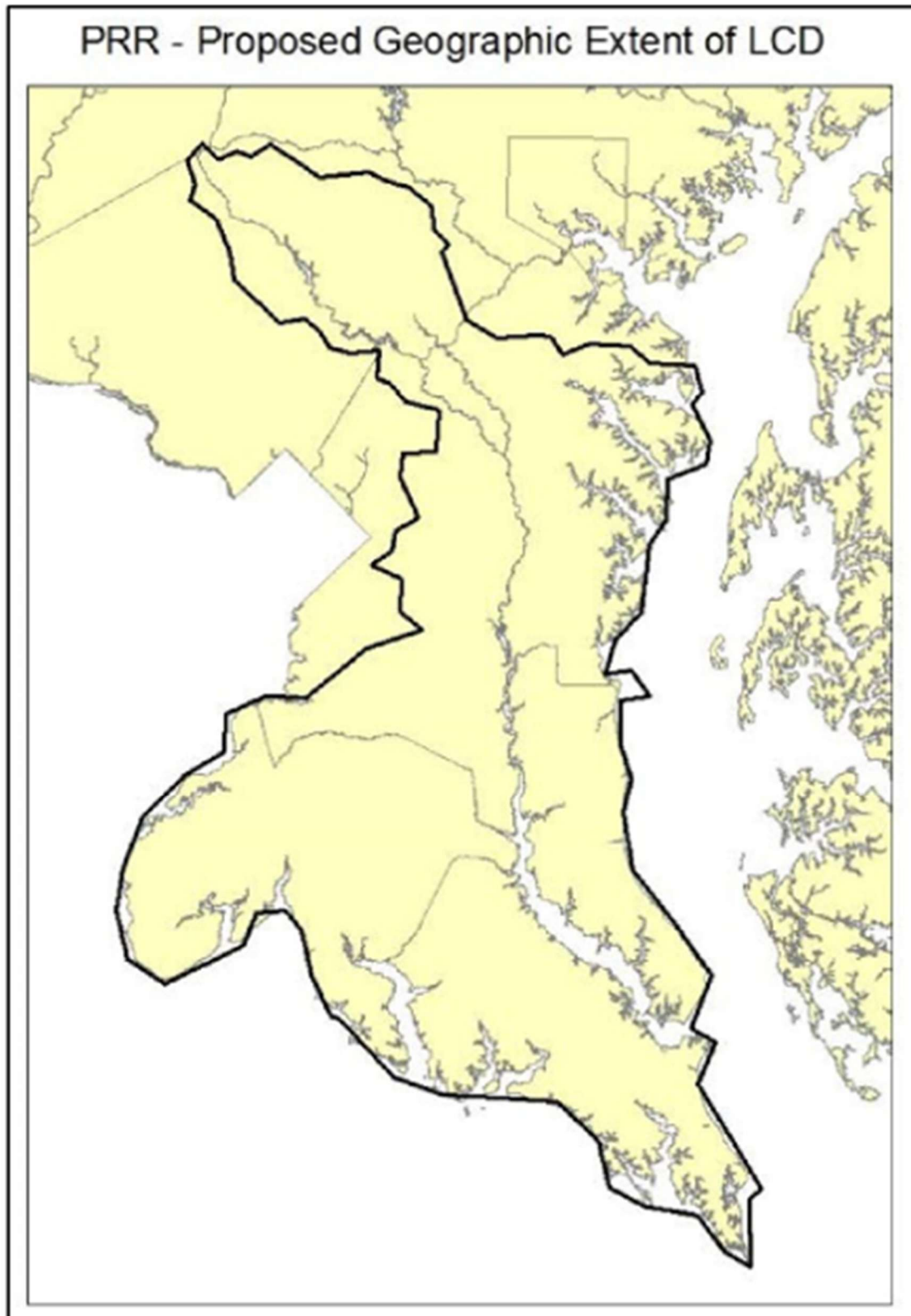
Countywide	Maryland's Clean Water Action Plan (1998) – <i>Clean Water Action Plan Technical Workgroup, December 1998</i>	preservation priorities. The three categories are: 1) watersheds not meeting clean water and natural resource goals; 2) watersheds meeting goals but needing preventive actions to sustain quality; and 3) pristine or sensitive watersheds meeting goals but needing extra levels of protection. All seven county watersheds fail one or more clean water/natural resource goals. The St. Clement's, Wicomico, and Lower Potomac Rivers watersheds meet two or more indicators of high quality and are classified as Category 3 watersheds, meaning an extra level of protection is needed to enhance positive indicators; St. Mary's River, Gilbert Swamp, and Lower Patuxent watersheds meet four or more indicators of high quality and are classified as Selected Category 3 watersheds, again needing protection to enhance positive indicators. Breton Bay was added as a Selected Category 3 watershed after the action plan was released, because it was found to be both a Category 1 Priority (Restoration) watershed and a Selected Category 3 watershed—one of only 18 such watersheds in the state.
Stormwater Restoration – Countywide	Year 7, 2025 St. Mary's County Municipal MS4 Progress Report and Work Plan – <i>St. Mary's County, October 2025</i>	- Documents progress toward impervious area restoration and implementation of the County's Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System permit requirements. - Findings: - The County documented 556.77 acres of restoration credit completed between January 2006 and October 2025. - Restoration completed to date is sufficient to meet the County's current 20 percent restoration goal. - Additional restoration credits are anticipated through future shoreline management and redevelopment projects. - Recommendations and planned actions include continued implementation of restoration projects through County capital improvement projects, County facility maintenance projects, and private development projects, continued tracking of restoration progress, and continued pursuit of shoreline management and redevelopment opportunities that provide additional restoration benefits.
St. Mary's River	Watershed Evaluation for St. Mary's River and McIntosh Run Watersheds – Watershed Assessment Plan – <i>KCI Technologies, April 1998</i>	- This document examines six sub-watersheds of the St. Mary's River watershed and five sub-watersheds of McIntosh Run (see Breton Bay Watershed below). The document identifies percent of watersheds unsuitable for development; areas with development constraints; areas for wetland and forest mitigation; and calculated watershed/land use carrying capacity (amount of acceptable impervious surface without effects on water quality). - Based on zoning and the amount of unsuitable lands (bad soils, slopes, etc.) conservation recommendations are made to reduce impacts and zoning/land use changes are suggested where necessary.

Watershed Restoration – St. Mary's River	St. Mary's River Watershed Plan – <i>Center for Watershed Protection, August 2012</i>	- Builds upon watershed assessment work completed in 2002–2003 and 2007–2008 and develops a community-supported restoration strategy for improving conditions in the St. Mary's River watershed. - Findings: - The St. Mary's River is designated as a Stronghold Watershed and supports regionally endangered and state-threatened species. - The watershed is listed as impaired and faces continued population growth and development pressure. - Existing impervious cover and stormwater runoff contribute to watershed impairment. - Recommendations include reducing and disconnecting impervious surfaces through stormwater retrofits, integrating watershed protection goals into future development and redevelopment, expanding watershed education and stewardship programs, encouraging green building and smart growth practices, and increasing participation by residents, schools, and businesses in watershed restoration efforts.
Lower Potomac River	Tributary Strategies for Lower Potomac Watershed Implementation Plan	To date, the portion of this watershed in St. Mary's County has been addressed only by Klein (1994)—see below in this table—and through the Tributary Strategies.
Wicomico River	Wicomico Scenic River Study and Management Plan – <i>Maryland Department of Natural Resources and Wicomico Scenic River Local Advisory Board, 1994</i>	- This watershed is a designated Maryland Scenic and Wild River. - Extensive inventory of natural, historic, and cultural resources. - Numerous recommendations for compatible land use, agricultural, and conservation practices to enhance water quality; conserve soil resources; control source sewerage discharge; control urban nonpoint pollution, stormwater, and sediment loads; facilitate compatible forestry operations and maintain/restore riparian forest buffers; and conduct a full environmental impact study for restoring nine miles of channelized Gilbert Run.
Gilbert Swamp		This watershed, a sub-watershed of the Wicomico River, is mostly in Charles County, where it has been studied intensely along with the Zekiah Swamp Run.
St. Clements Bay	No watershed studies	The Soil Conservation Service has been very active in achieving soil conservation and water quality plan goals in the county's largest agricultural watershed. Plans have been approved on 15,187 acres out of a proposed 21,154 acres.

3.3.4 Planning and Land Use Management Authority, Easements, and Funding

The key components of the County's planning strategy to implement natural resource goals is its land use management, zoning, and subdivision authorities. *Table 16 summarizes fundamental regulations.*

Figure 35: Proposed Patuxent Waters Conservation Area



As development occurs, these regulations help protect sensitive resource lands and provide an opportunity to fill gaps in Green Infrastructure. To date, the County's easement acquisition efforts have focused on agricultural land preservation. The Rural Legacy Program and other easement programs discussed in *Section 4 Agricultural Land Preservation* of this LPPRP are valuable in that they have enabled the conservation of both farmland and natural resource land. Agricultural land preservation also serves to protect natural resources from development. However, funding specifically for natural resource land conservation is generally limited. Program Open Space is generally used for Parks and Recreation land acquisition and development projects, some of which conserve natural resource land and make outdoor recreation opportunities available to the public.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service completed the Final Land Protection Plan and Environmental Assessment for the Southern Maryland Woodlands National Wildlife Refuge in 2024. The approved conservation area includes portions of Anne Arundel, Calvert, Charles, Prince George's, and St. Mary's counties and provides a framework for conserving significant forest, wetland, wildlife habitat, and connected natural landscapes throughout Southern Maryland.

Through conservation easements, land acquisition, and partnerships with willing landowners, conservation organizations, and local governments, the refuge program seeks to protect ecologically significant natural areas while enhancing habitat connectivity and supporting regional conservation objectives. The program emphasizes voluntary land conservation and partnership-based approaches that complement existing agricultural preservation, Rural Legacy, Program Open Space, and local land conservation efforts. These efforts support broader conservation objectives related to habitat connectivity, protection of resilient landscapes, biodiversity conservation, water quality improvement, and flood resilience.

Placeholder: Table x - St. Mary's County Natural Resources Protection Requirements Summary

Subject	Zoning Ordinance	Criteria (For actual requirements, see St. Mary's County Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance)
Natural Resources Conservation (streams, wetlands, hydric soils, floodplain, steep slopes, erodible soils, habitat protection, shoreline resources)	Chapter 71 Sections 1 – 9	• Streams – maintain natural stream buffers (replant if needed) of 100-foot width from edge of bank for perennial streams and intermittent streams within the Critical Area (CBCA) and 50-foot width from edge of bank outside of Critical Area for intermittent streams; maintain fish movement; and prohibit disrupting stream flow with riprap or other artificial means. • Wetlands and hydric soils – 100-foot buffer for tidal wetlands with expansion for steep slopes, highly erodible soils and hydric soils; 25-foot buffer for non-tidal wetlands (expanded up to 100 feet for adjoining hydric soils); mitigation required for any disturbance. • 100-year floodplain protections – establishes environmental review procedures and minimum floodplain protection standards, such as prohibiting any new development within floodplains; requiring permits for any work within floodplains; requiring easements for all floodplain areas; and requiring 50-foot buffers around edges, reduced to 25 feet with approved water quality plan. • Steep slopes/erodible soils – no disturbance on slopes over 25%; on highly erodible soils with greater than 15% slope; no grading on steep slopes within 50 feet of streams in CBCA and stream buffers (many detailed requirements for each). • Highly erodible soils – Soil Conservation Service review required for disturbed soils and wetlands; Critical Area Buffer, stream buffers, and wetland buffers expand to extent of steep erodible soils or 300 feet (whichever is greater) include these soil types; requires use of infiltration, flow attenuation, stormwater retention, or detention. • Habitat protection – required for expanded CBCA buffer, FIDS habitat for contiguous forests generally 50 acres or more and adjacent to Maryland Department of Natural Resources' green infrastructure network, habitats for RTES, colonial water bird nesting areas, historic waterfowl concentration areas, Natural Heritage Areas, anadromous fish propagation waters; (many detailed requirements for each).
Forest Conservation (timber, forest, and woodlands)	Chapter 72 Sections 1 – 5	• Timber Harvests – forest management plans required for over one acre in CBCA, plus sediment control plan; all harvesting subject to review; no cutting in buffer; harvested lands must remain in forest reuse, with regeneration, for minimum of five years. • Forest/Woodland Protection - CBCA mitigation required to offset clearing/cutting impacts (many other requirements); mitigation-banking allowed with approved plans for native species reforestation or afforestation.
Forest Conservation	Chapter 75 Sections 1 – 12	• Regulations for cutting and clearing certain forests and requiring forest stand delineations and conservation plans for sites greater than 20,000 square feet for many development activities.

Floodplain Regulations	Chapter 76 <i>Sections 1 – 6</i>	Establishes standards and regulations related to development within floodplains; requires site plans and permits for any disturbance; establishes flood elevation and location standards for structures; numerous other county, state and federal permits and procedures required.
CBCA	Chapters 41, 72, 73, and 74 <i>Sections 22.5 and 24.4</i>	Applies to all land and water within 1,000 feet beyond heads of tide boundaries and private tidal wetlands (many more requirements for Intensely Developed Areas, Limited Development Areas, and Resource Conservation Areas).

3.3.5 Other Regulatory or Management Programs

The County's TDR program contributes to the County's Natural Resource Land Conservation strategy. As of 2026, the TDR program had permanently protected XXX acres, retiring XXX development rights on XXX tracts (may include multiple lots in common ownership). The subdivision ordinance provides for protection of natural features in the RPD by requiring major subdivisions to cluster development. In subdivisions that create more than five lots, at least 50% of the tract must be preserved in open space. The subdivision regulations also allow the provision of greenways where they preserve or establish sections of designated Green Infrastructure corridors or routes listed in the Maryland Greenways Atlas.

