Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy, and Leader Schumer:

As members of the Chesapeake Bay Program’s Principals’ Staff Committee, we write to express our support for an economic recovery and infrastructure package that includes significant investment in conservation construction for the Chesapeake Bay watershed. These projects not only create jobs, they also advance the restoration of our natural environment, which increases climate resilience and improves public health.

History has shown that investing in natural resource conservation generates significant economic and environmental benefits. Establishing the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1933, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt successfully utilized these policies during the Great Depression to employ over 3 million Americans and enhance some of our nation’s most beautiful natural landscapes. As our nation seeks to recover from the public health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, we could benefit greatly from renewed investment in conservation construction projects across our country.

Not only will this put Americans back to work as the unemployment percentage remains in double digits, it will have added benefit to food production industries such as farming and fisheries that have been so hard hit by this pandemic. In addition, the pandemic and the need for social distancing have reminded us of the critical importance of access to open space for all. Parks, trails
and other outdoor recreational and physical fitness opportunities are critical to public health in normal times; they are an absolute necessity in a time of pandemic.

Thus, we support federal investment in the following initiatives:

**Clean Water, Stormwater and Green Infrastructure** – Substantially expand investments in the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) and provide States with authority to deploy allocated funds as grants to support implementation of ongoing and new municipal projects. Given the economic crisis, the state-match requirement for the CWSRF should be waived as part of the stimulus to help states provide as much assistance as possible to their most vulnerable or underserved communities. Provide greater support for installing and maintaining stormwater and green infrastructure and other forms of municipal wastewater assistance, while maintaining maximum state authority to dedicate these resources to the most pressing needs. Projects to maintain and enhance wastewater treatment systems are fundamental to our Nation’s water quality and public health. Many of these projects are at high risk due to Covid-19 induced budget shortfalls. Inadequate stormwater management contributes to not only nutrient and sediment pollution, but also flash flooding, property damage and the loss of life from severe rain events, which are expected to increase. It is one of the most expensive and difficult infrastructure challenges to mitigate in built-out areas. Communities with Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4s) require additional resources to address their critical infrastructure needs. The use of green infrastructure practices can help reduce the cost and provide additional benefits to communities such as green space, recreational areas and tree canopy. We have neglected to adequately invest in our nation’s infrastructure for far too long. As a result, many communities struggle with the consequences of more frequent flooding events, impaired waterways, and reduced quality of life. These funds can be deployed rapidly, will create good-paying jobs, and have a significant economic multiplier effect.

**Farms and Farmers** – Restoration of the Chesapeake Bay is not possible without sound agricultural conservation and management policies and the ability of farmers to implement them. As disruptions in food service and processing ripple through the supply chain, farmers are facing unprecedented challenges. The bulk of resources to assist farmers in land and water Best Management Practices (BMPs) are delivered through mandatory programs associated with the federal Farm Bill. In these difficult times for the farming community, Congress should consider additional investments in programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP). By funding BMPs such as manure storage structures, barnyard improvements, tree plantings, and stream fencing, these programs support demand for both skilled and unskilled labor.

In addition, conservation planning capacity is often a limiting factor in achieving higher rates of BMP implementation. Additional discretionary funding for Natural Resources Conservation Service’s Conservation Technical Assistance could help ensure that these farm bill resources are used efficiently and that the benefits of improved farm efficiency and resiliency are maximized.

**Fisheries** – Like the farming sector, recovery of our region’s iconic fishing industry will depend on sustainable fish populations and the viability of watermen and processing infrastructure. Short term relief remains critical, but longer term conservation construction projects will be necessary to
sustain recovery. Similar to agricultural conservation practices, aquatic habitat restoration is also conservation construction. Stream restoration, creation of living shorelines, oyster restoration and installation of fish passages will put engineers, design technicians and laborers to work with positive outcomes for both the commercial and recreational fishing communities. We suggest establishment of a competitive large-scale grant program administered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, focused on large-scale efforts to improve fish and shellfish habitat, water quality and community resiliency.

**Forests, Parks and Open Space** – Natural, scenic and open areas provide the recreation and respite so many have sought-out and appreciated during the pandemic. Research increasingly demonstrates spending time outdoors in nature improves mental and physical health. However, significant disparities exist in access to parks and open space particularly among people of color. Several federal programs support the creation and enhancement of publicly-accessible open space. Augmentation of these programs would help ensure that the benefits can be extended to underserved populations and communities.

- **Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF):** The LWCF is the nation’s premier land conservation program and should be made permanent. Through locally driven projects, it provides for the permanent protection of landscapes to safeguard the rivers and streams feeding into the Chesapeake Bay, while supporting local economies through recreation and tourism.

- **Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Trails Program:** Under the National Park Service, this program provides assistance for connecting people with the heritage of the watershed by increasing programming and projects that get children and visitors outside; and advancing Chesapeake Bay conservation and access goals.

**Major Watersheds and Ecosystems** – The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Chesapeake Bay Program is the nucleus of the federal-state partnership to restore the Chesapeake Bay and coordinates the complex science and monitoring efforts that drive restoration. The partnership has resulted in strong coordination among federal agencies, state and local government and private partners. Like the Chesapeake Bay, many major watersheds have developed comprehensive plans that drive restoration efforts, and should be fully funded to promote direct and related jobs in those regions as well as environmental restoration and monitoring. We support the allocation of stimulus funds, along with continuing annual appropriations, as an investment in these geographic programs and comprehensive restoration plans at the EPA, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, United States Geological Survey and other related agencies.

We are dedicated to improving the health and natural ecosystems of the Chesapeake Bay watershed. We believe these goals are consistent with many policies that provide much needed economic stimulus and aid to struggling industries and communities in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As you draft national infrastructure and economic recovery legislation in the coming weeks and months, we appreciate your consideration of these policy requests. Thank you.
June 12, 2020
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Sincerely,

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