

ACTION ALERT

Maryland's Open Space Funding Slashed 75%!

Budget risks the loss of endangered species habitat and our best rural lands

The Facts

- This year, real estate transfer taxes are expected to generate a record high \$157.6 million for parks land conservation programs. The Governor's budget proposal, however, includes only \$40.3 million for land conservation programs—a 75 percent reduction. This is one of the largest cuts in open space funding ever. It will significantly reduce the state's ability to preserve Maryland's rapidly dwindling open space.
- The Governor's open space budget risks the loss of endangered species habitats and Maryland's most valuable rural lands. The budget contains no funds at all for the Heritage Conservation and Rural Legacy programs. The Heritage Conservation program preserves the habitats of threatened and endangered species. Rural Legacy preserves the state's most precious rural open space, lands important for the mixture of agricultural, forestry, historic, and environmental values they contain.
- State open space programs are funded mainly through a real estate transfer tax, a one-half of percent (0.5%) state tax on the sale of real estate. State law dedicates this tax revenue solely for parks and land conservation. The Governor diverts all of the transfer tax revenues to help balance the state budget. The \$40.3 million that is available for land conservation is from bond funding.

What You Can Do and What You Can Say

Call, write and meet with your elected official **NOW** and let them know that:

- Land conservation is important to you. (Local examples make it more real: land that was recently protected by state, local, or land trust funding **OR** a property that will likely be developed if the funding is not available soon to buy and protect that property.)
- The Governor's budget slashes state funding for land conservation and parks by 75 percent.
- Bond funds are being used to provide most of the open space funding that is available. Bond funds must not become a permanent substitute for transfer tax revenue.
- In years past, there has not been either sunset or repayment provisions in legislation authorizing the diversion of open space revenues.

Tell your state legislators that this year's budget bill must include:

- Sunset language that sets a deadline establishing when the diversion of transfer tax revenue (to the budget deficit) and the substitution with bond funds must end, and when open space programs are fully funded by transfer tax revenue once again.
- Language calling for a full repayment of the transfer tax revenue that is diverted. Otherwise, the diversion of transfer taxes for a purpose other than open space is a violation of the public trust.
- Increased funding for land conservation and parks programs to match last year's funding level of \$76 million.

You can find the contact information for your elected officials at:

<http://MLIS.state.md.us>

or call 410.946.5400/301.970.5400

ACT NOW!

