

Greater **Baltimore**



**Wilderness**

Coalition

Thriving Together:  
Our Collective Agenda  
2023-2026

12.16.22

## We Invite You to Join Us...

We all benefit from nature in our lives. Study after study has shown that spending time in nature can reduce stress, improve mental health and social cohesion, and even lower mortality rates. Nature can also provide social support, reduce loneliness, and provide a space for people to feel connected to each other.

Yet for many people living in the Greater Baltimore area of Central Maryland, access to nature is limited or nonexistent. In our urban and suburban communities, nature often gets sacrificed in favor of other needs such as housing, transportation and jobs. **This is a false choice.** Nature-based solutions such as planting trees and forests actually make better places for business and government to invest and for people and wildlife to live.

The Greater Baltimore Wilderness Coalition is a group of private, public and nonprofit partners committed to ensuring people and nature thrive together in every community across central Maryland.

Coalition Member **vs** Partner: *a "member" is a partner that has signed our Accord*



Sandi Olek



Carmera Thomas-Wilhite

We've created a Collective Agenda (see page 14) to advance this vision and focus on three shared priorities:

- Strengthen collaboration, coordination and capacity of our Coalition members, partners and communities;
- Improve regional planning for green infrastructure and climate action; and
- Prioritize and support implementation of green infrastructure projects.

Through our collective efforts we will tap the power of nature-based solutions to reduce costs for local governments and communities, adapt to climate change and improve the quality of life in our region.



Sandi Olek

GBWC Co-Chair



Carmera Thomas-Wilhite

GBWC Co-Chair

# About this Plan

Building upon years of supporting community members and organizations working on the ground to protect green infrastructure across Maryland, the staff and Steering Committee of Greater Baltimore Wilderness Coalition (GBWC) developed this strategic plan to harness the efforts of our members and partners toward greater collective impact. Guided by Due East Partners, our planning process began with engaging and learning from key constituents including:

- 11** **staff and general members** through an internal survey
- 12** **key informant interviews** representing partner organizations, members, and funders
- 75** **members, partners, funders, and others** through an external survey and listening sessions

Led by our Strategic Planning Committee (right), GBWC's staff and Steering Committee participated in multiple planning sessions in 2022. The result is a broadly-owned Collective Agenda (p. 14) with a new mission, vision, and principles, as well as three strategic priorities with corresponding strategies and performance measures for tracking GBWC's impact over the next several years. Guided by this plan and our Collective Agenda, we will create a green infrastructure network across Central Maryland with and for the many people who call this region home.

## STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

- Ashley Traut
- Carmera Thomas
- Sandi Olek
- Lindsay DeMarzo
- Curtis Bennett
- Gaby Roffe
- Jen Mihills
- Jeff Lerner
- David Rouse
- Eliza Thomas
- Michael Stringer
- Gloria Nelson
- Swathi Ayyagari

[CLICK HERE](#)  
to meet our full Steering  
Committee  
and staff team

# What is Green Infrastructure?

Green infrastructure means different things to different people. Among our Coalition members, partners and communities, we define green infrastructure as: **Natural and nature-based solutions integrated into the built environment that provide environmental, economic and social benefits to society.**



