

THE WHITE HOUSE

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VICE PRESIDENT GORE ANNOUNCES NEW FEDERAL, STATE EFFORT
TO PROTECT CHESAPEAKE BAY WATERSHEDS

Centreville, MD, October 20, 1997-- Vice President Al Gore today announced that the Clinton Administration and the state of Maryland have joined together in a new initiative to help protect the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. This agreement serves as a model for other water quality efforts nationwide.

Maryland and the U.S. Department of Agriculture have formed a partnership that will expand an existing program, USDA's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), by allowing up to 100,000 acres of environmentally-sensitive land along Maryland streams and rivers to be set aside and maintained to protect water quality.

"This new partnership will further protect the water resources of Maryland and the Chesapeake Bay," said Vice President Gore. "This agreement means cleaner water, healthier fish, and a stronger environment for every family in Maryland. By protecting the lands adjacent to the tributaries of the Bay and by restoring wetlands, we can significantly reduce the amount of nutrients, sediment, and pesticides that reach the waters of the Bay."

This new initiative, the State Enhancement Program (SEP), is designed to build on the success of the CRP by allowing USDA to work in partnership with states, link resources and share costs to meet conservation and environmental objectives. Maryland is the first state to participate in a SEP. Illinois and Minnesota have submitted proposals for SEP agreements to the USDA.

"While we begin this effort in Maryland, we believe it is a model that can apply to other states as well," said the Vice President. "Clean water is not a regional issue. It is a national issue."

USDA and Maryland expect to contribute a total of about \$200 million for this program. Both will provide 10 to 15-year contracts, cost-share assistance, and technical assistance to encourage landowners to devote environmentally sensitive cropland or marginal pasture land adjacent to streams, rivers, or other water bodies to long-term resource conserving vegetative covers.

Riparian buffer areas, land along stream and river banks, can reduce the amount of sediment and nutrients reaching streams or rivers by as much as 90 percent if properly planted with protective vegetation. Wetlands play a vital role in filtering pollutants and restoring water quality.

"This new initiative reflects the Clinton Administration's commitment to voluntary, cost-effective conservation programs," Glickman said. "Problems associated with run-off from agricultural lands, as well as from urban areas, are real and must be addressed. Working with farmers, ranchers and other landowners through these kind of state and federal partnerships will go along way to addressing water quality problems."

To encourage applicants to protect these environmentally sensitive lands, USDA will make annual incentive payments. USDA and Maryland also will help pay for the cost of planting long-term resource conserving vegetation and for restoring wetlands. Maryland will provide technical support to all applicants. Maryland also may purchase permanent conservation easements to protect riparian areas.

Today, some 27.8 million acres are enrolled in the CRP. About 20,000 acres in Maryland now are enrolled in the program. The CRP protects millions of acres of American topsoil from erosion, and, by reducing water runoff and sedimentation, it protects groundwater and helps improve countless lakes, rivers, ponds, streams and other water bodies. All of these acres are planted to vegetative cover or other forms of wildlife habitat.

Landowners interested in enrolling acreage in this State Enhancement Program or participating in the regular CRP may visit a local USDA Service Center for additional information.

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