

Program Open Space: A Priority for Maryland in Fiscal Year 2008

Your tax dollars are supposed to be protecting critically important parks and open space.

Everyone who purchased property in Maryland since 1969 has paid a real estate transfer tax. The legislation that created Program Open Space dedicated this revenue source to help build parks, preserve forests and open space, and protect our working farms. The real estate transfer tax is expected to generate up to \$188 million next year for Maryland's nationally recognized land conservation programs. We need to ensure that all these funds will be used for their intended purpose of land conservation. Last year, the Governor and legislature fully funded land conservation and we need to continue that trend to provide a stable source of funding for these programs. Previous diversions of funds have seriously set back the progress of these programs in the protection of our open spaces and working lands, which could disappear under record-breaking rates of development.

Funding for Land Conservation is a Priority for Maryland in Fiscal Year 2008.

The environmental community is anxiously awaiting the Governor's Fiscal Year 2008 budget to see if he will fulfill his campaign promise to fully fund Maryland's land conservation programs. Since 2002, more than \$480 million of dedicated land conservation funds, slated for protecting lands at the state and local level, have been taken from these vital programs and diverted to unrelated state programs. This has threatened to undermine a long history of protection for Maryland's rich natural and cultural heritage. You can help turn this situation around by contacting Governor-Elect O'Malley and your legislators, and tell them that these programs are important to you and should be fully funded this year and every year.

What you can do to save Maryland's lands?

Please act now to save Maryland's nationally recognized land conservation programs. If your family spends weekends bird watching in Patapsco Valley State Park, playing soccer at a local park, or hiking at Kilgore Falls in Harford County, let the Governor and your legislators know that:

- The Governor's Fiscal Year 2008 budget must include full funding for Program Open Space and the other land conservation programs funded by the real estate transfer tax ;
- Loopholes that allow certain real estate transactions to avoid the real estate transfer tax must be closed; and
- A mechanism must be established to prohibit future diversions.

Join the Partners for Open Space! If you know of an organization interested in joining the coalition, please contact Marcia Verploegen Lewis at marcia@partnersforopenspace.org. For the third year, Partners for Open Space, a statewide coalition of 150 organizations has organized to stop the diversion of the real estate transfer tax and ensure full funding for Maryland's land conservation programs. This coalition has strong public support and is dedicated to maintaining the funds urgently needed to protect our land and parks. The recent election illustrated the public interest for land conservation when 85% of Maryland voters supported the constitutional amendment to protect our preserved lands.

For more information:

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