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Marylanders Name Clean, Healthy Chesapeake Bay as Top Environmental Priority in New Opinion Survey

Aware of Challenges Facing Bay and Local Waters, Citizens
Remain Optimistic About Prospects of Recovery

(Annapolis, MD) – Even though few Marylanders actually come into contact with the Bay -- either through boating, fishing, swimming, or crabbing -- state residents chose a clean and healthy Chesapeake Bay as their number one environmental priority from a list of 12 other state and national environmental concerns, according to a statewide public opinion survey released today by the Chesapeake Bay Trust.

Years of lackluster reports about progress toward achieving Chesapeake Bay restoration goals have failed to create “Chesapeake Bay fatigue” among Marylanders, the survey indicates. A full 86% of citizens say that “making the Chesapeake Bay clean and healthy” is either *extremely* important or *very* important to them – a priority that topped a list of state and national concerns that included reducing air pollution, reversing global warming, slowing development in the state, and shrinking their own carbon footprint. (Coming in a close second is “environmental education for children”: 85% of state residents rate this issue as *extremely* important or *very* important to them.)

More than half (55%) of state citizens indicate they are *more* interested and 35% are *just as* interested “in hearing about the health of the Chesapeake Bay” today compared to a few years ago. The vast majority of Marylanders (9 out of 10) are highly confident that the Bay and other local waterways can be returned to health, according to the survey.

“As we head into Earth Day, this is important environmental news for the state of Maryland,” declared Allen Hance, Executive Director of the Chesapeake Bay Trust. “Our citizens are saying clearly they cherish the Chesapeake Bay as a valuable natural asset. Even though they may not actually experience the Bay first-hand and are aware that water quality in many local waterways is not getting better, they care deeply about the health of the Bay and local waters and are optimistic about and committed to their restoration.”

While the vast majority of residents are certain that the environmental threats facing the state’s local waterways can be reversed, a large majority (73%) say that the problem is so big that it will require some government regulation. More than two-thirds (68%) would support more public money to clean up the Bay “if leaders in the state said more tax dollars would be needed” – a striking finding in view of the fact that 72% of citizens worry about money (38% worry about money *every day*).

From a regional perspective, concern for “making the Chesapeake Bay clean and healthy” rises steadily as one moves toward the more urbanized areas of the state. In the 14 rural counties, 81% call this priority *extremely* important or *very* important compared to 83% in the outer suburbs (Frederick, Charles, Howard, Anne Arundel, Carroll, and Harford), 89% in the first-ring suburbs (Montgomery, Prince George’s, and Baltimore County), and 93% in Baltimore City. Among the rural counties, the Bay is a much higher priority in Southern Maryland (95%) and the Eastern Shore (85%), compared to Western Maryland (69%). In addition, Baltimore City dwellers (64%) are more interested in hearing about the health of the Bay than they were a few years ago compared to residents statewide (55%) and the first-ring suburban counties of Baltimore (58%).

Environmental protection in general remains critically important to Marylanders. One in five citizens rank this matter at the top of the list of basic priorities among “all the issues and challenges facing Maryland today” and 29% rank it above average.

“This survey confirms that, even in tough economic times, Marylanders still regard the environment as a top priority,” added Hance. “There’s strong public support for bolder actions by government, whether through increased environmental spending or tighter regulations to address water pollution. Underpinning these sentiments is a recognition that educating children and young adults about the environment and building the workforce needed to support a new, greener economy are the keys to a more sustainable future for the state.”

Many Marylanders demonstrate their support for the Bay regularly in a variety of ways. For example, according to the survey, 10% of households in the state have purchased a *Treasure the Chesapeake* license plate (www.bayplate.org) for at least one of their vehicles, indicating that they buy the plates primarily because “it helps pay for restoration of rivers and the Bay.” Thirty percent of the public are *very likely* to buy a Bay plate the next time they renew their registration,

according to the survey. In addition, 21% say they would be very likely to give money to the Chesapeake Bay Trust through the tax check-off option on their state income tax forms if they were reminded at tax time

The Chesapeake Bay Trust funds on-the-ground projects that help protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay and its rivers and supports public outreach and education programs designed to engage all Marylanders in these efforts. Since its creation in 1985, the Trust has awarded millions of dollars in grants for a broad spectrum of projects -- from field trips that educate students about one of the world's most productive estuaries, to critical Chesapeake Bay restoration initiatives including shoreline and wetland restoration projects. Through its *Treasure the Chesapeake* license plate program and other projects, the Trust has reached and engaged hundreds of thousands of Marylanders on behalf of saving the Bay. In 2008 alone, grants have been leveraged by grantees to educate over 87,000 students on Bay related issues, plant over 144,000 trees and native plants, remove 324 tons of trash and mobilize over 23,000 volunteers.

According to the survey, the Maryland public supports this kind of grant-making, wanting investment in locally meaningful projects in their home communities, including cleaning up local waters and making fish, crabs, and drinking water safe.

About the Survey:

This survey was conducted by OpinionWorks, a full-service opinion research organization based in Annapolis, MD. A total of 1,015 randomly selected adult residents of Maryland were interviewed by telephone for this survey. Respondents were not told that the survey was sponsored by the Chesapeake Bay Trust or that it concerned environmental issues so as not to bias their responses. Strict sampling quotas were established for seven regions of the state and the final sample was weighted to accurately reflect the distribution of Maryland's adult population for key indicators including race/ethnicity, age, and educational attainment, according to the latest estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau.

About the Chesapeake Bay Trust:

The Chesapeake Bay Trust is a nonprofit, grant-making organization. Funding provided through the Chesapeake Bay Trust is sparking on-the-ground change in communities throughout Maryland and developing Bay stewards in classrooms across the state. The Trust is supported by the sale of the Maryland *Treasure the Chesapeake* license plate, donations to the *Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund* on the Maryland State income tax form, and donations from individuals and corporations. Fully 90 percent of the Trust's expenditures are directed to Chesapeake Bay restoration and education programs.

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