



FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

2023-2027

Approved by the MET Board of
Trustees on September 12, 2022

Our Mandate

MET 1967-2023

Maryland Environmental Trust was established by the Maryland General Assembly in 1967 as a free-standing agency with its own board of trustees, and later assigned to the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Today, as a valued unit of the Department of Natural Resources, MET continues to work with local land trusts, governmental partners, and Maryland citizens to protect land forever.

MET's purpose was, and still is, twofold:

- to conserve and maintain Maryland's natural, agricultural, scenic, and cultural resources for future generations; and
- to inspire and engage the public to take responsibility for care of these natural resources that sustain all Marylanders.

THE STATUTE TEXT (Article Natural Resources)

There is a Maryland Environmental Trust established to conserve, improve, stimulate, and perpetuate the aesthetic, natural, health and welfare, scenic, and cultural qualities of the environment, including, but not limited to land, water, air, wildlife, scenic qualities, open spaces, buildings or any interest therein, and other appurtenances pertaining in any way to the State. Through educational and other means, the Trust shall encourage and motivate the populace of the State and others to do so and shall promote continuing interest in and the study of these matters. The purpose of the Trust is of general benefit to the citizens of the State, and it is charitable in nature.

As one of the oldest and most successful land trusts in the country, the Maryland Environmental Trust holds over 1,100 conservation easements preserving more than 140,000 acres statewide.

From the Chesapeake Bay to the mountains of Garrett County, our Land Conservation, Easement Monitoring and Stewardship, and Land Trust Assistance Programs promote the protection of open land. Partnering with the Maryland Department of Transportation, and the nonprofit Forever Maryland, we also provide grants to support environmental education projects, citizen stewardship and to protect natural resources through the Keep Maryland Beautiful grant program.

<https://dnr.maryland.gov/met>

Maryland Environmental Trust 2023-2027 Strategic Plan

Approved by the MET Board of Trustees on September 12, 2022

MET has the opportunity to focus on solidifying its core land conservation services, now that the non-profit Forever Maryland has been launched, a key goal in MET's 2017 strategic plan.

Goal 1: Maintain MET as Maryland's flagship land trust by continuing to pursue best practices in governance, conservation, stewardship, and management.

<u>Action step</u>	<u>Success indicators</u>
Strengthen MET governance by simplifying trustee selection process, enhancing trustee onboarding, engagement, and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Work with Governor and state legislature to simplify trustee appointment process● Trustee orientation process is regularly reviewed, updated, and implemented● MET trustee manual is reviewed and updated annually (or as necessary)● An annual trustee evaluation survey is conducted, and results are reported to the board for discussion● Board meeting and committee meeting attendance is tracked● Governance committee chair check-in calls/meetings with trustees take place, and low-attendance trustees are prioritized
Enhance MET conservation impact by prioritizing lands that are environmentally significant	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● New projects are evaluated using Maryland's Environmental Resources and Land Information Network ("MERLIN"), and other interactive mapping tools available online from the Maryland DNR and other entities● New projects are consistent with MET's easement policies

<p>As part of implementing Land Trust Standards and Practices, create a plan for annually monitoring MET's easements, and complete all current conditions reports within the 5-year period of this plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Annual plan created for assigning easement monitoring site visits and aerial imagery reviews to appropriate parties (land trust co-holders, staff, volunteers) ● Current conditions reports completed for approx. 200 older easements with insufficient baseline documentation
<p>Ensure that all MET policies, procedures, and manuals are updated on a regular basis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● MET by-laws are reviewed/updated every other year by the board's governance committee working with the Office of Attorney General staff to ensure compliance with MET's statute and policies, state open meetings law, state ethics commission, etc. ● MET program-specific manuals and procedures, including record-keeping, are reviewed, and updated biennially ● Program manuals and procedures reflect continued implementation of Land Trust Standards and Practices
<p>Cultivate a positive work environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Practices continued to encourage communication, collaboration, and inclusion ● MET director and trustees seek feedback from staff and provide the same for major projects and successes, including volunteer/intern recognition ● Staff develop their individual plan of interest for topics/areas where they seek continued education, which are discussed and documented in the employee evaluation process ("PEP")

MET was instrumental in the formation and startup of Forever Maryland. One of the findings during this strategic planning discovery and input process was that key audiences continue to be confused about the roles and responsibilities of MET and Forever Maryland. As Forever Maryland matures, there are opportunities to continue to refine the two groups' roles and help key stakeholders differentiate between the two organizations.

Goal 2. Clarify roles and responsibilities with Forever Maryland to ensure complementary services to land trust community

<u>Action step</u>	<u>Success indicators</u>
<p>Clarify the differences between MET and Forever Maryland (FM) programs, interest areas, and services, and communicate to key audiences</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A document is created summarizing the focus areas of each organization including programs offered defining difference between MET's land protection role and FM's advocacy and education role, and where we can work together (e.g., regional conservation partnerships, Keep Maryland Beautiful Grants program) ● MET's print and e-newsletters highlight MET land conservation, easement stewardship, and partnerships ● Update look and feel of communications documents to differentiate branding of the two organizations ● Different roles of each organization are communicated with land trusts and other audiences
<p>Ensure continued partnership and coordination by holding regular executive meetings with board chairs and directors of both organizations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Current practice of monthly meeting between MET director and FM president is continued ● MET chair continues to serve as a liaison to the FM board of directors

MET has a unique relationship with its numerous easement landowners across the state and thus has the opportunity to serve as a resource to its landowners. By motivating landowners to pursue enhanced environmental outcomes on their properties, this education process will contribute to restoring the water quality of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries and addressing climate change.

Goal 3. Encourage easement landowners to pursue enhanced stewardship to contribute to restoring the Chesapeake Bay and to addressing climate change

<u>Action step</u>	<u>Success indicators</u>
Develop a strategy to approach MET easement landowners about pursuing enhanced stewardship as part of the monitoring process, including exploring the targeting of specific ecological needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Opportunities for restoration/Best Management Practices (BMP) implementation are noted during on-site and remote monitoring of easements ● Stewardship program staff tracks the number of discussions with easement holders as well as those who implement enhanced stewardship projects on their properties (acres, type of BMP, etc.) ● High priority locations are identified with assistance of land trust partners, DNR
Connect easement landowners and land trusts to partners, providers, and institutions (such as DNR, SCD, UMD ext.) with the skills and knowledge to assist landowners with implementing enhanced stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Landowners are regularly connected to appropriate partners/service providers ● Updated links to providers and institutions is available on MET's website and printed materials