Plant or soil systems



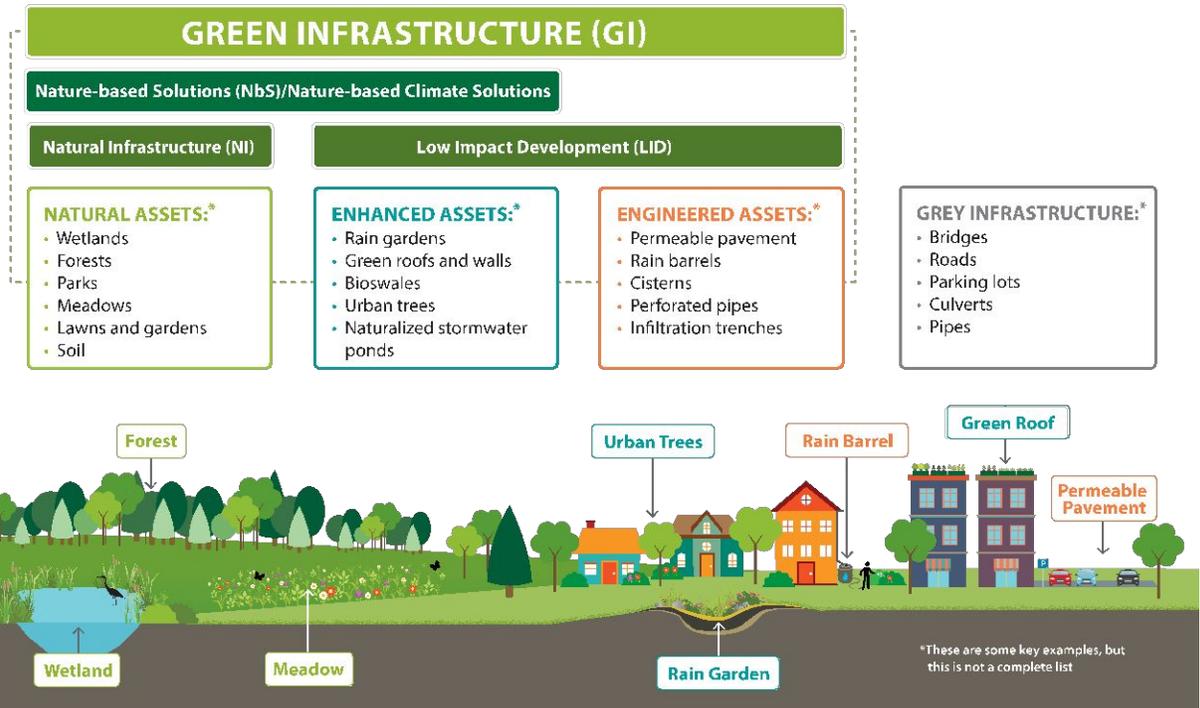
Permeable pavement, surfaces or substrates



Stormwater harvest and reuse



Landscaping



Green Infrastructure Ontario Coalition

# Why Do We Need Green Infrastructure?

In the US...

The economic value of ecosystem services from natural lands in Maryland totals **\$8 billion per year**, roughly the same economic impact as Maryland's agricultural sector.



**\$1 spent to restore forests yields up to \$30 in economic benefits** such as adding jobs, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and safeguarding drinking water. Fargione et al. (2018)



**People who live within walking distance (.6 miles) of greenspace have lower rates of 15 major diseases**, including heart disease, diabetes and depression and lower health care COSTS. Morris & Thomas (2018)



**For an average of \$4 per urban resident, urban tree planting and greening programs could help cool cities** while reducing life-threatening air pollution. The Nature Conservancy (2016)



**Trees save homeowners more than \$7 billion in energy savings.** USDA (2017)

# Our Vision

People and nature thriving together in every community across central Maryland.



## RESULTS:

People living in the region have access and opportunities to discover nature in their communities.

Central Maryland has a robust and sustainable green infrastructure network.



Coalition partners are connected and collaborating on transformational green infrastructure solutions.



# Living Our Values & Principles

**We rise** to the environmental and climate urgency before us, looking beyond obstacles to what's necessary

**We acknowledge** past harms and seek social and environmental justice through holistic, nature-based and emergent solutions that benefit people and the planet

**We are committed** to equity and biodiversity, knowing that truly transformational restoration leaves no living being behind

**We believe** that all voices are important and everyone has a role to play

**We are stronger together** - government, industry, nonprofit, tribal, faith and community partners working collaboratively to advance our vision



# Our Mission and Unique Role

We are an inclusive network of partners co-leading transformational, green infrastructure solutions in the Greater Baltimore region.

Working together, we focus on:

- Equity
- Discovery of nature
- Biodiversity
- Climate resiliency
- Health



Equity



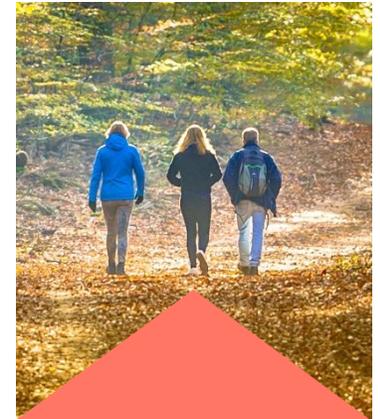
Discovery



Biodiversity



Climate Resiliency



Health



Many people living in Central Maryland do not have access to nature where they live or work. Our Coalition seeks to connect our region’s increasingly urbanized population with “nearby nature.” Local and regional greenways, city parks, restored stream corridors, urban waterways and trees strategically woven through developed areas provide opportunities for everyone to enjoy time outdoors, explore nature and reap the many protective benefits greenspace brings to our communities.

