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Large Landscape Peer Learning Initiative meets in Chesapeake Bay for final strategy summit

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June 24, 2023

The second cohort of the International Land Conservation Network's (ILCN) Large Landscape Peer Learning Initiative (LLPLI) convened in the Chesapeake Bay earlier this month, bringing together four teams, each representing unique conservation projects from China, Romania, Canada and the United States for a final strategy summit. Through the LLPLI, teams took on strategically significant landscape protection or restoration projects to workshop over the course of a two-year exchange, which took place online due to pandemic travel restrictions. In Maryland, our first in-person gathering was hosted by the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center and the Chesapeake Conservancy.

The four groups were the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Landscape Team, represented by the Chesapeake Conservancy in Annapolis, Maryland which is seeking to protect 40 percent of the watershed area across four states by 2040; the Tarnava Mare Landscape Team, represented by Fundatia ADEPT in Saschiz, Romania working to conserve Europe's last remaining grasslands through low-intensity farming practices; the Baishanzu National Park Landscape Team, represented by The Nature Conservancy, China that is developing a pilot park for China's ambitious new national park system; and the Rice Lake Plains Landscape Team, represented by The Nature Conservancy Canada and the Centre for Land Conservation, which are building a large landscape conservation movement in an urban/rural interface in Ontario.

A highlight of the summit was a meeting with land conservation champions Maryland Senator Sarah Elfreth, Secretary of Natural Resources Josh Kurtz, Chesapeake Bay Commission chair Anna Killius, Landscape Conservation Coordinator at the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service Chesapeake Region Superintendent Wendy O'Sullivan at the James Senate Office building in Annapolis. The four teams listened to the speakers present on Maryland's remarkable achievements in land conservation and showcase how partnership between the civic sector with different levels of government strengthens and advances conservation goals.

The four teams will submit written reports detailing their work, strategic action plans, and the lessons that have emerged from the exchange, which will be compiled and disseminated later this year.

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