

## **Chesapeake Bay Farm Bill Enhancements Act of 2017**

The Chesapeake Bay Farm Bill Enhancements Act of 2017 builds on the great progress made on Chesapeake Bay restoration. It develops opportunities to strengthen the Regional Conservation Partnership Program and provides more opportunities for effective Chesapeake Bay conservation efforts.

### **Background**

In the Farm Bill in 2008, Congress authorized the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative to provide assistance to agricultural producers to minimize excess nutrients and sediments in order to restore, preserve, and protect the Chesapeake Bay. On average, approximately \$50 million was invested annually in the Chesapeake Bay through in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative. In the Farm Bill in 2014, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) was created in order to prioritize conservation resources that were previously handled by separate conservation programs such as the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative, one of the goals being to “accomplish the functions of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program”. While very successful nationally, the overall investment in the Chesapeake Bay region through the RCPP has had some challenges. Heading into the next Farm Bill, it is critical to work with stakeholders in the Chesapeake Bay region to develop opportunities to strengthen the RCPP program and provide more opportunities for effective conservation efforts in the area.

### **Bill Summary**

The bill makes a number of changes to RCPP in order to improve conservation efforts in the Chesapeake Bay through additional funding, bolstering critical conservation areas, and boosting technical assistance.

### **Senate Cosponsors**

Senator Van Hollen (D-MD), Senator Capito (R-WV), Senator Kaine (D-VA), Senator Casey (D-PA), Senator Manchin (D-WV), Senator Cardin (D-MD), Senator Warner (D-VA), Senator Carper (D-DE), Senator Coons (D-DE), and Senator Gillibrand (D-NY)

### **House Cosponsors**

Congressman Bobby Scott (D-VA), Congressman Rob Wittman (R-VA) Congressman John Sarbanes (D-MD), Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), Congressman Gerry Connolly (D-VA), Congressman Anthony Brown (D-MD), Congressman Steny Hoyer (D-MD), Congressman Dutch Ruppersburger (D-MD), Congressman Jamie Raskin (D-MD), Congressman Donald McEachin (D-VA), Congressman Elijah E. Cummings (D-MD), Congresswoman Lisa Blunt Rochester (D-DE), Congressman John Delaney (D-MD), and Congresswoman Barbara Comstock (R-VA)

### **Other Officials Supporting the Bill**

Maryland Governor Hogan (R)  
Virginia Governor McAuliffe (D)  
West Virginia Governor Justice (R)  
Pennsylvania Governor Wolf (D)  
Delaware Governor Carney  
Washington, DC Mayor Bowser (D)

## How It Works

Funding	Critical Conservation Areas	Technical Assistance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Triples the amount of mandatory RCPP funding available per fiscal year from \$100 million to \$300 million</li> <li>-Eliminates the National Pool category and divides RCPP funding into two categories: 60% to Critical Conservation Areas and 40% to states</li> <li>-Allows in-kind support to count towards a partner’s matching contribution</li> <li>-Allows partners to apply for a funding renewal of a partnership agreement</li> <li>- Fosters new and innovative approaches to conservation by authorizing a pilot grant program that allows partners to directly operate conservation projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Strengthens the definitions of a critical conservation area to include “critical conservation conditions” that would improve water quality and water quantity</li> <li>-Prioritizes applications that implement multi-state watershed restoration plans; bring together a diverse array of stakeholders into a project, build new partnerships at the local, state and corporate level, and coordinate with other local, state, and national efforts</li> <li>-Creates national guidelines for Critical Conservation Area outcomes data and reporting the data to Congress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Authorizes the Secretary to advance reasonable amounts of funding to eligible partners for technical assistance</li> <li>-Requires the Secretary to make publically available the amount that will be available for technical assistance at the time of project selection</li> <li>-Requires the Secretary to limit agency costs for technical assistance to those necessary to carry out the objectives of the partnership agreement</li> <li>-Authorizes the Secretary to provide feedback to applicants throughout the application process on how the proposals can be improved</li> </ul>