

Calvert County Critical Area Program

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An act as simple as planting a tree can make a big difference in the health of the bay and provide vital wildlife habitat. Photo courtesy of USDA NRCS



Chesapeake Bay Critical Area

What YOU Need to Know



Calvert County Critical Area Program

You live in the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area. The Critical Area includes all lands within 1,000 feet of the bay and the rivers, creeks, and streams that flow into it. This land is "critical" because the health of the Bay including the plant and animal life living in it are impacted by what you do on your property.

The Critical Area Program is designed to help keep up the good work and curb the harmful effects to the Bay that often come from development. The Program, adopted by Calvert County in 1988, is in response to legislation passed by the State of Maryland after many studies demonstrated that the health of the Chesapeake Bay was in decline.

This brochure will provide an overview of how the Critical Area regulations apply to your property, and give guidance on how to protect the Bay as you use and develop your land. YOU can make a difference!



Photo courtesy of NOAA



Photo courtesy of NOAA



Photo courtesy of NOAA

What is the Critical Area?

All land within 1,000 feet of the mean high tide line of tidal water or tidal wetland. State law recognizes that the land immediately surrounding the Bay and its tributaries has the greatest potential to affect water quality and wildlife habitat for our crabs, oysters, herons and waterfowl. The purpose of the Critical Area Program is to mitigate the damaging impact of water pollution and loss of natural habitat, while also accommodating the County's future growth.

How does the Critical Area Law affect YOU?

Special regulations apply to the following activities:

- Tree removal or clearing of underbrush or other vegetation.
- Construction of any house, addition, shed, deck, pool, pier, bulkhead, sidewalk, driveway, or other structure through which water can not pass.
- Grading or contouring of the land.
- Farming and/or timber harvesting.
- Subdivision of your property.



Photo courtesy of Michael Shisler

Photo courtesy of NOAA



What is the Critical Area Buffer?

Within the Critical Area, the first 100 feet from mean high tide is known as the Critical Area Buffer. The Buffer may be extended for adjacent steep slopes and other sensitive areas, such as Habitat Protection Areas. In areas adjacent to non-tidal wetlands, the buffer is 50 feet. A naturally vegetated or forested Buffer filters out much of the harmful sediments and toxic runoff before it reaches the Bay.

What activities are regulated in the buffer?

- No cutting or clearing is allowed without a permit.
- No structure or building is allowed without a permit.
- Grading, adding fill material, or shore erosion control methods require permits.
- Dead trees may be removed with a permit.
- Trees posing immediate threat to a structure may be removed without a permit, but with prior Planning and Zoning approval.
- The lower one-third of branches on mature trees may be pruned without a permit, but with prior Planning and Zoning approval.
- Invasive vines may be removed without a permit, but with prior Planning and Zoning approval.
- Maintenance of existing lawns is permitted.
- Stiff penalties are imposed for unauthorized clearing in the buffer.

What are some of the added costs that may be involved when you develop in the Critical Area?

- Trees must be replaced on a 1:1 basis.
- Lots must have a minimum of 15 percent tree cover.
- Refundable bonds must be posted when trees are required to be planted on site.
- Fees-in-lieu must be paid when tree replacement cannot be accomplished on site.
- Penalties are imposed for unauthorized clearing.



Photo courtesy of Michael Shisler



How can you make a difference?

- Plant a tree or shrub to help improve our air quality and absorb nutrients before they enter the Bay.
- Participate in the Critical Area Program and follow all regulations.

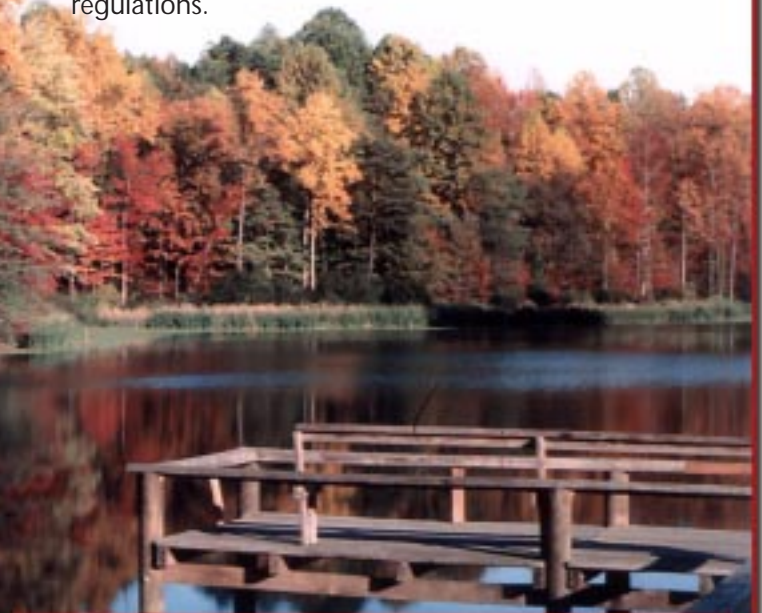


Photo courtesy of Michael Shisler



Would you like to receive "free" trees to plant on your property in the Critical Area?

Applications for "free" trees are available from the Department of Planning and Zoning. Planting is done by a County contractor in the Spring and Fall. Requests may range from one tree to acres of seedlings and will be reviewed by the Critical Area Reforestation Evaluation (CARE) Committee twice a year.

Thanks for your help!

For more information please contact:
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