Equity



People will protect what they value. The best way to appreciate nature is to experience it. Our first-hand opportunities to discover nature as a child often shape who we become as people. As adults, spending time in nature feeds our spirits and offers a welcome retreat from our high-tech world. GBWC is working to ensure all people in our region have access and opportunities to **discover nature in their home communities** and in doing so, will inspire the next generation of stewards for our region's rich natural resources.

Discovery



In this fast-developing region wildlife habitat is continually fragmented or lost due to development and aging water and sewer infrastructure. Preserving valuable natural areas, such as forests, wetlands, vernal pools, and coastal environments provides access to food and shelter for wildlife, offers corridors for migration, and protects vulnerable, often at-risk species. Biodiversity is essential for all species to survive and thrive in a rapidly changing climate.

# Biodiversity



## Climate Resiliency

### OUR APPROACH – PILLAR #4

To sustain and strengthen our region's economy, GBWC is working to mitigate impacts of climate change including sea level rise, flooding, stronger coastal storms, warmer temperatures, and drought through a protective regional green infrastructure network that includes forests, wetlands, parks, rain gardens and urban tree canopy. This network will absorb rainfall, store water, reduce flooding and provide additional community benefits, such as cleaner air, cooler cities and towns, and greenspace for recreation.



The research is clear. Nature is good for us. It's essential for all living beings including humans. A regular dose of nature, interwoven with our busy lives, boosts our physical, mental and emotional health. GBWC strives to improve health outcomes and equity in our region by working with planners and policymakers to add greenspace and increase **access to nature for all** who live, work or play in Central Maryland.

Health

## Vision

People and nature thriving together in every community across central Maryland.

## Mission

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- Health

## Values and Principles:

- **We rise** to the environmental and climate urgency before us, looking beyond obstacles to what's necessary
- **We acknowledge** past harms and seek social and environmental justice through holistic, nature-based and emergent solutions that benefit people and the planet
- **We are committed** to equity and biodiversity, knowing that truly transformational restoration leaves no living being behind
- **We believe** that all voices are important and everyone has a role to play
- **We are stronger together** - government, industry, nonprofit, tribal, faith and community partners working collaboratively to advance our vision

## GOALS

- 1 **People living in the region have access and opportunities to discover nature in their communities.**
- 2 **Central Maryland has a robust and sustainable green infrastructure network.**
- 3 **Coalition partners are connected and collaborating on transformational green infrastructure solutions.**

## PRIORITIES & STRATEGIES

### Strengthen collaboration, coordination and capacity of Coalition members, partners and communities

- Promote green infrastructure - what it is and why it matters
- Expand and diversify Coalition membership, including businesses and new partners engaged in green infrastructure
- Partner with universities and researchers to monitor current science and share best practices in green infrastructure
- Use work groups to elevate best practices for outreach, workforce development and other focus areas
- Create a broadly accessible, user-friendly communication hub or platform to encourage partner collaboration, peer learning and joint funding applications
- Convene local governments to build relationships, learn from one another and inspire innovation
- Grow the capacity and resources of the Coalition to advance the Collective agenda (funding, staff, structure, brand/name)

### Improve regional planning for green infrastructure and climate action

- Map current and pending green infrastructure projects and serve as clearinghouse for tracking progress
- Advocate for state-sponsored green infrastructure incentives that encourage local municipalities to plan together
- Convene regional planning groups (Baltimore Metropolitan Council, Chesapeake Bay Commission) and local municipalities to co-create a regional green infrastructure network for landscape-scale restoration
- Educate communities and conservation groups on how to access state/local planning processes and resources
- Support planners and policymakers to mitigate the impacts of climate change (flooding, warming, habitat loss)

### Prioritize and support implementation of green infrastructure projects

- Advocate for funding to implement and maintain green infrastructure
- Disseminate broadly-accessible, educational resources on green infrastructure, best practices and incentives/funding
- Create and connect youth and other priority populations to nature-based jobs and job training
- Increase the visibility of the Coalition in priority areas/communities
- Provide technical assistance to community organizations to identify, navigate and secure funding for green infrastructure
- Build capacity of community leaders to implement green infrastructure projects

## ANNUAL PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- # Coalition members
- % Coalition members who are engaged in work groups
- # attendees at Nature City Forum
- # of joint grant proposals submitted and % funded

- # total green infrastructure planning efforts supported
- # local governments assisted with green infrastructure planning
- # cross-jurisdictional planning sessions held

- # trees planted in Central Maryland
- # sites/acres secured for restoration projects
- # of Climate Corps graduates



*Working  
for people  
and nature*

# Our Collective Agenda

2023-2026