The County's Recreation and Parks land acquisition program is another means of conserving lands with high natural resource values and making them accessible for appropriate public use and interaction with nature. Myrtle Point Park continues to provide opportunities for resource-based recreation and is the focus of ongoing recreational and educational improvements, including planned visitor and environmental education facilities. These efforts complement environmental education programs provided by St. Mary's County Public Schools and other local partners throughout the County.

3.3.6 Eco-Tourism and Resource-Based Recreation

The Comprehensive Plan encourages heritage tourism and resource-based recreation. Both activities are complementary components of the County's natural resource conservation program. In 2003, St. Mary's County adopted a regional Heritage Tourism Management Plan designed to increase and enhance visitation in Southern Maryland and support designation of Southern Maryland as a National Heritage Area. In 2016, the County completed a tourism master plan that identified opportunities to expand visitor experiences through enhanced parks, recreational facilities, cultural resources, waterfront access, and heritage attractions. More recent planning efforts continue to recognize tourism, historic preservation, environmental stewardship, and outdoor recreation as important contributors to the County's economy and quality of life. St. Mary's County also maintains an active historic preservation program, with an inventory of approximately 700 historic sites and structures, including numerous properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

3.4 Evaluation of the Natural Resource Land Conservation Program

This section presents County staff evaluation of the ability of St. Mary's County to achieve natural resource goals through an evaluation of strengths and weaknesses of the state and County's current Natural Resource Land Conservation implementation strategies, programs, and processes.

3.4.1 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Natural Resources Implementation Program

3.4.1.1 Comprehensive Planning Process

Strengths

- Natural resource conservation goals, objectives, and policies are well integrated in the comprehensive planning process. They provide a framework to implement relevant planning strategies, programs, regulations, and decision-making. The goals are grounded in the Comprehensive Plan's vision statement and are compatible with the state's goals for Natural Resource Land Conservation.
- The 2010 Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance incorporates many of the Comprehensive Plan's natural resource conservation and protection recommendations. While some of the regulations go beyond minimum state or federal requirements, the increased standards will be necessary for the County to meet water quality improvement goals, assist in hazard mitigation planning, protect life and property, and make the County eligible for participation in programs such as:
 - The National Flood Insurance Program's Community Rating System, which has the potential to reduce flood insurance costs for residents.

Weaknesses

- Watershed restoration, habitat conservation, and natural resource protection efforts are informed by numerous plans, studies, and environmental inventories. Continued integration of updated conservation datasets, including Green Infrastructure, Targeted Ecological Areas, habitat connectivity analyses, and watershed restoration priorities, would strengthen coordination between conservation planning and land use decision-making.
- While the County has undertaken significant efforts to protect natural resources, opportunities remain to more explicitly integrate climate resilience, flood resilience, and conservation of resilient landscapes into natural resource planning, land conservation priorities, and implementation strategies.
- Watershed strategies and related studies are not fully integrated into the comprehensive planning process. Plans such as the Breton Bay WRAS, the St. Mary's River Watershed Plan, the Management Plan for Hilton Run, and other watershed restoration efforts identify conservation and restoration opportunities that should continue to be evaluated as functional plans and planning documents are updated.

3.4.1.2 Use of Resource Data and Inventories

Strengths

- The County has developed a comprehensive GIS-based system that includes natural resources data, which the County uses in small area planning and in day-to-day subdivision and site plan review. Extensive analysis of this data was used to update the Natural Resources Element of the Comprehensive Plan.

Weaknesses

- The County relies on a variety of state and federal environmental datasets to support planning and development reviews. While access to digital soil information and other environmental data has improved planning capabilities, continued updates to resource inventories and environmental datasets are needed to support implementation of erosion control, steep slope protection, watershed protection, and other natural resource conservation objectives.
- The County has worked with the state to improve access to information on RTES and associated habitats. However, timely review of RTES information remains important during development review and permitting processes. Early identification of sensitive habitats helps provide adequate resource protection, minimize impacts to RTES, and improve project planning while maintaining appropriate safeguards for sensitive environmental data.

3.4.1.3 Designated Conservation and Other Natural Resource Areas

Strengths

- The Huntersville Rural Legacy (RLA) established in 1998 and the Mattapany RLA, established in 2004 have been successful in concentrating easement purchases and protecting large contiguous natural resource land areas. The County expanded the Huntersville RLA in 2004 and 2017. The Mattapany RLA was expanded in 2009 to facilitate additional land protection efforts near Naval Air Station Patuxent River and was expanded again in 2022.
- The St. Mary's River Wildland is an important designated protection area in the central part of the County and serves as the anchor for conservation efforts in the St. Mary's River Watershed. The County has identified an extensive sensitive area network centered on streams, floodplains and wetlands, the surrounding steep slopes, and sensitive soils, and has established regulations to protect and enhance these resources.

Weaknesses

- The County's designated conservation areas (CBCA, Huntersville RLA, Mattapany RLA, and St. Mary's River Wildland) have been criticized as being too small in overall area to effectively support a comprehensive network of contiguous Green Infrastructure and priority conservation areas. While expansion of the Rural Legacy Areas has improved connectivity among protected lands, opportunities remain to strengthen habitat connections and ecological networks identified through Green Infrastructure, Targeted Ecological Areas, and other conservation planning efforts.

- Feedback mechanisms in the RLA review process need improvement so local applicants (land trusts and the County) have direction regarding the status of applications. Prompt feedback is important so the local community can use its resources to respond to evolving opportunities.
- The sensitive areas protected by regulations are not always adequately monitored to ensure that protected land remains as such. While land protected by regulation accomplish many resource, habitat, and services goals, the regulations can be changed to weaken protection, and privately protected land is not available to create a coordinated network accessible to the public for recreation or tourism purposes. The County could consider negotiating limited public access into future private easement agreements.

3.4.1.4 Planning and Land Use Management Authority, Easements, and Funding

Strengths

- Implementation of the County's zoning and subdivision ordinances' natural resource protection requirements should be effective in addressing impacts related to specific development projects. The regulations address all sensitive resources.
- Environmental planners and review staff are plugged in procedurally to the development review process, facilitating their input into subdivision and site plan review.
- Local funds for land preservation have remained stable since 2001 when the County dedicated a portion of its increased recordation tax to conserve rural lands.

Weaknesses

- Environmental planning, review, grant administration, inventory maintenance, project implementation, and agency coordination require specialized expertise and significant staff resources. Continued investment in staffing and technical capacity is important to support environmental review, planning, conservation implementation, and coordination with state and federal agencies.
- Weaknesses remain in the County's ability to fully protect and connect Green Infrastructure through its planning and regulatory framework. While zoning and subdivision regulations incorporate protections for sensitive habitats and natural resources, additional integration of Green Infrastructure, Targeted Ecological Areas, Stronghold Watersheds, habitat connectivity analyses, and watershed priorities would strengthen conservation outcomes and improve coordination between resource protection and development review.
- Continued efforts are needed to fund natural resource conservation, especially for fee simple and easement acquisitions.
- The County's Agricultural and Land Preservation Program has been primarily used to match state funds to preserve agricultural lands. While this has also helped natural resource conservation, such as in the Huntersville RLA, few resources are dedicated primarily for Natural Resource Land Conservation.

- Add other programs working to preserve land as partners to the Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative (REPI) agreement for Southern Maryland to allow additional funding sources to be matched with REPI funds.

3.4.1.5 Other Regulatory or Management Programs

Strengths

- The County's suite of programs for natural resource protection is comprehensive and includes sensitive area protection regulations, a TDR program, and cluster development requirements. A special strength is the 50% minimum required open space provision for major subdivisions in the RPD and residential zones in growth areas through which natural resource land and farmland are protected as part of a development project.
- The County has established development applications and review procedures to incorporate more detailed environmental comments earlier in the plan design and review process.

Weaknesses

- St. Mary's County is a non-delegated County for sediment and erosion control. Thus, the County remains dependent on coordination among multiple agencies and organizations for implementation of sediment and erosion control, stormwater management, watershed protection, and natural resource conservation programs. Continued investment in technical staff, training, monitoring, and interagency coordination is needed to ensure consistent implementation, compliance monitoring, maintenance of restoration projects, and protection of sensitive environmental resources.

3.4.1.6 Eco-Tourism and Resource-Based Recreation

Strengths

- St. Mary's County actively promotes its rural character and cultural heritage as a participant in the Southern Maryland Heritage Area program. Both the County and state have done a good job documenting and promoting the area's rich natural and historic resources.
- State-owned resource lands, including Saint Inigoes State Forest, Newtowne Neck, Salem State Forest, and other publicly accessible conservation areas, provide significant cultural, recreational, and natural resource assets within the County and support eco-tourism, environmental education, and outdoor recreation opportunities.
- The County has continued to invest in passive recreation, environmental education, and waterfront access through implementation of capital projects at Shannon Farm, Snow Hill Park, Myrtle Point Park, Elms Beach, and other recreation facilities. These projects expand opportunities for resource-based recreation, environmental education, waterfront access, and stewardship of natural and cultural resources.
- County tourism initiatives continue to promote cultural heritage, waterfront resources, resource-based recreation, and water-dependent activities as important components of the local economy and visitor experience.

- The Patuxent River Commission sponsored an effort to promote and expand water-focused eco-tourism in the Patuxent River watershed.
- Opportunities exist to expand agritourism, equine activities, farm-based recreation, and other working-land tourism experiences that support agricultural viability while enhancing visitor access to the County's rural landscape.
- Federal, state, and local agencies have worked to develop resources for the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail.

Weaknesses

- While significant progress has been made in advancing recreation, tourism, environmental education, and waterfront access projects, continued funding, permitting, and interagency coordination are needed to fully implement planned capital improvements and expand resource-based recreation opportunities throughout the County

3.4.2 Summary of Needed Improvements in the Implementation Program

Resource protection is a key component of the County Comprehensive Plan's vision statement that establishes a strong policy foundation for implementation strategies. Overall, the County has made progress in inventorying, mapping, and understanding its natural resources. The County, residents, and other individuals have made substantial progress in analyzing resources and the impacts of development in most County watersheds. The zoning ordinance was updated to incorporate environmental and conservation criteria. Easement programs (MALPF, Maryland Environmental Trust, MHT, and RL) have permanently preserved over 29,800 acres of agricultural and natural resource lands.

- The County's suite of programs for natural resource protection is comprehensive, but some areas for improvement in processes appear to exist. Based on analysis of Natural Resource Land Conservation programs, County staff identified the following key areas for improvement:
 - Additional tools and performance measures are needed to evaluate cumulative impacts of development on natural resources, habitat connectivity, watershed health, water quality, and resilience. Improved assessment and tracking of resource conditions at watershed and sub-watershed scales would enhance the County's ability to target conservation investments, evaluate development impacts, and support long-term resource protection goals. Emerging federal, state, and regional datasets provide opportunities to strengthen project review, environmental planning, and conservation decision-making.
 - Natural resource conservation efforts are implemented through multiple County, state, federal, nonprofit, and private-sector programs. Continued coordination among partner organizations is needed to identify funding opportunities, expand conservation initiatives, support land acquisition and easement programs, and advance long-term natural resource protection goals.

- Limited staffing and funding resources continue to constrain the County's ability to strategically identify, prioritize, acquire, and manage conservation lands and easements. Preservation efforts are often dependent upon available funding opportunities and willing landowners rather than a comprehensive conservation acquisition strategy.
- Additional integration of Green Infrastructure mapping, Targeted Ecological Areas (TEAs), Stronghold Watersheds, habitat connectivity analyses, and other emerging conservation datasets into land conservation, restoration, and acquisition strategies would improve targeting of limited conservation resources and strengthen long-term ecological, water quality, and resilience outcomes.
- Capacity to oversee easements and manage lands and facilities once acquired remains an ongoing concern. Continued evaluation of staffing, organizational capacity, monitoring, and long-term stewardship responsibilities is needed to ensure the continued success of conservation programs and protected lands.

3.5 Program Development Strategy for Natural Resource Conservation

3.5.1 County Steps

The County has taken steps to overcome weaknesses and achieve state and local goals for Natural Resource Land Conservation, including:

- The County has identified priority conservation areas through the Comprehensive Plan and related conservation planning efforts to help focus public investment and conservation activities. These efforts support protection of the St. Mary's River Watershed, Breton Bay watershed, Huntersville Rural Legacy Area, Mattapany Rural Legacy Area, and other priority conservation lands. Progress since 2010 includes establishment of the McIntosh Run Watershed Conservation Area, expansion of the Huntersville Rural Legacy Area in 2017, expansion of the Mattapany Rural Legacy Area in 2022, and continued easement acquisitions supported through County, state, federal, military, and land trust partnerships. The County's partnerships with the Department of Defense and conservation organizations have expanded opportunities for easement acquisition and fee simple land conservation:
 - The first property protected in the planned McIntosh Run Watershed Conservation Area is managed under an agreement with the State of Maryland.
 - The 2017 Huntersville Rural Legacy Area expansion included portions of the County's natural resource conservation focus area and the Patuxent Waters Conservation Area, helping to strengthen connections between protected resource lands.
 - The 2022 Mattapany Rural Legacy Area expansion increased opportunities for protection of priority resource lands between the St. Mary's River, Breton Bay, and Potomac River watersheds.

