

Partnership Conserves 318 Acres in Dorchester County

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(<https://www.chesapeakeconservancy.org/2021/01/>)

Today, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and the United States Department of the Navy in partnership with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), The Conservation Fund (TCF), and Chesapeake Conservancy announced the successful conservation of 318 acres in the Nanticoke Rural Legacy Area on Maryland's Eastern Shore. With the acquisition of this conservation easement from a consenting landowner, the Nanticoke Rural Legacy Area now contains over 24,000 acres of preserved land.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and The Conservation Fund (TCF) as joint Sponsors of the Nanticoke Rural Legacy Area, located in Dorchester County, negotiated with the landowner and presented the Eberspacher tract to the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Rural Legacy Program and the U.S. Navy for acquisition of a conservation easement on the property. Funding to purchase the Eberspacher conservation easement was provided by Maryland's Rural Legacy Program, the U.S. Department of Defense's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program through the U.S. Navy, and was leveraged with the contribution of private funds secured by Chesapeake Conservancy from Mt. Cuba Center.



Photo by The Nature Conservancy

The conservation easement protects 318 acres that consists of 167 acres of prime agricultural land and 108 acres of forestland, in which there are 42 acres of non-tidal wetlands as well as tidal wetlands along 1,400 linear feet of riparian buffer on the Middletown Branch that allow for wetland migration and adaptation. Overall, this easement provides 112 acres of biodiversity conservation. Land protected by this easement is also within a state-designated Targeted Ecological Area and Green Infrastructure Hub in the Nanticoke River Watershed.

TNC prepared and completed "The Chesapeake Bay Lowlands" ecoregional assessment in 2002. This acquisition is located within TNC's Nanticoke River Conservation Area, and is part of their Ecoregional

Portfolio identified by that assessment. TNC also completed a "Conservation Action Plan" for the Nanticoke River in the year 2000 and this easement acquisition also implements goals of that action plan.

The property is also beneath U.S. Navy airspace, and its conservation will limit development that can be incompatible with the aircraft testing mission of the Atlantic Test Ranges and Naval Air Station Patuxent River.

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“All naval aircraft are tested at Naval Air Station Patuxent River and in the surrounding ATR airspace, making it vital to military readiness. The Department of Defense REPI Program provides funding for military Services to share the cost of the acquisition of easements or other interests in land from willing sellers to preserve compatible land uses. It is a key tool for combating encroachment that can limit or restrict military training, testing, and operations. By preserving open space, the U.S. Navy ensures that flight operations occur without interference and that we can continue to meet our mission. We are grateful to the Eberspacher family and the project partners for supporting national defense through land conservation,” said Captain John Brabazon, NAS Patuxent River Commanding Officer.

“This project demonstrates our success in engaging with local and federal partners to conserve and maintain the rural character and working landscapes of our state for future generations,” Maryland Department of Natural Resources Secretary Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio said. “This is in large part due to Governor Hogan’s leadership in fully funded land conservation and preservation programs. With more than \$75 million approved by the Board of Public Works, we have protected more than 27,000 acres during his administration.”

“The Eberspacher property is a diverse landscape made up of working agricultural fields, forest, and wetlands supporting many native species and that will provide space for critical marsh habitats to migrate to in the future,” said Elizabeth Carter, land protection director for The Nature Conservancy in Maryland. “The project is a great example of how collaboration between federal, state, nonprofit, and private partners can achieve landscape scale conservation success in the Nanticoke watershed. We are truly fortunate to have so many great partners working towards a shared goal of protecting this unique and important place on Maryland’s Eastern Shore.”

“Great conservation work like this does not happen without the dedication of the partners, both government and nonprofit,” said Bill Crouch, Maryland director at The Conservation Fund. “We’d especially like to thank U.S. Senators Ben Cardin and Chris Van Hollen and U.S. Representative Andy Harris for their support for the REPI program, which is annually funded by the U.S. Congress. The ecological and economic benefits that the Eberspacher property will secure for the Nanticoke River community will be enjoyed for generations to come.”

“Today we are celebrating a major conservation success story, thanks to a strong partnership that bridges together government agencies and nonprofits, and landowners who are caring stewards of the environment,” said Joel Dunn, Chesapeake Conservancy’s president and CEO. “Once again, Mt. Cuba Center was there to help us protect another high priority conservation project that will help improve water quality, habitat for wildlife and native plants, and our way of life for future generations.”

“Mt. Cuba Center is pleased to support this critical conservation project. The forest on this property supports diverse plant and wildlife habitat including breeding and stopover habitat for migratory songbirds and raptors,” said Ann Rose, Mt. Cuba Center’s president.



Photo by The Nature Conservancy