

## Baltimore County—Proactively Managing Forest Resources for the Future

### The Challenge

Baltimore County, Maryland, is recognized locally and nationally for its growth management and environmental initiatives. In 2000, following 40 years of growth management, 90 percent of the county's population lived within the urban growth boundary on only one-third of the land. Despite efforts to curtail forest loss during land development through State-mandated forest protection measures, hundreds of acres of forest land are still converted to nonforest uses each year, and the remaining forest is fragmented into smaller parcels with multiple owners. It is crucial that these privately owned forest lands continue to provide social, economic, and environmental benefits, yet many new owners are ill-prepared to manage them. County officials, forest-based industries, and citizens must work together to assess the health of these forest resources and take measures to ensure their sustainability.

### The Solution

A green renaissance is underway in Baltimore County to preserve greenspace and improve existing neighborhoods. Baltimore County was one of three counties selected to participate in a cooperative Federal, State, and local pilot project to assess the ecological and economic sustainability of its forest resources. Following a forum in 2003, a steering committee of stakeholders developed a Forest Sustainability Strategy that provides detailed guiding principles, goals, recommended actions, and data assessment and analyses needs for 15 ecological and economic issues related to forest sustainability.

### Resulting Benefits

As a result of the forest sustainability strategy, Baltimore County now has new homeowner education programs; forest health assessments and management plans for large, publicly owned tracts of forest land; and assistance for rural residents to replant riparian buffers and reforest large subdivision lots.

*Maintaining forest sustainability is one tool that local governments can use to meet water quality mandates and commitments, protect drinking water reservoir watersheds, and protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay.*



*Tree shelters protect hardwood seedlings planted on a rural subdivision lot as part of Baltimore County's Rural Residential Stewardship Initiative.*

Landowner programs reduce barriers to forest sustainability and use market incentives. Examples include:

- The Growing Home Campaign—This provides education and \$10 coupons toward the purchase of qualifying trees that cost more than \$25. In the first 2-month pilot of this effort, about 1,700 trees with an average cost of \$55 were planted in private yards throughout the county, which increased the county's urban tree canopy cover.
- The Rural Residential Stewardship Initiative—Seventeen acres of forest on previously mowed, "excess" lawn were reforested in low-density rural subdivisions.
- The County Forest Sustainability Strategy—This effort has secured capital funding to support assessment and monitoring programs using Forest Service protocols, including the Urban Forest Effects model for urban tree canopy ecological assessment, the North East Decision Model for public lands management plans, and Forest Health Monitoring/Forest Inventory and Analysis protocols for assessing the long-term condition and health of larger rural forest patches.

### Sharing Success

Baltimore County is working with neighboring counties and the city of Baltimore to discuss expanding the county's approach to forest sustainability throughout the Baltimore region and elsewhere in Maryland. Baltimore County is demonstrating that maintaining forest sustainability is a strategic tool that local governments can use to meet water quality mandates and commitments, protect drinking water reservoir watersheds, and protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay, all of which are important for maintaining the quality of life for its residents.



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