- The County has incorporated updated GIS resource data layers, Green Infrastructure mapping, FIDS habitat information, and other habitat and water quality datasets into environmental review processes to improve identification of sensitive resources and ensure compliance with Comprehensive Plan policies and regulatory requirements. The Comprehensive Plan identifies important habitats, sensitive areas, TEAs, Green Infrastructure networks, and other priority conservation resources that help guide these reviews.
- Specific Rural Subdivision Design guidelines require protection of agricultural lands, as well as natural landscapes and habitats, as components of the overall rural character of the County.
- The County's TDR program, conservation easements, Rural Legacy Program, Priority Preservation Area initiatives, and related preservation programs continue to support long-term protection of agricultural and natural resource lands throughout the County.
- Green Infrastructure has been incorporated into comprehensive planning, conservation planning, and development review processes. Current planning efforts emphasize protection of habitat cores, ecological corridors, headwater forests, Stronghold Watersheds, and TEAs. The County continues to utilize GIS-based environmental inventories, habitat mapping, watershed data, and other planning tools to support conservation planning, restoration targeting, environmental review, and prioritization of land preservation investments.

3.5.2 Additional County and State Actions

The following recommended strategies are intended to improve Natural Resource Land Conservation in St. Mary's County.

3.5.2.1 County

- Continue to update and use the Water Resources Element of the plan and Watershed Implementation Process to better integrate watershed restoration strategies and tracking into the comprehensive planning, development review, and inspection processes.
- Implement the Breton Bay WRAS and the St. Mary's River WRAS.
- Increase staff and/or fund contract services for environmental planning, development review, and stormwater management maintenance and inspections, to ensure responsive and effective implementation of County programs and regulations developed to meet local, state, and federal mandates.

3.5.2.2 State

- Implement Maryland legislation to restore and protect state funding to transfer tax-funded land conservation, preservation, and recreation programs; provide new programs (MALPF, Rural Legacy, and Program Open Space); allocate funds for state land and park development; and provide for maintenance and recreation. Use general funds to repay past transfers and appropriate funds for additional repayments starting in 2021.

- Identify measurable natural resource planning objectives that can be credited in the state's Watershed Implementation Plans.
- Streamline the easement acquisition and Rural Legacy application process to make it more responsive to County and land trust needs.
- Increase access to the State's RTES inventory to flag development sites and improve RTES habitat review.
- Increase the number of Maryland Department of Environment inspectors for sediment and erosion control inspections and compliance.

4.0 Agricultural Land Preservation

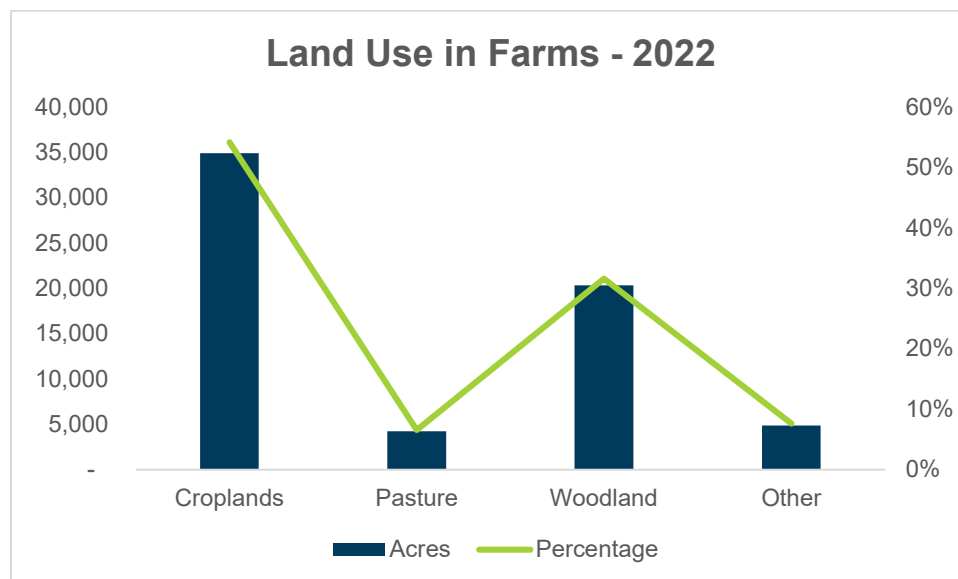
4.1 Agricultural Industry and Farmland Preservation Overview

Protection of agricultural lands is a key component of the St. Mary's County land conservation strategy. The Agriculture and Seafood Division manages the County's agricultural programs, including land preservation. Deliberately setting aside land for public benefit (for any purpose) has commonalities, and land conservation efforts need to be coordinated. However, agricultural land protection is often far more complex because it involves leaving land in private hands with participation in programs being voluntary. To achieve its primary purpose (permanent protection of the productive land and its microclimate resource for food production into the future), skilled farmers and farm families as well as a viable agricultural industry are needed. No other form of land conservation needs to accommodate an economic activity as relatively intense as agriculture.

Agricultural Industry in St. Mary's County

The USDA Census of Agriculture (Census) defines a farm as, "any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, in the census year." The Census asks farmers about the amount of land on their farms and consistently reports more land in farms than is reported by the Maryland Department of Planning's (MDP) 2007 Land Use Mapping for agricultural land uses which **interprets satellite imagery and does not identify forestland that is on farms.**

Figure 36: Land Use on Farms 2022



In 2022, the Census counted 61,803 acres of land in farms in St. Mary's County, down from 64,308 acres in 2012. The 2022 Census also showed that the average size of farms decreased slightly and that the number of farms in 2022 has increased from 615 farms in 2017 to 656 farms in 2022. This reduction in farms reversed the trend seen from 2002 to 2012. Land in farms tends to be in a mixture of agricultural uses including cropland, pasture, woodland, and

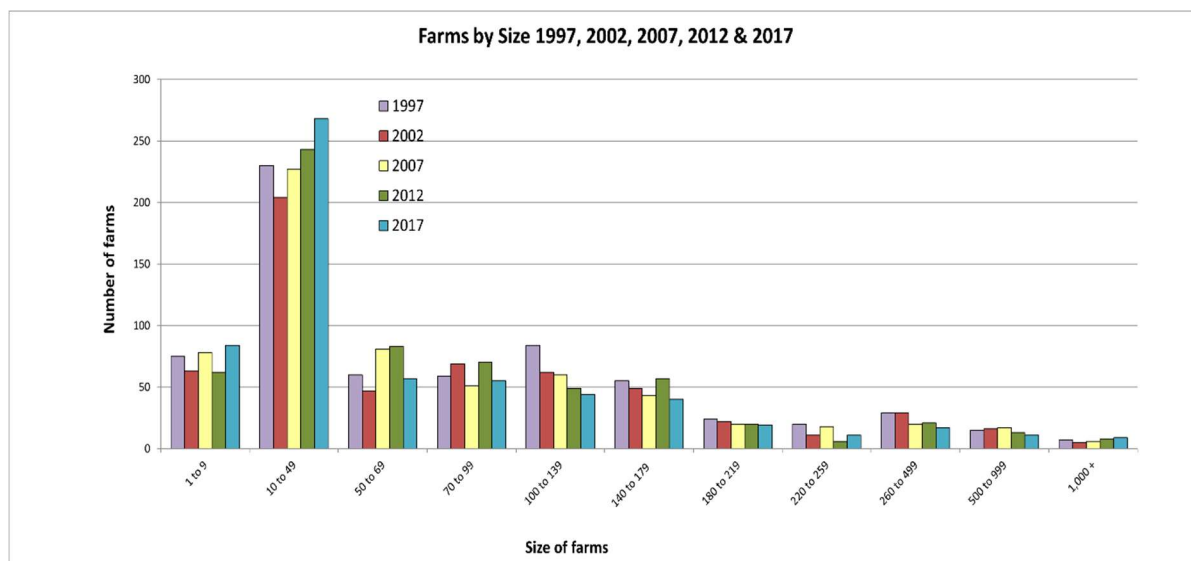
structures. However, cropland is the most dominant use with most St. Mary's County farms growing soybeans, corn, wheat, hay, and barley. Pastureland is primarily used for beef cattle. Nursery greenhouse products are now second to grains in sales value, and tobacco has dropped from second in sales value (after grains/soybeans) to sixth in sales value in the County. Vegetables, cattle for meat, milk, and dairy products now rank third to fifth respectively in value.

In 2022, an average County farm size was 98 acres, down slightly from 100 acres in 2017. Charting the distribution of farms by size shows a preponderance of farms between 10 and 49 acres (**Figure 4-2**).

In 2022, slightly greater than 75% of all farms were less than 100 acres in size and encompassed just under 24% of the land in farms. Slightly less than 25% of farms were between 100 and more than 1,000 acres and contained more than 76% of farmland.

The County's history of tobacco cultivation, which can generate a high value product on relatively small acreages, allowed tobacco farms to be subdivided into small-sized, but economically viable operations. The percentage of farms producing tobacco has declined primarily due to Maryland's Tobacco Buyout Program, which paid farmers to cease growing tobacco in perpetuity. Of the Maryland farms in six counties producing tobacco in-2022, St. Mary's County ranked first in number of farms (29 of 40) and in value of tobacco production (\$1.09M in 2017 up from \$683,000 in 2012). Since 2017 the local UMD Extension staff have noted that there has been a shift in the type of tobacco desired by product manufacturers and the trend for value in tobacco production appears likely to resume its decline as more farms shift out of tobacco production.

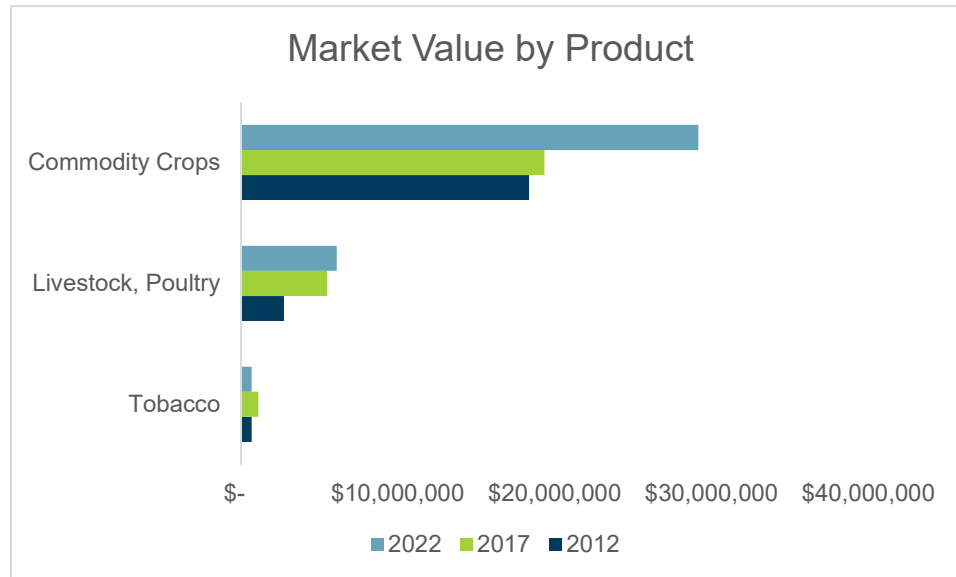
Figure 37: Farms by Acreage Size 1997, 2002, 2007, 2012, and 2017



Source: St. Mary's County Agriculture and Seafood Division

As shown in **Figure 4-3**, this downward trend did not affect the total market value of agricultural production in the County since 2012, with overall production values increasing as farmers shifted to producing commodity crops and livestock/poultry.

Figure 38: Market Value of Production: 2012, 2017, 2022



As **Table 4-4** shows that St. Mary's County has lost a lower percentage of farmland in the 15 years between 2002 and 2017 than the Southern Maryland region and a higher percentage than the State. In terms of the market value of agricultural products sold, St. Mary's percentage value increased by a higher percentage than either the Southern Maryland region or the state generally. This means that the County and Southern Maryland region is experiencing a greater increase in agricultural value than the State overall. The increase in values over the 15-year period represents a significant industry readjustment, in large part due to strong regional efforts to address changes in the agricultural industry, including help provided to former tobacco farms to shift away from tobacco products to alternative crops, value-added products, and farm-to-table direct sales. Local and regional efforts have greatly enhanced the economic viability of the farm economy in the region.

Table 7: Land in Farms and Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold -2017-2022

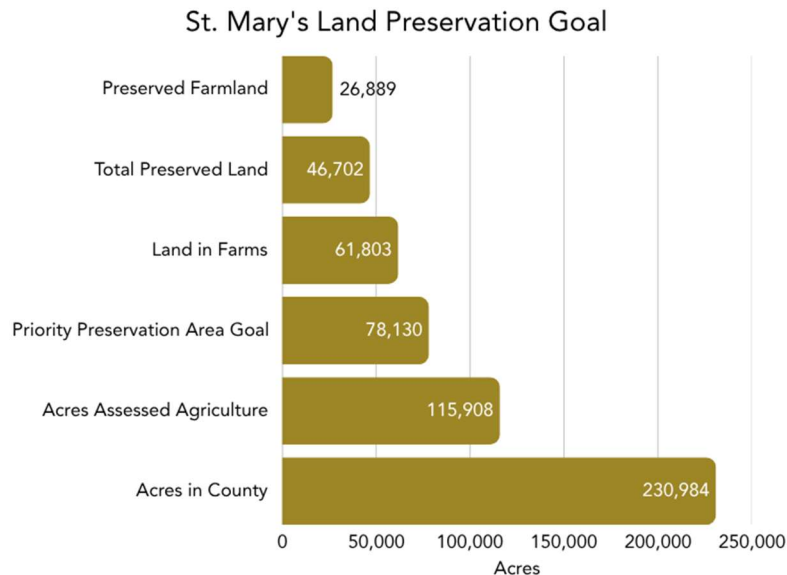
Land in Farms			Market Value of Ag Products Sold		
2017 – 2022			2017 – 2022 (1,000 Constant \$)		
	Acres change	% Change		Value change	% Change
Maryland	-12,086	-0.61%	Maryland	\$905,267	36.61%
St. Mary's County	2,577	-4.17%	St. Mary's County	-\$6,937	-26.73%

Farmland Preservation Goals

In 1995, as part of its agricultural land preservation program certification, St. Mary's County set a goal to permanently protect 60,000 acres of farmland. The goal was based on a desire to protect nearly all of the existing productive land bases in the County and was reaffirmed in the

2010 County Comprehensive Plan. No time frame accompanied this goal, but the creation of a local purchase of development rights program was proposed (but has not been funded) to augment participation in the MALPF program. In addition, the County adopted a stronger TDR program in 2007.

