

Advocates for the Chesapeake Bay applaud passage of federal conservation law

November 2 2020, by Christine Condon



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President Donald Trump signed into law Friday a conservation bill with

plenty of perks for Maryland's Chesapeake Bay.

Environmental groups in Maryland lauded the passage of America's Conservation Enhancement Act as "groundbreaking."

The bill reauthorizes a host of environmental programs, including the Chesapeake Bay Program, an EPA initiative focused on cleaning up the watershed by fostering coordination between state, federal and local governments and conservation groups.

On several occasions, Trump had tried to slash funding for the [program](#); his February budget proposal for the 2021 fiscal year included just \$7.3 million for it. But the version of the ACE bill that crossed his desk, after unanimous passage on the House and Senate floors, allocates \$90 million for the program in 2021. Each year up until 2025, that number will increase by a half-million dollars.

The law also funds smaller programs, like the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Program, a National Parks Service initiative that aims to increase public access to environments in the bay watershed.

It includes the Chesapeake WILD Act, too, which will create a new \$15 million grant program for habitat restoration in the bay through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"Now that the President has signed our Chesapeake WILD Act into law, we are more equipped to protect the ecosystem of the Bay and the [economic activities](#) that rely on its health," said Sen. Chris Van Hollen in a statement. The Maryland Democrat introduced the piece of legislation alongside West Virginia Republican Sen. Shelley Moore Capito.

Van Hollen had also backed the boost in funding for the Chesapeake Bay Program.

In a statement, Kristin Reilly, director of Choose Clean Water, called ACE "the most important piece of federal legislation to help the Chesapeake Bay and its rivers and streams in more than 30 years."

"This groundbreaking legislation could not have arrived at a better time as the country perseveres through the COVID-19 pandemic," she said. "By providing critical funding for on-the-ground conservation projects, this legislation serves as an economic stimulus to communities throughout the country."

President of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, William C. Baker, cheered the news, but urged Maryland and other states in the region to follow the congressional lead and make good on their promises to cut pollution in the bay by 2025.

"In past decades, as pollution reduction deadlines neared, state and regional officials violated their promises and pushed to extend the deadline. We hope and trust that will not be the case this time. The ACE Act demonstrates the congressional commitment to saving the Bay. It is time for all parties to recommit to the 2025 deadline."

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