

Deputy Secretary of Defense visits Vienna

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VIENNA — Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks and other federal, state and local officials visited Vienna on Thursday, April 22, to discuss environmental initiatives and tour a portion of the Nanticoke River.

Hicks made the trip to Vienna on Earth Day to visit the Middle Chesapeake Sentinel Landscape, a land preservation initiative that is part of the Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program.

The REPI program ensures the military can conduct training, testing and operations without limits or restrictions from civilian land use in the area. The MCSL was formed in 2015 to protect the Atlantic Test Ranges used heavily by Naval Air Station Patuxent, in part by acquiring land and funding conservation easements for privately held land. The U.S. Navy conducts over 150,000 testing and research flights every year in the 1.5 million acre ATR special use airspace.

Upon her arrival by Department of Defense helicopter, which landed on the Vienna Volunteer Fire Company helipad, Hicks was greeted by Vienna Mayor Jamie McFarlane. Hicks toured the Captain John Smith Museum before walking to the Vienna Community Center for a roundtable discussion with government and nonprofit stakeholders.

The deputy secretary and entourage then sailed down the Nanticoke River on the Maryland Department of Natural Resources vessel *A.V. Sandusky*.

During the roundtable, Hicks said environmental and climate challenges make programs like REPI important to the DoD for “maintaining the quality of the training environment, the longevity of our assets, and also the relationships with the communities that we work so closely with that surround our installations.”

Hicks said the program has funded over \$100 million in the Chesapeake region, matched by private funds. “That over \$200 million has protected 62,000 acres in 15 different locations in Maryland, Virginia, Delaware and Pennsylvania,” Hicks said. “That’s an incredible mutual investment that helps us all.”

“The Department of Defense’s Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration program has greatly enhanced Maryland’s ability to protect our ag land, our working landscapes and our natural resources,” said Maryland Department of Natural Resources Secretary Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio. “It was an honor to have the opportunity on Earth Day to highlight the work we are doing with our partners along the Nanticoke River.”

Prior to departure, Hicks stopped by Mandala Pies, owned and operated by female veteran Caitlin LaComb and her husband, Mike.

“As a female veteran, mother-owned business, having the first appointed woman in history as the Deputy Secretary of Defense inside our bakery was a magnitude of honor we still can’t really put into words. Deputy Secretary of Defense Dr. Hicks was smitten with our kids, and it was obvious how genuine she is with compassion,” said a post on a Mandala Pies social media page.