Figure 39: Land Preservation Goal



The 64,308 acres (27.8% of the County) identified as land in farms by the 2017 Census is a subset of the 112,513 acres currently assessed as agricultural for tax purposes (2026). Woodlands with forest management plans are eligible for agricultural assessment. Farms in the County often contain a mixture of cropland, pasture, and woodland. Of the 64,308 farm acres in St. Mary's County, the Census identified 59,496 acres (67.4%) as cropland, pasture, or wooded pasture.

As of the end of FY2025, a total of 26,889 acres of land in farms have been permanently protected by easements (17,162 acres through the MALPF program, 9,727 acres of farmland through the Rural Legacy Program, 2,349 acres through the Maryland Environmental Trust, and 2,212 acres through MD POS or DOD REPI funded PTLT easements). An additional 5,534 acres have been protected through TDR easements.

The qualitative goals of the State of Maryland for agricultural land preservation are shared by St. Mary's County. These goals are explicitly stated in the 2010 Comprehensive Plan, and many of them underpin the programs currently being implemented. For example, the State's goal of protecting high-quality productive land in contiguous blocks is reflected in the eligibility requirements for district creation and purchase of development rights programs. It is reinforced in the ranking formula for prioritizing properties sent to the MALPF program for easement purchase. The goal of protecting natural, forestry, and historic resources, as well as rural character is met by the typical presence of these additional elements on St. Mary's County farms applying for preservation programs.

The purpose of the RPD, in which most of the farms and preserved lands fall, is "to foster agricultural, forestry, mineral resource extraction, and aquaculture use, and protect the land

base necessary to support these activities.” As such, St. Mary’s County shares the State’s intention to protect its natural resource-based industries. In terms of land management goals, the 2010 Comprehensive Plan adopted a Priority Preservation Area Element, which states the County goals for agricultural resource protection.

4.2 Current Program/Policy Implementation

A diverse group of organizations and agencies contribute to farmland protection in St. Mary’s County. Significant attention is given both to direct protection of private farmland through conservation easement acquisition, and to economic development support of the agricultural industry itself. This complementary approach is carried out at state and local government levels, as well as with regional organizations and private nonprofit initiatives. The approach includes voluntary participation of landowners in statewide programs such as MALPF, and Rural Legacy Easement (both purchase of development rights programs). The County contributes local tax dollars to staffing and easement purchase, as well as enforcing land use and Right to Farm regulations. County boards such as the Agricultural Land Preservation Advisory Board, and the Agriculture, Seafood, and Forestry Commission oversee programs and initiatives with resident members. The regional Tri-County Council works on agricultural economic development to benefit all of Southern Maryland. The Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust, a local land trust, formed by St. Mary’s County residents, solicits and holds conservation easements donated by landowners in exchange for tax benefits. Finally, St. Mary’s County is home to a significant number of Amish and Mennonite families who have multi-generational commitments to agriculture.

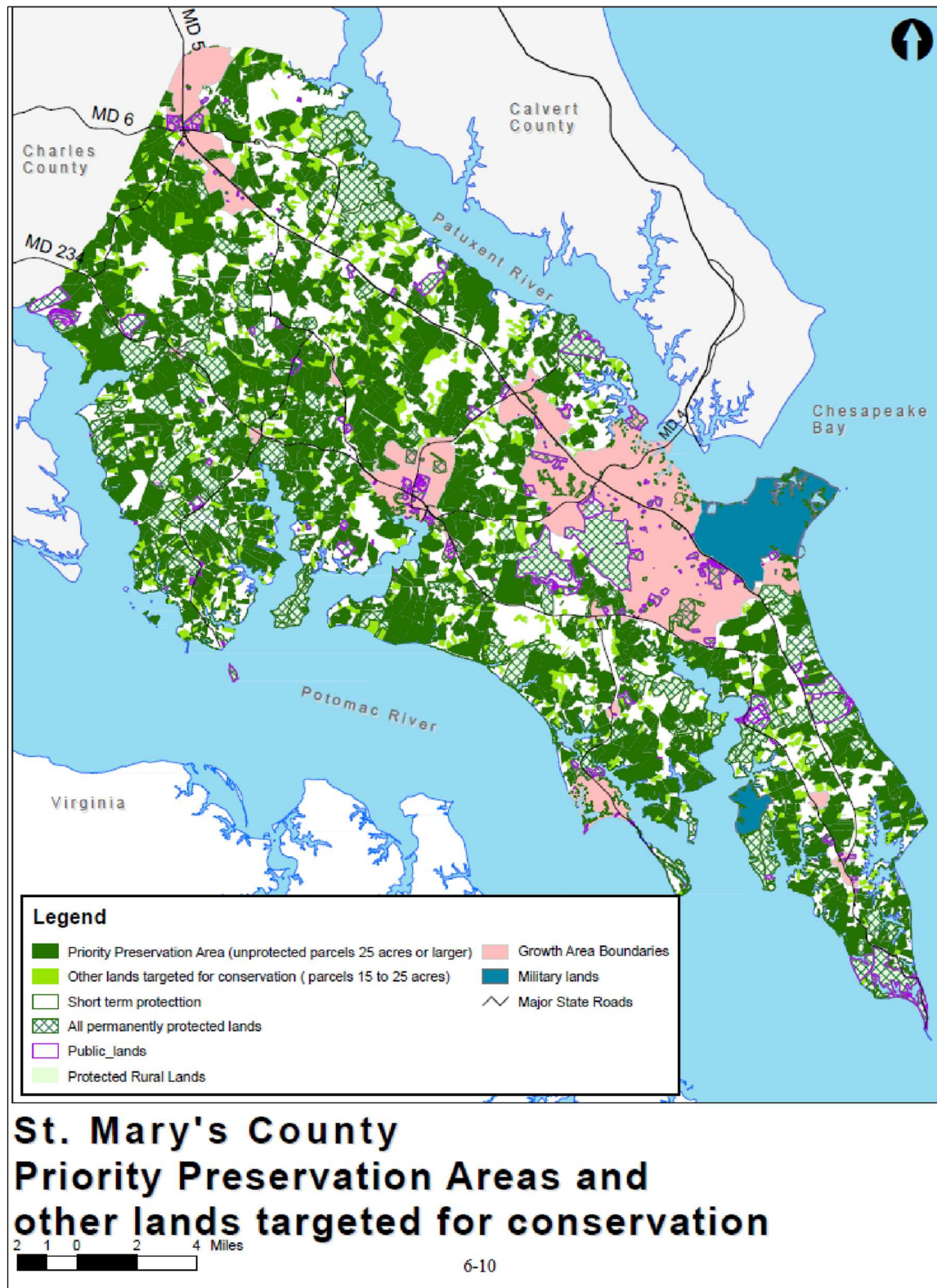
The following is a description of the tools employed by these groups and organizations to preserve farmland and support the agricultural industry. The chart below summarizes their accomplishments in permanently protecting private lands with conservation easements as of July 2026.

Table 8: Inventory of Protected Lands – As of Oct 2021

Program	Properties	Acres
MD Agricultural Land Preservation Easements (MALPF)	171	17,162
Rural Legacy Easements	79	9,727
Maryland Historical Trust Easements	1	303.0
Maryland Environmental Trust Easements	16	2,627.0
Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust	2	133.9
TDR Sending sites (parcels lifting TDR’s on >15 acres)	237	4092.9
TDR Sending sites (environmentally constrained subdivision lots from which TDRs were lifted regardless of parcel/lot size)	364	421.3
TOTAL	870	34,467.1

Source: St. Mary's County Departments of Economic, Community Development, and Land Use & Growth Management

Figure 40: Priority Preservation Area



Source: St. Mary's County Comprehensive Plan

Designated Preservation Areas

Chapter 6 of the 2010 County Comprehensive Plan established a designated Priority Preservation Area (PPA) and, in accordance with state guidelines, anticipates protection of 80% of the designated land using a variety of means. The PPA (illustrated in **Map 4.1**) is parcel-based and includes lands of 25 acres or larger located in the RPD that were unprotected as of 2010. As of this time, the PPA encompassed 97,660 acres and recognized other lands targeted for conservation (parcels 15 acres to less than 25 acres in size encompassing an additional 14,990 acres), which about PPA parcels. The lands in the PPA have existing concentrations of profitable agricultural and forestry enterprises or have the capacity for reestablishing these activities. The PPA and the parcels targeted for conservation are large enough to support commodity crops (predominately corn, wheat, and soybeans), fodder and feed operations, small to medium scale livestock operations, equine operations, and specialty farm operations, including organic farming. The PPA includes lands owned by Amish and Mennonite community members, who are not likely to participate in formal land conservation programs, but whose agrarian heritage is central to their communities and to the County's rural character. PPA lands also surround existing concentrations of MALPF and Rural Legacy easements and include many parcels that were enrolled in five-year Agricultural Land Preservation Districts.

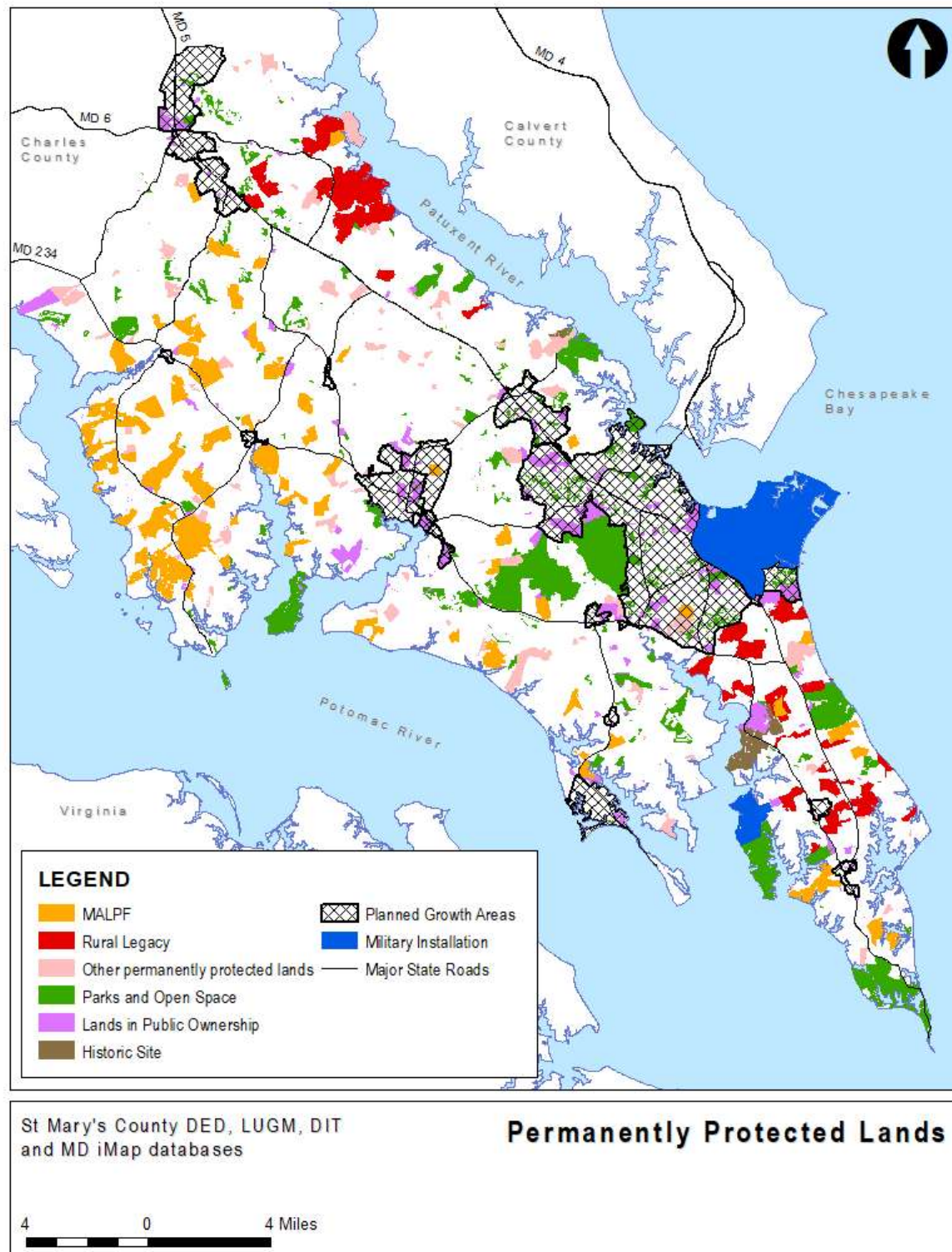
The various easement acquisition programs do not compete to preserve the same parcels of land. Property eligibility differs among them and benefits to landowners vary. However, because conservation easement efforts are often in competition with developers who want to buy the land outright for development, the County updated its TDR program in 2007 to require use of TDRs for all but the first dwelling on a parcel in the RPD. Landowners may utilize their own acreage to satisfy the TDR requirement effectively lowering the rural density countywide to one dwelling per 10 acres. Outside of Rural Legacy Areas, they may achieve development densities up to one dwelling per three acres, with substantial conservation of land under the TDR program. While the economic downturn reduced overall development pressure, the TDR program change appeared to slow the development of agricultural and resource lands for large rural residential developments and increased the attractiveness of participation in easement programs. Although the Sustainable Growth and Agricultural Preservation Act of 2012 limited rural landowners to seven-lot minor subdivisions, it did not negate land preservation contribution at increased rates via the County's TDR program when rural development occurs.

