

MIDDLE CHESAPEAKE SENTINEL LANDSCAPE



Celebrating Milestones

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Naval Air Station Patuxent River (NAS Pax River), the Atlantic Test Range (ATR), and Middle Chesapeake Sentinel Landscape (MCSL) along with leadership, partners, and stakeholders came together at the Patuxent River Naval Air Museum in Lexington Park, Maryland June 3, 2026 to celebrate dual milestones in Fiscal Year 2026; the 10th anniversary of the MCSL and surpassing 20,000 acres protected through the Department of War (DoW) Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) program beneath NAS Pax River / ATR airspace.

“The REPI Program provides us with that win-win-win scenario for mission readiness, land conservation, and cultural preservation,” said Capt. Mark Zematis, Commanding Officer, NAS Patuxent River addressing the more than 50 partners in attendance. “Thank you for helping us mark this great achievement in maintaining mission-readiness, community collaboration, and environmental stewardship.”



REPI enables cost-sharing partnerships between military services, private conservation groups, and state and local governments to purchase land interests or easements from willing landowners or manage natural resources. Easements allow landowners to maintain ownership of their property and continue to farm or preserve natural resources, while limiting development that could impede the military mission.

The NAS Pax River and ATR REPI program has successfully preserved 108 parcels beneath the Navy airspace since 2010, protecting 21,005 acres across portions of three distinct geographies; Southern Maryland, the Northern Neck of Virginia, and Maryland’s Eastern Shore and southwest Delaware.



Celebrating its 10th anniversary in FY26, the MCSL continues to build and facilitate collaborative, multi-stakeholder partnerships that advance shared goals supporting military readiness, working and natural lands, and resilient communities and ecosystems. Together with the Navy, MCSL partners have doubled the average annual rate of land protection through the NAS Pax River and ATR REPI program, successfully leveraging REPI funding such that for every REPI dollar spent, seven were brought in from other sources, including state, local, and private funds.

Middle Chesapeake Sentinel Landscape Coordinator, Joanna Ogburn, explained that “By combining the strengths of our federal agencies, on-the-ground expertise of our state and local partners, and commitment of landowners to this landscape, we are able to protect and restore lands that support the tremendous overlap of values here in the Middle Chesapeake. These efforts not only support military readiness, but also help protect wildlife habitat for threatened species, create marsh migration corridors to improve regional resilience, support our local agricultural economies – from farming to forestry and fisheries – and preserve the integrity of our cultural landscapes, such as the Northern Neck National Heritage Area and Harriet Tubman Rural Legacy Area.”

“The Middle Chesapeake Sentinel Landscape has been critical to protection of land on the Delmarva Peninsula. Given all the threats our habitats, fish, and wildlife species face, including development and changing environments, it is integral that we have large, landscape-scale conservation occurring,” said Julie Slacum, Strategic Resource Conservation Manager, Chesapeake Bay Ecological Services Field Office with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. “This partnership has done that while maintaining both military readiness and working landscapes and conserving at-risk species like the saltmarsh sparrow.”

The MCSL is one of 21 Sentinel Landscapes operating across the country, all supported by the broader Sentinel Landscape partnership. Founded in 2013, the Sentinel Landscape partnership aligns the objectives of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), DoW, and Department of the Interior to strengthen military readiness, conserve natural resources, bolster agricultural and forestry economies, increase public access to outdoor recreation, and enhance landscape resilience. By creating coalitions of federal agencies, state and local governments, and private

organizations, sentinel landscapes are able to strategically and efficiently leverage resources to implement conservation projects that safeguard military, working lands, and recreation interests.

“In the Middle Chesapeake Sentinel Landscape, our primary objectives are to facilitate constructive dialogue, safeguard natural resources, conserve working lands and enhance military mission readiness. This opportunity fosters collaboration among landowners, local organizations, state agencies, and federal entities, furthering our commitment to maintaining productive working lands, in alignment with our motto: keeping working lands in working hands,” said Astor Boozer, Deputy Assistant Chief, Natural Resource Conservation Service, USDA.

The celebratory event featured multiple keynote speakers, including Kristin Thomasgard, acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of War for Environmental Management & Restoration with the Office of the Assistant Secretary of War (Energy, Installations, & Environment). Highlighting the collaboration between NAS Pax River / ATR and the MCSL, Thomasgard noted, “partnerships like this will remain critical to preserving military readiness, supporting local communities, and protecting natural resources, like America’s largest estuary, the Chesapeake Bay, that define this region.” She added that, “over the last decade, this partnership has shown that when we align resources, expertise, and shared goals, we can achieve outcomes that none of us could accomplish alone.”



Following an on-installation tour of VX-1 (Air Test and Evaluation Squadron One) and the Hog Point project site, the day culminated in a visit to a preserved farm in Southern Maryland. The 80-acre property, owned by Roberta and John Sola of St. Mary’s County, showcased the tangible benefits of these conservation efforts.

“Participating in a conservation easement has allowed us to preserve our farm, hopefully for generations to come, and gave us the opportunity to invest in the property and establish a cattle operation! We are incredibly grateful,” said the Solas.

Together, the organizations recognized the partnership, collaboration, and shared values that have contributed to their collective progress in preserving the working and rural character of key landscapes vital to military testing and training.



LT Pearce Phinney and LT Mike Crandell lead a tour of the VX-1 Hangar and runway, showcasing the Boeing P8 Poseidon aircraft. VX-1 is one of several test and evaluation squadrons at NAS Pax River. The principal mission of VX-1 is to test and evaluate airborne anti-submarine warfare (ASW) and maritime anti-surface warfare (SUW) weapon systems, airborne strategic weapon systems, as well as support systems, equipment and materials in an operational environment. A variety of operational aircraft are assigned to VX-1 including the P-3C Orion, MH-60R and MH-60S.



In 2025, the MCSL partners completed a large-scale project, located at Hog Point along the coast of NAS Pax River in Southern Maryland. Spanning 4,870 linear feet, the project helps protect helicopter training areas, at-risk diamondback terrapin nesting habitat, and recreation beach and water access. Led by Southern Maryland RC&D, the project leveraged funding from the REPI Challenge, Navy, and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.



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