

## Natural Resources Secretary's Message: August 2019

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August 7, 2019 - Two of the most important things that we can do for our young people is to teach them environmental stewardship and to provide them with opportunities for their future. I'm proud to say the Maryland Department of Natural Resources works hard to do both.

Recently I had the honor of speaking to 28 young men and women at their graduation from the Maryland Conservation Corps. This is such an important program – providing young adults crucial, hands-on, experience that supports community service and conservation stewardship.

Since 1984, this program has allowed countless members get real-world experience while working toward their career goals in conservation. In fact, four of this year's MCC graduates already have been offered full-time positions in the conservation field.

There are alumni who have important and fulfilling careers with conservation-minded organizations, including the National Aquarium, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Maryland Department of Agriculture, local parks, and of course at the Department of Natural Resources!

Further, this class has been an incredible help to us as we work toward our department's mission — preserving, protecting, restoring, and enhancing Maryland's natural resources.

The related program, the Conservation Jobs Corps, also just graduated hundreds of young workers. The CJC works in partnership with community youth organizations to provide conservation service opportunities for youth in our Maryland State Parks. It's a unique summer program where these young workers join together in teams to discover Maryland's natural resources and gain the skills to protect them.

The skills these programs provide help prepare our young people for many career opportunities and a lifetime of healthy outdoor recreation and interaction with nature. But the skills and values these students have learned as part of CJC will mean even more than that to our state, our citizens, and our environment – for generations to come.

As we all know, the earlier you plan a career the better. I recently visited our Natural Resources Careers Camp. In this yearly camp held in late July, natural resource professionals provide high-school aged campers with hands-on lessons and educational experiences in forestry, wildlife habitat management, fisheries and watershed ecology, and more.

During my visit, experts gave tree-climbing lessons, where students used ropes and harnesses to climb several feet up a tree, ring a bell attached to a limb, and descend to the ground. I also had the opportunity and was able to get several feet off the ground — I can easily see why the students enjoyed it so much.

As the camp's director Gabrielle Oldham told me, there are a lot of camps for kids to attend, but this one is unique as its focused on showing how an interest in the outdoors can be a career opportunity.

The outdoor experiences I had when I was young absolutely inspired my passion for the Chesapeake Bay and our natural resources. I am pleased to see so many young people share that passion, and I look forward to seeing what more they accomplish as they move forward in their careers.

Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio is Secretary of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

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