To meet the goal of protecting 80% of the undeveloped land in the PPA, the County must protect a total of 78,130 acres. The limitation for creation of minor lots effectively removed the clustering of rural development on 50% of a parcel, and after accounting for existing protected lands, resulted in an estimated 7,000 possible rural lots at rural residential build-out. Within the "targeted lands," there will be 11,500 acres of protection provided by ordinance provisions. Currently, approximately 33,984 acres are in permanent agricultural and open space protection outside the PPA. The acreage of planned and existing land preservation in the rural planning

districts is 121,660 acres, which is 60% of the total rural area in the County.³ This goal remains valid although the implications of the Sustainable Growth and Agricultural Preservation Act of 2012 have not yet been fully assessed. This is planned to be accomplished in the next County Comprehensive Plan update.

³ Note: The PPA acreage figures in this section are consistent with the 2010 Comprehensive Plan and update the figures provided in the County's 2009 application for Agricultural Land Preservation Program recertification.

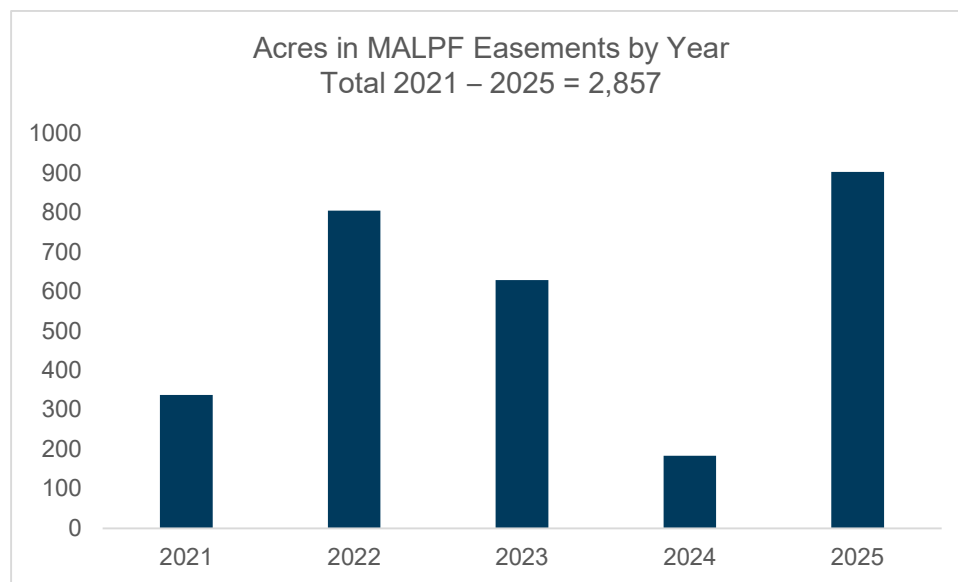
Figure 41: Protected Lands as of 2021



MALPF

St. Mary's County has participated in the MALPF program since 1984. As shown in **Figure 4-5**, easement purchases have protected significantly more land since 2002. This was due to additional local and state funding sources, including use of a portion of the local recordation tax dedicated in 2001 to agricultural land preservation. Shortage of funding from the state budget, as well as decreases in land transfer tax revenues as land sales have not rebounded from the economic downturn, have resulted in fluctuations in land and easement acquisitions since 2007. However, the County has partnered with the Department of Defense (Navy) through its REPI to fund land preservation easements of mutual interest. In 2017, the County's agricultural land preservation program, originally certified in 1995, was recertified by the Maryland Department of Agriculture and the MDP, enabling St. Mary's County to continue to hold back a larger percentage (75% instead of 33%) of agricultural transfer tax for use as matching funds to leverage state MALPF dollars.

Figure 42: MALPF Easement Acres per Year



Source: St. Mary's County Dept. of Economic and Community Development

Most MALPF easements are in the northwest quadrant of the County where farming is the predominant land use. The average price per acre over the last five years has been \$5,860. Interest on the part of landowners in selling easements has always exceeded the availability of funds. A deterrent to acceptance by landowners of easement offers from the State has been the amount of time between application and offer, a process that has taken up to two years in some cases. In addition, the State has mandated a cap of easement values to 75% of the appraised value. **Map 4-3** illustrates the location of all MALPF easements.

Rural Legacy Program

The Rural Legacy Program, run by the Maryland DNR, consists of two concepts: delineation of a specific geographic area of the County in need of focused land conservation efforts and the acquisition of easements from willing landowners within that area. The County has partnered

with the Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust, Southern Maryland Resource Conservation and Development to place easements on properties in the Rural Legacy Areas. In 1998, the County established the 5,800-acre Huntersville Rural Legacy Area (HRLA), which was expanded in 2004 to 8,950 acres due to the success of the HRLA and interest among larger landowners in preventing sprawl from Mechanicsville. In 2010, land was removed from the Mechanicsville town center in contemplation of including the down-zoned land in the HRLA. Currently, 14 properties in the HRLA, encompassing 3,029 acres in the Patuxent River watershed, have been protected through the Rural Legacy Program. An additional 603 acres in the HRLA are protected by MALPF, MET, and the TDR program, bringing the total land preserved in the 8,360-acre HRLA to approximately 3,632 acres. This represents 65% of the original RLA and 40% of the expanded RLA.

In 2006, the Mattapany Rural Legacy Area (MRLA), which encompasses 13,703 acres, was established with the aim to protect 6,500 acres with Rural Legacy funds, and an additional 2,000 acres by other means, for a total of 8,500 acres (62% of the MRLA). The Commissioners of St. Mary's County purchased the first property preserved in this Rural Legacy Area, referred to as the Fenwick Property. This site is now home to a thriving Home Grown Farm Market. Currently, nine properties in the MRLA encompassing over 4,187 acres in the Chesapeake Bay watershed have been protected through the Rural Legacy Program. An additional 1,107 acres in the MRLA are protected by MALPF, MET, and the TDR program, bringing the total land preserved in the 13,703-acre MRLA to approximately 5,294 acres. In the near future, the MRLA seeks to be expanded to incorporate parcels that had been outside the RLA but can take advantage of REPI funds from the Navy. Preserving agriculture areas adjacent but outside of the rural legacy area is beneficial for preserving contiguous tracts of farm and forest lands.

Land Trusts/Maryland Environmental Trust

Local land trusts are nonprofit organizations created by interested citizens to accept, monitor, and enforce conservation easements donated by landowners in exchange for significant tax benefits. The Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust, and Southern Maryland Resource and Conservation Development Inc. partner with St. Mary's County as sponsors of Rural Legacy Area proposals and solicitors of purchased easements. In the Huntersville and Mattapany RLAs, the Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust and Southern Maryland Resource and Conservation "co-hold" easements with the Maryland Environmental Trust (MET), the statewide quasi-public land trust, and the Department of Defense (when REPI funds are used).

Funding for Easement Acquisition

Placing conservation easements on private land from willing owners is the chief mechanism for permanently protecting agricultural land in St. Mary's County. Most of these easements have been purchased through MALPF or Rural Legacy, with the State providing most of the needed funding (Figure 14). Local funds used to match state dollars are generated from several sources including:

Agricultural Transfer Tax

When agricultural land in Maryland is sold for development, a small percentage of the transaction value is paid to recapture, in part, the preferential taxation rate to which the land was subject during its previous agricultural use. Part of the revenue collected is forwarded to the

State and part remains with the County to be used only for farmland preservation. As St. Mary's County has an agricultural preservation program certified by MDP and Maryland Department of Agriculture, it may hold back 75% of revenues collected to be used to purchase easements within three years. The County applies these funds to its match of State funds in the MALPF program. In the long run, this source of revenue is self-limiting because the amount of farmland diminishes as the tax on conversion to non-agricultural use diminishes. Conversely, increased collection of agricultural transfer tax funds indicates rapid loss of the farmland this money is meant to protect.

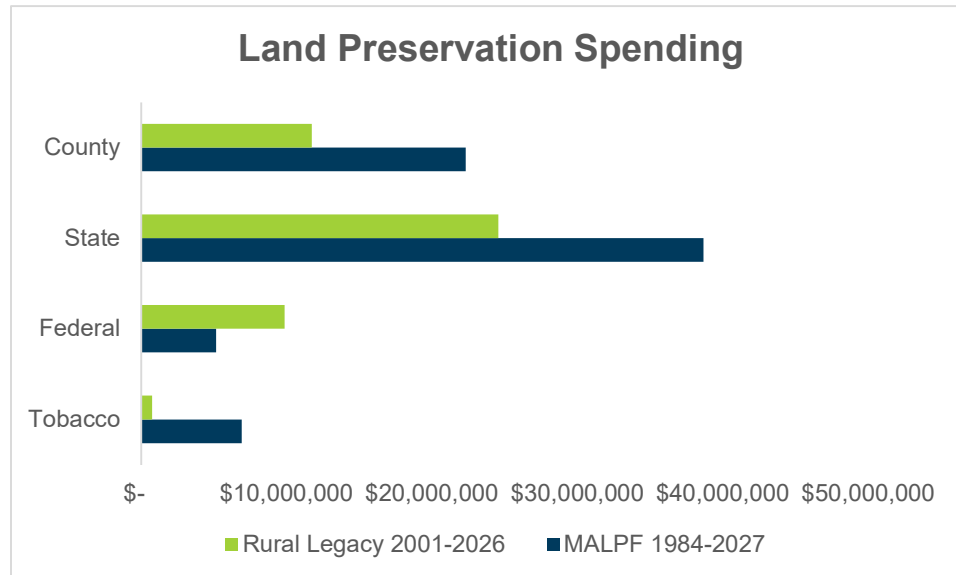
Recordation Tax

In 2001, St. Mary's County increased the recordation tax, a tax paid when documents are recorded with the Clerk of the Circuit Court. At the same time, the County dedicated a portion of that revenue to "conserve and protect rural lands," specifically noting that, "the purchase of development rights that will preserve agricultural lands." This revenue source adds varying amounts each year to the County's contribution to land protection.

TDR Fees-In Lieu Funds

In lieu of purchasing development rights from a sending parcel for use in development of a receiving parcel, a person may pay a fee to the County, which the County holds in a separate Open Lands Trust Fund for use in purchasing development rights from owners of sending parcels and other related purposes as defined in the subsections below. A schedule of the "in lieu of" fees for the Open Lands Trust is established annually at least 120% of the average fair market value paid for TDRs in "arm's length" intermediate transactions in the previous fiscal year, as calculated by the County, Department of Economic Development Director. The Commissioners of the County reserve the right to increase or decrease the fee-in-lieu. Those applicants who pay the fee-in-lieu may apply credits received for said payments to develop land in a receiving parcel at an additional density or intensity of use through the same provision as TDRs. Payments received by the County as fees-in lieu of purchasing development rights from sending zones are used by the St. Mary's County Agricultural Preservation Commission to acquire property having high agricultural value or to replenish the Critical Farms Programs. Such purchases of development rights may be resold by the County. As of July 2018, the fee-in-lieu program collected \$873.106.

Figure 43: Land Preservation Spending



Source: St. Mary's County Dept. of Economic and Community Development

Discretionary Local Funds and Bonds

In addition to the agricultural transfer tax and portion of the recordation tax, which are required by law to be spent on land preservation, St. Mary's County has also contributed money from the County's General Fund, the local Transfer Tax, and the sale of bonds to augment both the MALPF program and Rural Legacy. These amounts have varied over time, based on fiscal conditions in the County budget.

Federal Funds

Since 1998, the federal government has made relatively small amounts of funding available for the purchase of development rights on farmland through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service's Farmland Preservation Program. However, since 2013, the County has partnered with the Department of Defense's REPI program to target and fund land purchases and easements on farm and forest lands. Another new potential source of funding is an active effort led by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for creation of a Patuxent Waters Conservation Area. If approved (2017 approval projected), this program could make new federal funds available for purchase of conservation easements on farm and natural resource lands that are significant wildlife habitats in the Coastal Plan region. It is anticipated that funds from this program could be matched with funds from other federal programs, as well as from local, state, and private sources.

Agricultural Districts

St. Mary's County offers a tax credit to landowners who enroll in the County Agricultural District Program, which requires a five-year commitment from the landowner to refrain from developing their land without a provision for creating children's lots or agricultural subdivisions. Landowners in these districts receive a 100% credit on the County portion of their tax bill for their agriculturally assessed land and farm buildings. After five years, they can renew or dissolve

agreement. If they do not fulfill the five-year commitment, they must repay the credited taxes plus interest and penalties. The program has had success, and County now has 15,774 acres in 138 County districts.

