

# Pax River, ATR receive \$3 million grant for Eastern Shore land protection

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By Matt Kane The Nature Conservancy Special to  
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The Atlantic Test Ranges (ATR) and NAS Patuxent River have been awarded a \$3 million grant from the Department of Defense (DoD)'s Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program to protect land on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

The funds will be used to purchase easements on 4,000 acres of land, establishing a resilient and connected marsh migration corridor and preventing incompatible development within the Navy's fly zone. The U.S. Navy will partner with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and others on the protection effort.

The funds were awarded through the 2020 REPI Challenge, which recognizes projects that preserve and enhance military installations or ranges that host key capabilities identified in the National Defense Strategy. This year's REPI Challenge awarded \$17 million in program funds to implement seven projects that will limit incompatible development and enhance military installation resilience.

Through the REPI Program, DoD partners with conservation organizations and governmental agencies to prevent encroachment that interferes with military training, testing, and operations.

One of the Navy's premier aircraft testing locations, NAS Patuxent River and ATR, conducts over 150,000 annual testing and research flights within the 1.5 million-acre special use airspace. This averages out to more than 410 aircraft operations occurring per day. TNC has partnered with the Navy since 2009 to protect land from incompatible development within the ATR, preserving 3,700 acres through easements.

"We are excited to be embarking on this new project with TNC. They have been a key partner on conservation projects since our REPI program began," said Rob Vargo, director of the Navy's Atlantic Ranges and Targets. "Preserving land beneath our range helps to ensure we can continue our mission of aircraft testing and meet our national defense objectives."

The ATR land protection and resilience project is located within the Middle Chesapeake Sentinel Landscape. The national Sentinel Landscapes partnership is a coalition of federal agencies, state and local governments, and non-governmental organizations working with private landowners to protect natural and working lands around military installations and ranges from incompatible development. The Navy and TNC will collaborate with USFWS through the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership to advance conservation of marshes and other Chesapeake Bay habitats.

"We can only succeed in conserving wildlife on a landscape level through partnerships with organizations like The Nature Conservancy and the Department of Defense's REPI Program," said Christina Ryder, biologist with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. "By aligning and focusing our collective priorities through the Sentinel Landscape partnership, both TNC and USFWS will be able to accelerate the conservation gains made around the Chesapeake Bay. By combining resources to protect land, TNC and USFWS have effectively amplified the collective impact of our work. This type of collaborative effort is allowing us to affect conservation at a Bay-wide scale, and complete projects beyond our individual capacities. USFWS is excited to continue to innovate with the Nature Conservancy and the REPI program to sustain our fish and wildlife resources for the public."

Maryland's Lower Eastern Shore is home to more than 75% of Maryland's remaining tidal wetlands, which provide critical habitat for a variety of commercially and recreationally important fish, bird, and shellfish species that state and local economies depend on. Coastal marshes also provide a defense against coastal hazards, protecting communities by reducing wave heights and erosion along shorelines, thereby reducing emergency recovery expenses. Conservation of these critical resources will protect communities, habitats, and the economies they support, while also protecting the integrity of the Navy's preeminent testing range.

“With this REPI Challenge award, we have an exciting and unprecedented opportunity to advance climate adaptation and coastal resilience through conservation on Maryland’s Eastern Shore,” said Elizabeth Carter, land protection director for The Nature Conservancy. “This investment in tidal marsh ecosystems and adaptation zones will preserve essential habitat for thousands of species and natural defenses for coastal communities and infrastructure. We look forward to collaborating with federal, state, and local partners on the protection of resilient coastal sites and productive ecosystems benefiting both nature and people.”

The mission of The Nature Conservancy’s Resilient Coasts Program is to safeguard coastal habitats and increase community resilience in the face of sea level rise and climate change. Protection of Lower Eastern Shore coastal ecosystems is critical to that mission, and the ATR land protection and resilience project will help ensure existing marshes are able to migrate inland — and continue to benefit human and natural communities — as sea levels rise.

To learn more about the REPI Program and 2020 REPI Challenge awarded projects, visit [www.repi.mil](http://www.repi.mil).