



## **PARTNERS *for* OPEN SPACE**

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### **Making the Case for Open Space: Report Shows High Need for Land Conservation Funds**

**Annapolis** – Partners for Open Space released a report, “The Case for Open Space,” which documents that land conservation funds are needed now more than ever at both the state and local levels.

“This report shows the investment that land conservation funding has made to neighborhoods across Maryland,” explained Kelly Carneal, Partners for Open Space Director. “It also shows the uncompleted projects at both the state and local level, projects needed by our communities but unable to move forward without this dedicated funding.”

“Gov. O’Malley has stood by his pledge to protect this critical fund and use it to protect our farms, forests, and parks. However, the Department of Legislative Services has recommended millions to be diverted to other programs- - cuts these programs cannot afford.”

Program Open Space has been the principal funding mechanism for open space and park development programs since its inception in 1969. The term Program Open Space refers to a number of land conservation programs funded through the real estate transfer tax fund. The collective result is remarkable. Today every county in Maryland has a list of state and local parks, playgrounds, recreation centers, protected agricultural lands, and Rural Legacy areas that were funded by the transfer tax and Program Open Space.

“Maryland has lost more than 286,000 acres of farmland to development,” says Jim Baird, Mid-Atlantic States Director for American Farmland Trust. “Farmland protection programs are crucial to the health and viability of agriculture and to the state as a whole.”

“In tough economic times, there is significant pressure to divert transfer tax revenue to other programs,” said Carneal. “Over the years, Program Open Space has had almost a third of this dedicated revenue re-allocated and not repaid.” Although Program Open Space has been fully funded for the last few years, the funding has been in the form of bonds, which then spreads out their uses over three years. This reduces the available funds each year. All this is on top of the depressed housing market that has resulted in even less income to the program. As a result, Program Open Space and associated programs have been severely underfunded over the years.

"Most people don't realize how much Program Open Space has affected their communities and their lives over the last 40 + years," says John Byrd, who is the MACo Recreation and Parks Affiliate. "More than likely without it, their favorite local park or playground would not exist - or it would look very different."

“Any diversion of Program Open Space funding this year would be unfortunate,” claims Janna Howley with University of Maryland Extension. With the Southern Maryland tobacco buyouts ending this year, if there is no money for farmers to preserve their farms, they’ll most likely sell the land for development.”

According to Steve Bunker with The Nature Conservancy “This report clearly articulates the need for continued funding at both the state and local level for these critically important programs.” The report also documents how past funding has been used by the counties and the state to provide recreational opportunities for all Marylanders and protect valuable farm and forestlands.

The report was prepared by the Partners for Open Space, which represents a diverse group of organizations united by a common interest in land conservation and public recreation made up of millions of citizens across Maryland.

“The report makes the case for full funding for Program Open Space as provided in the Governor’s FY 13 budget, adds Carneal. “Protecting this funding is of critical importance, because when land is gone, it is gone forever.”

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*Partners for Open Space is a statewide coalition of over 165 groups seeking to secure, save and protect Maryland’s land conservation programs.*