Land Use Management Authority

a. Zoning

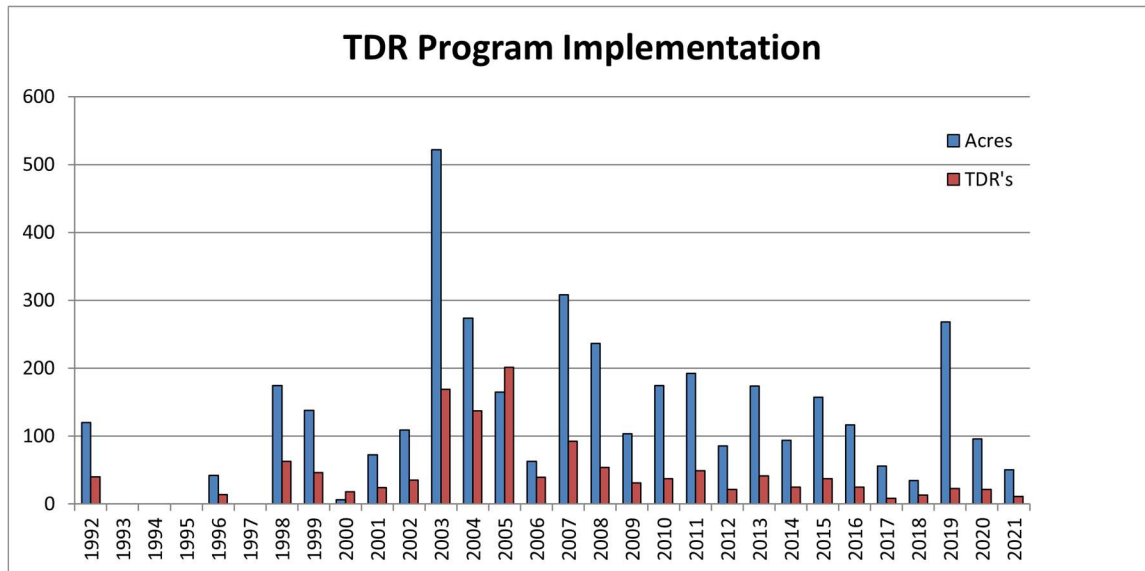
Most of the acreage in St. Mary's County that lies outside of the development districts and priority funding areas is zoned as RPD. The RPD is approximately 178,000 acres, and virtually all of the County's permanently protected private lands are located within it. The purpose of this district is "to foster agricultural, forestry, mineral resource extraction, and aquaculture uses, and protect the land base necessary to support these activities." Residential development is permitted at a density of one dwelling unit per five acres (1:5) with provisions to achieve 1:3 outside of Rural Legacy Areas, subject to the landowner's purchase of TDRs for the additional units. Major subdivisions (greater than seven lots) must cluster development on 50% or less of the parent parcel.

b. TDR

St. Mary's County has adopted a unique TDR program. From 1992 through 2002, the program was similar to traditional programs and minimally used. In 2002, the TDR program and base zoning regulations were revised. This increased the need for TDRs and allowed for the retirement of environmentally constrained RPD lots. **Figure 15** illustrates the significant increase in the implementation of TDRs after 2002.

The large number of TDRs lifted in relation to the amount of land protected from 2002 to 2007 reflects the retirement of numerous small, grandfathered lots on which development was difficult or impossible due to severe environmental constraints. The 2002 TDR program changes increased the need and ability to use TDRs in growth areas but did not adequately reduce rural development or protect larger tracts of rural land. It also placed most of the financial burden for rural land protection on landowners. A 2007 amendment of the TDR program simplified calculation of TDRs, mandated use of TDRs, and required retirement of land, or payment of a fee-in-lieu, for all but the first development right on a rural parcel, eliminated the buyback provision, and specified allowed uses on TDR-protected parcels. Current zoning allows the RPD base density of one dwelling per five acres (at the cost of one TDR per unit) to be increased, and outside of the Rural Legacy Areas zoning now allows for up to one unit per three acres. Those units above base density require an increased number of TDRs per unit, which is intended to increase overall land protection.

Figure 44: TDR Program Implementation



Source: St. Mary's County Department of Economic Development

Since the 2007 TDR program revisions, major RPD subdivisions (with more than seven lots per parcel) had nearly halted. Major subdivisions not served by public sewer have halted because of HB 236 (Septic Bill). The lifting of TDRs has continued at a moderate pace, with greater land area protected per TDR and more total acres protected than prior to 2007. Build-out of existing rural lots has continued at a moderate pace, and subdivision of larger lots for family members continues. Modest rural growth can continue at a manageable pace with the use of the TDRs, which is anticipated to continue the steady protection of farmland without the use of public funding. The TDR fee-in-lieu funds are collected (at an amount equal to at least 125% fair market value) to maintain the market value of TDRs.

c. Right to Farm

The County's zoning regulations contain general Right to Farm provisions for landowners in the RPD. Since agriculture, aquaculture, and silviculture are the preferred land uses in the District, the ordinance attempts to limit "the circumstances under which agriculture and forestry operations may be deemed to interfere with the reasonable use and enjoyment of adjacent land."

Farming Assistance Programs

St. Mary's County participates in the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC). SMADC focuses on land preservation in Southern Maryland, agribusiness development, and outreach to help area farmers grow and thrive. The following initiatives are part of SMADC's outreach/education program:

- **SMADC Grant Programs:** Targeted grants provide help for farms transitioning into new agricultural ventures that would otherwise be perceived as risky and/or cost prohibitive. Grants have been provided to the St. Mary's County and Prince Georges County Farm Bureaus to purchase freezer trailers and refrigerated cases to promote the purchase of

local meats. Grants have also been provided to purchase conservation equipment and specialized equipment for vegetable production.

- *Retaining and Recruiting New Farmers:* SMADC's Maryland FarmLINK provides mechanisms for farmland transfer, mentoring connections, and business partnerships for current and future farmers. Maryland FarmLINK strives to keep Maryland farmland in agricultural usage via a property exchange function that allows farmers to list farmland for sale. It also includes a farmer forum and a "person to person" feature to connect farmers, and future farmers, with mentors, apprentices, etc.
- *Resources, Networking and Education/Training for Farmers:* A seminar and conference program, interactive web sites, and various networking events are all part of SMADC's extensive efforts to provide farmers with tools to help their operations. Resource links on the website provide information like a Step-by-Step Acidified Foods Guide and listings of farm equipment for rent.

Access to Fresh and Local Food: SMADC works with farmers markets, hospitals, schools, and other institutions to expand access to fresh and local farm foods. Public Outreach and Education: Creative and adaptive marketing and outreach programs are changing consumers' buying habits.

Programs like *So Maryland, So Good* help consumers "find the farms that fit their needs." *The Southern Maryland Trails: Earth, Art, Imagination* connects farms, the arts, and the broader cultural tourism community. The annual *Buy Local Challenge* highlights the value of local farms to our families, our communities, and our planet.

Educating the Next Generation: Today's young people are tomorrow's farmers, and tomorrow's educated and healthy consumers. SMADC's children's programs teach children about farms, give them access to locally grown foods, and bring future farmers together to interact and learn. Programs like *Cornelia and the Farm Band* teach children about the diversity and importance of farms to the economy, to our nation's health and safety, and to an active, healthy lifestyle.

St. Mary's County sponsors three retail farmers markets: Charlotte Hall, California, and Lexington Park. The County is in the process of relocating the Charlotte Hall Farmers Market to a larger location. In addition, Sotterley and Jubilee Farms sponsor their own farmers markets. Farm stands are also set up weekly at the Governmental Center Complex and the St. Mary's County.

Hospital to make local produce available to County staff and public in these locations. Additionally, the County assisted the Mennonite Community in setting up a wholesale produce auction in Loveville and assisted the local Amish community in setting up the first cheese dairy market in St. Mary's County. The County has also assisted other local farmers to license their business to process farm foods including meat, baked goods, acidified foods such as beets and relish, and jams and jellies. Additionally, the County worked with a local farmer in establishing a USDA approved mobile slaughterhouse facility and is in the process of helping another local meat producer seek USDA approval for a new on-site facility.

4.3 Evaluation of Agricultural Land Preservation Program/Policy Implementation

Overall Preservation Strategy

St. Mary's County's overall preservation strategy contains all of the elements to be effective in securing a land base for the agricultural industry, and in doing so, protect the heritage and rural character of the County.

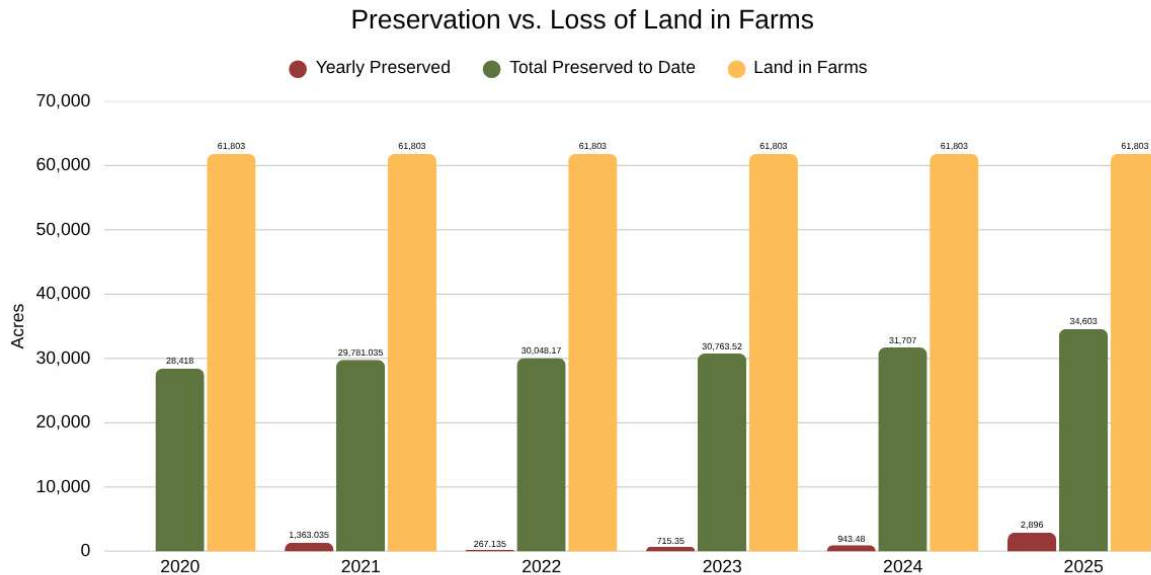
In 2010, the County adopted the Priority Preservation Element in the Comprehensive Plan. Its intent is to broadly protect farmland and forests in all areas outside of designated growth areas. Rather than designating a geographic focus of all program and policy implementation, the County believes that landowners who desire to continue farming and forestry operations should be eligible for programs that increase the likelihood of meeting shared goals.

The draft of the update to the County's comprehensive plan entitled "St. Mary's 2050: Charting Our Tomorrow" continues to prioritize an intentional growth approach to protect agricultural lands, environmental resources, and the rural character that define St. Mary's County (see Growth Management Element). One of the priorities expressed in the draft plan includes the maintenance and improvements of existing parks and supporting the creation of new ones (see Economic Development Element). Other priorities expressed in the draft plan includes the continued use of public-private partnerships (PPPs) to support the development of indoor sports and recreation facilities and increasing public access to the water and recreation on the water (see Public Facilities and Infrastructure Element). More specifically, implementation of the LPPRP and Park Master Plans are expressly called out in the draft plan.

Funding

Local sources of revenue have increased in recent years with the initiation of the recordation tax, with the intention of creating a larger and more consistent level of funding compared to other sources. The recordation tax augments the funds coming from the agricultural transfer tax. However, recordation tax funds replaced contributions from the general fund, local transfer tax contributions, and bonding, which are less frequently used now in funding agricultural land preservation than in previous years. The addition of federal REPI funds has the potential to double land preservation efforts in the MRLA. Except for MALPF, REPI funds can be matched by County contributions from a wide variety of other funding sources.

Figure 45: 2011 Trends: Preservation vs. Loss of Land in Farms



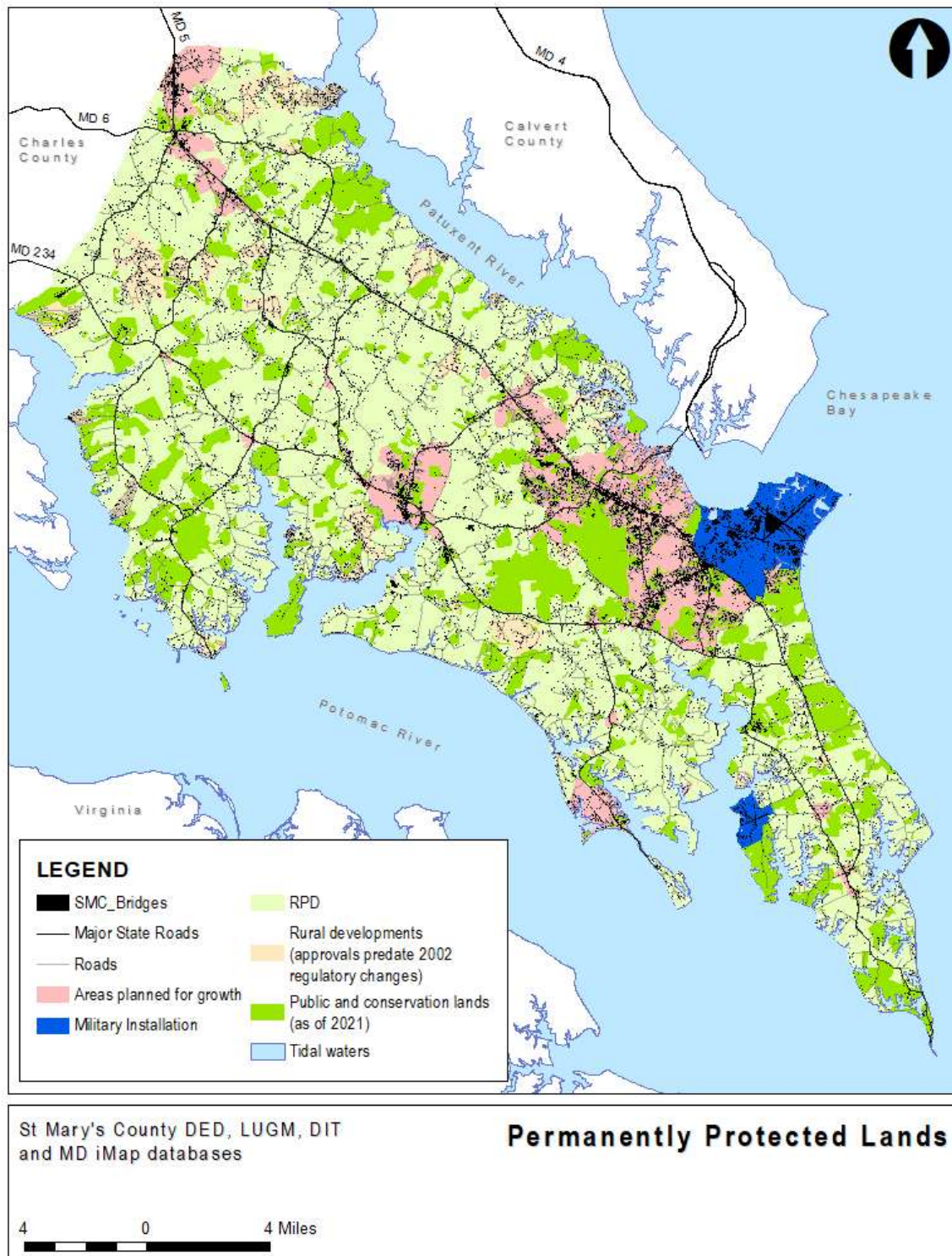
Source: St. Mary's County Dept. of Economic Development

