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Increasing Tree Canopy Across the Commonwealth

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation supports the many bills introduced by members of the General Assembly that will assist localities in increasing the number of trees in local neighborhoods across the state, including:

Bill Number	Patron	Code Section	Description
HB447	Hope	§ 62.1-44.15:72	Requires State Water Control Board to adopt regulations for localities to use to encourage and promote preservation of mature trees as a stormwater management tool in Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act areas.
HB494	Hodges	§ 15.2-961	Allows localities throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed (in addition to localities meeting density requirements) to adopt an ordinance requiring planting and replacement of trees during the development process to increase tree canopy in designated areas.
HJ93	Lopez	N/A	Requests DEQ to study the planting and preservation of trees as a stormwater best management practice and issue a report on its findings.

Why Are Trees So Important?

Trees improve both the environment and Virginia's economy. The canopy of mature trees intercepts rainwater, reducing the amount of stormwater pollution that reaches waterways. According to the U.S. Forest Service, trees' extensive root systems help absorb stormwater (over 1,300 gallons per mature tree per year) and the nutrients it carries. These root systems also stabilize soils, which prevents erosion, keeping sediment out of our local rivers and streams. This in turn lets sunlight reach underwater grasses—key habitat for oysters, crabs, and rockfish—supporting the livelihoods of Virginia's watermen. Leaf litter in streams provide a critical component of the food web, supporting aquatic creatures further up the food chain that depend on clean water to survive. This in turn supports local tourism economies by making more fish available for recreational fishing.

Trees also protect Virginia's drinking water quality. Increasing forest cover reduces the cost of drinking water treatment as the water arrives already filtered by trees alongside our reservoirs. American Water Works Association found a 10 percent increase in forest cover reduced chemical and treatment costs for drinking water by 20 percent.

According to the Chesapeake Bay Program, urban trees provide many benefits beyond water quality improvements. Trees:

- Improve air quality by catching particulate matter and absorbing air pollutants. This, in turn, improves human health outcomes.
- Reduce urban temperatures by shading roads, parking lots, sidewalks, and rooftops, helping to reduce homeowner energy costs.
- Increase property values by 5 to 18 percent in urban settings, according to CABA Space.
- Help mitigate climate change by absorbing greenhouse gases.
- Serve as an important wildlife habitat for birds and insects.

Trees are loved by citizens as they enhance aesthetic enjoyment of neighborhoods and increase recreational opportunities within the community.

CBF urges members of the General Assembly to support legislation that increases Virginia's tree canopy.

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