

## **Partners for Open Space E-News**

At midnight on April 10 the 2006 session of the Maryland General Assembly adjourned for the year. This morning, in the light of day, we know it is indeed a great day for land preservation in Maryland!

For the first time in 4 years we received all of the funding (\$361 million) from the real estate transfer tax that by law is suppose to be dedicated to Program Open Space and other land conservation programs. None of the money from this dedicated fund, not even one penny, was diverted to the general fund for unrelated purposes!

The passage of HB 815/SB 493 would have accelerated the repayment of previously diverted funds, currently scheduled to begin in 2012, to 2008. Not only would the bill have resulted in more funding for land conservation, it would have demonstrated long term commitment by legislators for these programs. We are very disappointed that the repayment bills did not pass out of the budget committees but the victory of full funding this year goes a long way to putting us back on track for land preservation in Maryland.

HB 815 received an unfavorable vote in the Appropriations Committee and SB 493 was never voted on in the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee. The defeat of the bill was probably due, in part, to the State's long term structural deficit, projected at \$800 million next year, and the committees' desire to reserve any so-called "surplus" to fill that budget gap.

Unfortunately, the dedicated funds of Program Open Space will continue to be at risk for diversion unless the Governor and members of the legislature deal with the problems of the structural deficit by creating new sources of revenue, or through other means.

We will continue to be vigilant and remind the Governor and legislators that 89% of Marylanders polled support Program Open Space and the other land conservation programs funded by the real estate transfer tax.

Thank you for sending your countless letters and emails to the Governor and members of the General Assembly. Clearly, your advocacy over the past 2 years has made all the difference!

Sincerely,

Marcia