Land Use Management Tools

Between 2005 and 2007, when the County examined the intention of the RPD to protect the land base for the natural resource-based industries in the County, a look at the actual and location of residential lots suggested that zoned density and TDRs had done little to direct growth away from areas intended for preservation, and that residential development continued to be scattered across the rural landscape creating conflicts with farm and forestry economic activities. This and other planning analysis efforts combined with the concern by County citizens prompted changes to the TDR to establish open space conservation requirements for development, and to establish Rural Subdivision design standards to preserve farm and forest land and minimize impacts from development on agricultural and forestry operations on minimally developed rural parcels 15 acres or greater in size.

The TDR program changes were positive, and the program became successful. It is now a key tool for land conservation in St. Mary's County. TDR program changes limited rural by-right development to the first dwelling and require one TDR for each additional dwelling on a parcel developed, up to one dwelling per five acres base density, and with additional TDRs required to exceed the 1 per 5 base density. The revised TDR program more evenly distributed the financial costs and rewards for rural development among landowners. Those who want to develop can do so, but the market for TDRs was expanded so that those who do not wish to develop have a demand for their TDRs. The program also allows a landowner to use his own excess development rights to meet the TDR requirement necessary to add lots to his parcel to supplement farm income or provide lots for homes for family on the farm or forested tract.

Figure 46: Map 4-3: 2020 Patterns of Land Development and Land Preservation



The mandatory open space provisions for major subdivisions in the RPD and RL zones ensured that when a site is developed with more than five lots, a minimum of 50% of the parcel is set aside as a contiguous block of open space. They also require an increase in development density proportionate to the proposed number of units to be developed; as more units are proposed, the lot sizes for the units must decrease. Criteria require that a high percentage of the prime farm and forestry soils must be protected in this open space.

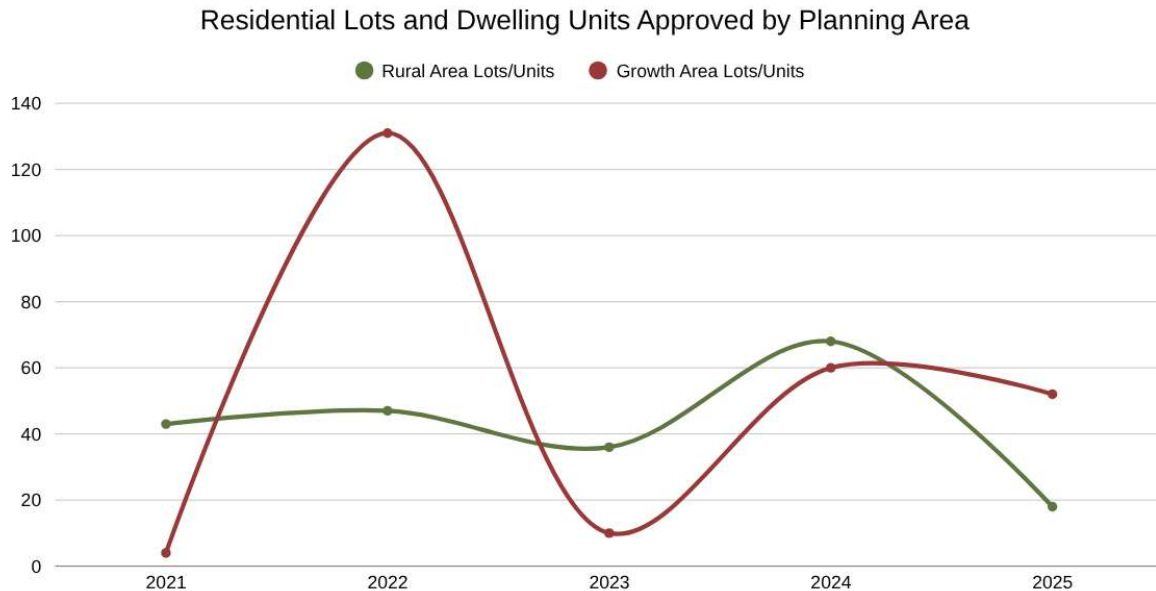
In 2010, zoning ordinance changes established Rural Subdivision design criteria for major subdivisions in the RPD to conserve productive farmland and minimize the impacts of proposed developments on farm operations. Other 2010 Zoning Ordinance amendments addressed the following items, which allowed for new types of agricultural activities in the County that are assisting local farmers to diversify operations and better secure the local farm economy:

- Define “agritourism”
- Allow for the operation of wineries and equestrian facilities
- Expand programs to support local production of value-added farm products

The Right to Farm provisions in the zoning ordinance provided clear definitions, processes, and a proactive approach to potential land use conflicts.

Planning Commission reports show that from 2020 through 2025, there were 187 outside the growth area and 202 inside the growth area. Portions of the non-PFA areas are comment areas within the County’s planned growth areas. But the trend from 2020 through 2025 (**Figure 47**) continues to show new lots are concentrated in growth areas. Rural construction is primarily on preexisting lots in rural residential development (most plated and developed prior to 1990) or on new family lots in rural areas. The County has applied land preservation efforts broadly outside of development districts to ensure that rural character and economies remain functional across the entire rural areas (**Map 47**).

Figure 47: Residential Lots Created by Planning Area



Source: St. Mary's County Department of Land Use and Growth Management.

Combined Performance of Preservation Tools

At the beginning of the last decade, St. Mary's County, Maryland was losing agricultural land at a high rate. Many local farms had traditionally farmed tobacco and found it difficult to remain in operation, or to diversify their operations, after the implementation of the State's tobacco buyout program. This (combined with residential growth in the Washington metropolitan area and expansion of operations at Naval Air Station Patuxent River) created a ready market for new homes, and much rural land was lost to new subdivisions. Between 1987 and 2002, the County lost 15% of its active farmland, roughly 12,000 acres. Determined to save its agricultural heritage, the community came together, creating a Rural Preservation Task Force. Between 2002 and 2010, the County implemented several land use reforms that curbed the residential development of agricultural lands.

The latest available data indicates that the overall acreage of agricultural land in St. Mary's County has remained relatively steady; however, the value of local farm products has increased. The County accomplished this turn-around with six tools, each of which reinforces the overall program: strong rural zoning, a TDR program, an institutionalizing funding for land preservation, a growth management policy, a "right to farm" ordinance, and zoning incentives for new forms of agriculture.

- Most of the County has been zoned for rural preservation.* Of land in St. Mary's County, 80% is in a rural preservation zone where agriculture is the preferred use. Only one dwelling unit can be built by-right on a parcel of land, regardless of its size. Additional dwellings can only be built by purchasing TDR. Subdivisions must be designed to protect prime soils for continued farming, buffer farming operations from houses, and protect rural character.

- *TDRs are used to reduce future development in the rural zone.* Owners of rural land are encouraged to extinguish development rights by selling them to developers. Residential development in the rural area (above one unit per parcel) requires the use of TDRs. Development in non-rural areas can increase density by purchasing TDRs from rural properties. The result is a win-win for farmers. If they wish to continue farming, they can sell TDRs from their land and receive cash. If they wish to develop their land, they have to purchase TDRs from other farmers who thereby give up the right to develop or use TDRs from their own parcel thus reducing overall parcel build-out. Eventually, the TDR program is intended to extinguish all non-agricultural development in the rural zone. Along with other easement programs, the County expects to preserve 122,000 acres, which is more than half of its land mass.
- *Mechanisms to generate funding for land conservation programs are built into the land development process.* The County dedicates 0.5% of the recording tax from property sales as a source of funding for land preservation programs. Within the TDR program, the County established a fee-in-lieu option, which provides a source of funds for easement purchase. As development permitting increases, the amount of funding for land conservation also increases.
- *The amount of development in the rural zone is rationed on a year-by-year basis.* The County limits residential growth countywide to about 2% per year, with only 30% of growth permitted to occur in the rural zone. This limits the amount of growth in the rural area and steers most development to non-rural areas. Use of this tool has not been necessary recently, and the County has suspended this policy until development pressure makes it necessary again.
- *A strong Right to Farm ordinance was adopted.* Agriculture is established by law as the “preferred land use” in the rural zone. To ensure the farmer’s ability to continue farming will not be compromised by residential subdivisions, farms are given a protected right to:
 - Conduct normal agricultural operations.
 - Operate farm machinery at any hour.
 - Emit agricultural noise and odors.
 - Sell farm products directly from the farm.

To build community understanding of the Right to Farm law, a notice outlining its provisions is given to every purchaser of real estate, and is mailed annually to all residents with their tax bill. People who move to the rural area are thereby placed on notice that farming operations are a protected aspect of the rural community they have joined.

- *The County helps farmers find new sources of farm income.* Market forces have reduced the profitability of many traditional farm products in the County. Grain production is less profitable than in the past, and tobacco production is almost extinct. Farmers need new ways to farm.

Zoning ordinance revisions and other County policies seek to achieve the following:

- Establishment of vineyards and wineries in the rural zone.
- Promote construction and operation of stables and equestrian centers.
- Establish new farmers' markets and farm auction houses.
- Promote local farm products through "Buy local" campaigns.
- Assist County farmers to market their products locally and in the region.

While each element of the strategy is important, the real genius of the St. Mary's County program is the contemporaneous implementation of all six measures. Working together, the measures have nearly stopped the loss of farmland and bolstered the agricultural economy. This occurred even though development pressures were extremely high during the 2002 – 2006 real estate boom. Key to the County's success was the involvement of multiple stakeholders, including those who comprise the Agriculture, Seafood, and Forestry Board. The board members consist of local farmers, developers, environmentalists, and other community representatives, with support from the County Department of Land Use and Growth Management, Department of Economic Development, and Commissioners of St. Mary's County.

Effects of Potential Development on Land Markets

No studies have been done in St. Mary's County to measure the impact of development on land markets, but it is widely known that land prices have remained high in part due to the development pressure resulting from the growth of Patuxent River Naval Air Station. The County has acted to limit pressure for rural development through the TDR program and the annual growth policies discussed above.

Farming Assistance Programs

The County's farming assistance activities are vigorous, diverse, and bolstered by the regional approach of the Tri-County Council. These partners include the Soil Conservation District, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Maryland Department of Agriculture, the Farm Services Agency, the University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Service, and the Department of Economic Development (DED). The County's Department of Economic Development's Agriculture and Seafood Division coordinates activities that support the local agricultural industry. Some of the recent farmland preservation activities managed by the Division included:

- Local Efforts – Provided staff support to the Agriculture, Seafood, and Forestry Board.
- Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Program (MALPF) – Assisted landowners in enrolling in the program. This included application assistance, coordination with the Soil Conservation District to qualify the farms for participation, presenting application information to the local Agriculture Land Preservation Advisory Board and the St. Mary's County Planning Commission, preparing legal notices, and the conducting public hearings before the Board of County Commissioners.
- Rural Legacy – Conducted research and provided staff support in helping the Patuxent Tidewater Land Trust and RC&D make application for Rural Legacy grants. The Division continues to assist the Land Trust in the easement acquisition and grant applications.

- St. Mary's County Farmers' Market – Over 50 farmers currently participate in St. Mary's County Farmers' Markets located in Charlotte Hall, California, and Lexington Park, with over \$1 million annual economic activity estimated to be generated at the markets.
- Southern Maryland Wine Growers Cooperative – The Division continued to support the Southern Maryland Wine Growers Cooperative and its venture at the Port of Leonardtown Winery.
- Loveville Produce Auction – Staff continued to work with the Mennonite based Loveville Produce Auction to market the auction.
- Right to Farm Ordinance – The St. Mary's County Right to Farm Ordinance was updated in 2011 to further support the County's commitment to its agricultural heritage.

