



Conservation Partnership Purchases 212 acres on Chesapeake Bay - Southern Maryland Headline News

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*Federal, State, County and Private Partners Preserve
Chesapeake Bay Waterfront Land with Economic,
Environmental and Historical Importance*

Press Release from The Conservation Fund

ST. MARY'S COUNTY, Md. (Dec. 11, 2014)—The Conservation Fund, in partnership with the U.S. Navy, Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MD DNR) and St. Mary's County, announced today the purchase and protection of 212 acres on the Chesapeake Bay that will provide opportunities for historical interpretation and recreational access along the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, while buffering Patuxent River Naval Air Station (NAS) from land uses that threaten the mission of the base.

Located just south of the military installation, the waterfront property—previously known as Shannon Farm—offers a variety of aquatic and woodland resources that were significant to the Native American and subsequent colonial settlements once found in the area. With 3,400 feet of frontage along the Chesapeake Bay, the land is representative of indigenous landscapes and lies within the scenic viewshed of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, the first entirely water-based trail in the National Trail System that traces the 1607-1609 voyages of Captain Smith as he charted the lands and waterways of the Bay. Later during the War of 1812, the property was used as a staging area for the British fleet.

The Conservation Fund, a national organization dedicated to creating land and water protection strategies that balance environmental stewardship with economic vitality, purchased the property this summer and then sold it to St. Mary's County in late November for incorporation into a county park for passive recreational activities and educational use. Funding for the acquisition was provided by the MD DNR's Program Open Space.

“The Commissioners of St. Mary's County were very happy and proud to have guaranteed the protection of Shannon Farm from further encroachment,” said former St. Mary's County Commissioner President Francis Jack Russell. “This is a win-win for the citizens of St. Mary's County now and into the future by securing another great natural resource in our county”.

In addition, the U.S. Navy acquired a conservation easement on the property as part of its Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program that will limit incompatible use and protect the rural character of the landscape within the Atlantic Test Range of the Patuxent River NAS. U.S. Senators Ben Cardin and Barbara Mikulski and U.S. Representative Steny Hoyer have supported U.S. Congressionally appropriate funding for REPI.

“We don't need to choose between protecting a wonderful indigenous landscape, providing for public access and ensuring security for Pax River. By working collaboratively, the U.S. Navy, The Conservation Fund and federal, state and local officials have shown how all these goals can be reached together,” said U.S. Senator Ben Cardin. “The purchase of the Shannon Farm tract will enhance the experience of those using the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, which also is a result of visionary partners in conservation. I am proud to see how we are able to preserve an archaeologically, historically and naturally significant piece of the Chesapeake Bay watershed while still securing the adjacent military operations.”

“I am very pleased that The Conservation Fund, the U.S. Navy, MD DNR, and St. Mary's County have been able to work together in such an innovative way to ensure the protection of Shannon Farm,” stated Congressman Steny Hoyer. “Not only is this a spectacular waterfront property, with wonderful vegetation and species diversity in its own right, but it is also now able to be shared with the public as part of telling the storied history of the Chesapeake Bay.”

“Due to its close proximity to NAS Patuxent River, less than a half mile from the fence line, Shannon Farm lies within a high noise area underneath the flight tracks of planes taking off and landing. It also had been approved for development of over 450 homes, which would have been subjected to high levels of noise on a daily basis,” said Russell Byrd, CPLO for NAS Patuxent River. “For these reasons, Shannon Farm was the highest priority parcel, on the list of over 50 potential parcels, for the Navy to purchase using REPI Program funds.”

“It’s rare for the protection of a piece of land like this to offer so many ecological, historical, cultural, recreational and economic benefits,” said Bill Crouch, Maryland director of The Conservation Fund. “As a driving force in the creation of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, we’re thrilled to help the County and the U.S. Navy not only provide access to the route that Captain Smith and his men took over 400 years ago, but also protect the mission of the Patuxent River NAS—St. Mary’s County’s most significant economic driver. With multiple funding sources and a simultaneous three way closing, the complexity of this project required a high level of coordination and expertise that has become The Conservation Fund’s specialty.”

“Shannon Farm’s 3,400 feet of Chesapeake Bay shorefront will provide much needed public access to the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail as well as protect the scenic view from the trail,” said Joel Dunn, executive director of the Chesapeake Conservancy, which is the National Park Service’s primary non-profit partner in developing the trail. “We congratulate the U.S. Navy, the State of Maryland, St. Mary’s County and The Conservation Fund on protecting this historically important property. Its conservation will help retain the rural character of the Atlantic Test Range south of Patuxent River Naval Air Station and allow archaeologists to explore the land’s past. We know from what Capt. Smith and early settlers wrote that the land was important to southern Maryland’s Native Americans.”

About The Conservation Fund

At The Conservation Fund, we combine a passion for conservation with an entrepreneurial spirit to protect your favorite places before they become just a memory. A hallmark of our work is our deep, unwavering understanding that for conservation solutions to last, they need to make economic sense.

In addition to championing the creation of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail in 2006, we’ve worked together with our partners to conserve the educational, recreational and heritage tourism opportunities associated with Captain Smith’s adventures and successfully protect key lands along the trail. Top-ranked, we have protected more than 7 million acres across America.
www.conservationfund.org

About the U.S. Navy Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative (REPI)

The Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration

Program supports cost-sharing partnerships authorized by Congress between the military Services, private conservation groups, and state and local governments to protect military test and training capabilities and conserve land. These win-win partnerships acquire easements or other interests in land from willing sellers to preserve compatible land uses and sustain wildlife habitat near installations and ranges where the military operates, tests, and trains.