Summary

The loss of farmland has essentially reached an equilibrium, and the County experienced a small decrease in actively farmed land between 2020 through 2025. While the economic slowdown of past years reduced development pressure, the County believes that appropriate measures have been put in place to help prevent future conversion of vast portions of the RPD to suburban home sites, and to support existing and future agricultural economic activity. Together, these efforts are intended to continue the trend toward meeting County goals for agricultural land preservation and retaining farm and forestry as important components of the County's economy and character.

4.4 Program Development Strategy for Agricultural Land Preservation

There are several steps that could be taken to achieve the County's goals for farmland protection, and to protect the public investment already made in easement purchases, including:

Agricultural Land Preservation Goal

Analysis of the TDR program, open space requirements, and current land protection programs has confirmed that the County's current goal of 60,000 acres adopted in 1995, as part of its agricultural land preservation certification is a realistic, achievable goal for permanent protection of land actively farmed or in managed woodland in St. Mary's County. Agricultural land preservation goals for 2017 largely intentionally mirror goals established by the County in its 2012 LPPRP. These goals for preservation are lofty and designed to be implemented over a long period of time. The achievement of land use and financial goals was hampered by the sluggish real estate market, economic recession, and reduction in available funding resources that impacted the country beginning in approximately 2008. However, as the County budget situation has stabilized, funding of farmland preservation has become economically viable again.

Land Use

- The County has designated a PPA (all unprotected RPD parcels greater than 25 acres as of 2009) with a secondary focus on adjacent parcels that are at least 15 – 25 acres in

size. The County also established an Agricultural Focus Area to target funding for preserving parcels. However, future improvements to consider include:

- Enact a local PDR program with the goal of:
 - Creating a nimble tool to allow the County to act in pursuing preservation opportunities than the current MALPF program allows.
 - Leverage funds to buy easements while the land is still available. Consider another dedicated revenue source, the establishment of installment purchase agreements, or zero coupon bonds and direct funds toward actions to meet PPA goals.
- Explore the possibility of a local land trust acting as an intermediary with the Amish and Mennonite communities to conserve lands without direct government action or participation. Considering reviewing the work of the Lancaster Land Trust in Pennsylvania, which has been successful in working with these communities (www.savelancasterfarms.org).
- Conduct annual reviews of development in the RPD and consider additional zoning ordinance revisions to further protect agricultural land and operations in the RPD as determined necessary.
- Continue to preserve the farmable land base in areas outside the agricultural preservation area, through the creation of new Rural Legacy Areas, or use of other land conservation measures.

Financial, Business, and Regulatory

Demand to sell agricultural easements exceeds available funding through the MALPF program. This resource limitation stifles the County's work to achieve goals for permanent agricultural land preservation. Areas for improvement to consider include:

- Increase State funding for the MALPF program consistent with the final report of the Task Force to Study the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (Final Report January 2005). Interest on the part of landowners in selling easements has consistently exceeded program funding. Increased funding would enable the County to increase its pace of easement acquisition, and the County believes MALPF reverts to use of an annual easement cycle instead of biannual. In addition, the cap on the number of applicants from each County should either be eliminated or increased so that all matching funds from a County can be utilized as high-quality preservation projects are identified. In addition to increasing State funding the MALPF program should address outstanding challenges that prohibit its funds from matching those from the federal REPI funding program, and USDA Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP).
- Revise the MALPF program to remove disincentives to participation, including long timelines for completing agreements, appraisal methodologies, and the lack of inclusion of certain farm practices participants consider a by-right activity in MALPF agreements.

- Continue to amend the Zoning Ordinance to allow auxiliary commercial enterprises on farms. These types of businesses are an integral part of the Mennonite and Amish communities, which are critical to St. Mary's County agriculture.

5.0 Appendices

5.1 Appendix A: State Goals

5.1.1 Maryland's Sustainable Growth Policy and Planning Principles

- **Land.** Optimize productivity of working landscapes, including farms and forests, and fisheries, and prioritize development within population centers that are in proximity to existing infrastructure and facilities.
- **Transportation.** Prioritize transportation networks that create energy efficient, affordable, and reliable access to jobs, housing, and services.
- **Housing.** Enable a mix of quality housing types and affordability options to accommodate all who want to live in the state.
- **Economy.** Allow for adaptive reuse, mixed-use, and context appropriate new development that responds to changing markets and innovations.
- **Equity.** Engage all sectors of the community in LPPRP development to ensure diverse voices are heard and the needs of underserved populations are prioritized.
- **Resilience.** Integrate resiliency measures that will minimize the impacts of rapid and unexpected natural- and human-caused threats on communities.
- **Place.** Provide for public spaces that encourage social interaction and value cultural, historical, and natural resources.
- **Ecology.** Protect and restore sensitive ecological systems and conserve natural resources, including forests, agricultural areas, and waterways.

5.1.2 State Goals for Parks and Recreation and Natural Resource Land Conservation

The following goals were included in the most recent Maryland Land Preservation and Recreation Plan. At a minimum, reference the items highlighted in yellow in the Natural Resource Land Conservation chapter and the items highlighted in blue in the Parks and Recreation chapter. Inclusion of the remaining LPRP goals is optional.

1. Steward What is Already Protected

- 1.1. Natural Resource Stewardship: Continue to protect Maryland's natural resources through planning, data collection and analysis, management practices, and collaboration.
- 1.2. Healthy Forests: Preserve, restore, and manage forests to ensure ecological health and economic sustainability.
- 1.3. Clean Water and Healthy Waterways: Continue to improve the health of Maryland's watersheds, waterways, and wetlands through coordinated conservation and management strategies.

1.4. Agricultural Land Preservation: Continue to conserve Maryland's farmlands to protect rural character and promote sustainable agriculture and stewardship practices on agricultural lands.

1.5. Historic and Cultural Resources: Protect Maryland's historic and cultural resources, with an emphasis on appropriate and sustainable stewardship models.

2. Grow, Together

2.1. New Open Space and Recreation: Continue to increase public open space statewide, prioritizing filling gaps in areas with the greatest need.

2.2. New Preserved Lands: Continue to conserve lands to support healthy ecosystems and maintain rural character—protecting the important economic and ecological value these lands provide.

2.3. Climate Adaptation: Plan proactively for rising sea levels by strategically acquiring land to reduce flood risk, improve social and economic outcomes, and support transitioning ecologies.

2.4. Balanced Development: Plan for future growth in a manner that strategically integrates land conservation and preservation, ensuring development occurs without compromising critical natural and agricultural resources.

3. Reinvest in Parks, Reinvest in People

3.1. Ongoing Parks and Open Space Care: Expand maintenance capacity, staffing, and consider funding, with a focus on strengthening partnerships to address staffing and resource gaps for parks and State-owned recreational areas.

3.2. Capital Projects: Fund projects in parks and State-owned recreation areas that proactively address deferred maintenance and meet contemporary community needs. Prioritize multi-benefit approaches that maximize the impact of public and private investments by aligning environmental protection, community well-being, and long-term economic sustainability.

3.3. Expand Access: Welcome everyone so all visitors build connections to nature and feel a sense of belonging in Maryland's parks and protected lands.

3.4. Interpretation and Programs: Support interpretation and programs to improve park experiences, stewardship, and recreation outcomes.

3.5. Heat Resilience: Create cooler parks and improve heat safety for park visitors and staff.

4. Blue and Green Connections

4.1. Expanded Multi-Use Trail Network: Continue to expand Maryland's multi-use trail network to connect communities, public lands, and outdoor experiences.

4.2. Trail Experiences: Improve the quality, comfort, and safety of trail experiences.

4.3. Water Access: Grow water access and waterside recreation opportunities, a high statewide priority based on survey results.

4.4. More Transportation Options: Make it easier for everyone to reach parks and trails without a car.

5.1.3 State Goals for Agricultural Land Preservation

- Permanently preserve agricultural land capable of supporting a reasonable diversity of agricultural production
- Protect natural, forestry, and historic resources and the rural character of the landscape associated with Maryland's farmland
- To the greatest degree possible, concentrate preserved land in large, relatively contiguous blocks to effectively support long-term protection of resources and resource-based industries
- Limit the intrusion of development and its impacts on rural resources and resource-based industries
- Ensure good return on public investment by concentrating state agricultural land preservation funds in areas where the investment is reasonably well supported by both local investment and land use management programs
- Work with local governments to achieve the following:
 - Establish preservation areas, goals, and strategies through local comprehensive planning processes that address and complement state goals
 - In each area designated for preservation, develop a shared understanding of goals and the strategy to achieve them among rural landowners, the public-at-large and state and local government officials
 - Protect the equity interests of rural landowners in preservation areas by ensuring sufficient public commitment and investment in preservation through easement acquisition and incentive programs
 - Use local land use management authority effectively to protect public investment in preservation by managing development in rural preservation areas
 - Establish effective measures to support profitable agriculture, including assistance in production, marketing and the practice of stewardship, so that farming remains a desirable way of life for both the farmer and public-at-large.

5.2 Appendix B: Background Information About State Programs

The following information can be used in the Parks and Recreation Implementing Programs section of the LPPRP. It lists information about the goals and logistics of State programs and explains how the programs connect to outdoor recreation and conservation.

Program Open Space

The Program Open Space fund allows most Maryland residents to live within 15 minutes of an open space or recreational area, providing amenities including playgrounds, fields, forests,

hiking trails, and water access. When a person buys a house or land, a 0.5% State property transfer tax is collected which funds Program Open Space. This was designed to directly tie development to available funding for open space and recreational facilities for the public good.

Greenspace Equity Program

The Greenspace Equity Program provides and administers grants to enhance the public health and livability of overburdened and underserved communities by implementing projects to preserve, create, and enhance community greenspace. This program makes conservation more equitable and helps meet community needs for greenspace. It allows eligible applicants to acquire land, create easements, or develop property for more equitable public use and conservation.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) supports projects to improve outdoor recreation through the acquisition of land and development or renovation of recreation amenities. The LWCF Act of 1965 established a federally funded program to provide 50/50 matching grants to state and local governments for the purpose of acquiring and/or developing public outdoor recreational areas and facilities.

Sustainable Communities

The program supports community development, revitalization, and sustainability through coordinated strategies. It gives local governments resources to improve older communities and promote growth that is environmentally, economically and socially responsible. Sustainable Communities are places where public and private investments work together to develop a healthy local economy; protect and appreciate historical and cultural resources; conserve air, water, and energy resources; and create recreational and transportation opportunities.

Community Parks and Playgrounds Program

The Community Parks and Playground Program provides funding to allow the State to focus on restoring existing and creating new park and green space systems in Maryland's cities and towns. The program provides flexible grants to local governments to respond to the unmet need for assistance to rehabilitate, expand or improve existing parks, create new parks, develop environmentally oriented Parks and Recreation projects, or purchase and install playground equipment in older neighborhoods and intensely developed areas throughout the state.

Rural Legacy Program

Maryland's Rural Legacy Program provides funding to preserve large, contiguous tracts of land and to enhance natural resource, agricultural, forestry and environmental protection while supporting a sustainable land base for natural resource-based industries. The program creates public-private partnerships and allows those who know the landscape best—land trusts and local governments—to determine the best way to protect the landscapes that are critical to our economy, environment and quality of life.

5.3 Appendix C: GIS Data Resources

DNR maintained GIS datasets available for County use:

1. Protected public lands (DNR owned lands and conservation easements)
2. Maryland Recreation Atlas: includes information on biking, fishing, hiking, and sports
3. Maryland Trails: viewer and data
4. Maryland Public Water Access Sites: viewer and data
5. Maryland Fishing Report
6. GIS datasets maintained by DNR can be downloaded from the Maryland GIS Data Catalog (Search = "DNR," check the boxes for "Feature Service")

5.4 Appendix D: Additional Considerations

Source water protection areas as priorities for local land preservation

In 1999, MDE began a program to assess the vulnerability to contamination of public drinking water sources in Maryland. The plan uses three main tools for assessing the drinking water sources: source water delineation, contaminant surveys, and susceptibility of a water supply.

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source to contaminants that may affect the safety of drinking water. Counties may wish to analyze source water protection areas using MDE's GIS data and whether those areas might be a priority for local land preservation.

- Maryland Source Water Assessment Reports (SWAP) by County
- Maryland's Source Water Assessment Program PDF

Cleaning up brownfield sites for recreational use

EPA's webpage on brownfield sites has information on opportunities for grants and technical assistance to safely clean up and reuse contaminated properties. There are many examples of brownfield sites that have been successfully converted for recreational use. Presentations on this issue can be found on MDP's website regarding the 2022 Maryland Brownfield Conference.

- Information on RCRA (Resource Conservation and Recovery Act) cleanup sites can be accessed through EPA's webpages:
 1. Go to Cleanups in my Community EPA Webpage
 2. On this EPA page, scroll down until you see the U.S. map and click on Maryland. You will see a map of hazardous waste cleanup sites. Current RCRA Corrective Actions appear as green squares.

3. Click on the green square. When the name and address of the company appears, click on the blue hyperlinked text “RCRA Corrective Action Profile.” This will give site cleanup and background information.

- Additional information on MDE’s Voluntary Cleanup Program

Recreation in State Forests

DNR’s state forest webpage includes links to the webpages of individual state forests. The opening page of each forest’s website includes information on the recreational opportunities in each forest and links to more information about the forest. The websites for some state forests include links to annual work plans (AWPs) that describe projected recreational activities for that particular state forest or for the region generally. These guidelines present, as an option, that counties refer to these forest webpages when creating the LPPRPs.

Children in Nature

Governor Wes Moore established the Maryland Outdoor Learning Partnership (OLP) by Executive Order (EO) on April 22, 2024, tasking OLP with empowering all of Maryland’s youth to grow as environmental stewards that access, conserve, and restore our natural resources to ensure a climate-ready Maryland.

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