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**Maryland Strides Forward in Minority Environmental Activism**  
*State Task Force on Minority Participation in the Environmental Community presents recommendations; Minority land trust proposed*

“This report shatters the myth that minorities are too busy or have too many other pressing issues to care about the environment.” — Maryland State Senator Lisa A. Gladden

ANNAPOLIS, MD — Maryland State Senator Lisa A. Gladden (D-Dist. 41), Maryland State Delegate Nathaniel T. Oaks (D-Dist. 41), directors of the Blacks of the Chesapeake Foundation, and other environmental advocates today announced the presentation of the Task Force on Minority Participation in the Environmental Community’s *Final Report to the Governor and Maryland General Assembly*. The report represents the culmination of a year-long effort initiated by the Blacks of the Chesapeake Foundation and spearheaded by Senator Gladden and Delegate Oaks, co-chairs of the task force.

With the passage of Senate Bill 350 (2006), the Maryland General Assembly created the Task Force on Minority Participation in the Environmental Community and charged it with evaluating the extent to which Maryland’s minority residents are involved in environmental efforts, and to make recommendations for increasing participation. After completing its work in July 2007, the task force prepared the *Final Report to the Governor and Maryland General Assembly*.

The report focuses on solving four main problems: The lack of minorities in key policy positions throughout the state government, the scarcity of support for traditional environmental organizations addressing minority issues, the low level of minority participation in efforts to protect and restore the Chesapeake and coastal bay watersheds, and the unavailability of public education programs directly linking minority health issues to environmental justice and engagement.

The report’s key recommendation is the creation of the Maryland Minority Environmental & Land Trust (MELT). The trust would serve as a vehicle to implement and finance the report’s other recommended actions, which include establishing “virtual” environmental centers at historically black colleges and universities; providing opportunities and encouragement for students to participate in environmental causes; and improving the flow of information and services into minority communities, focusing on protection of natural resources, preservation of open space, and the value of conservation easements.

The Task Force on Minority Participation in the Environmental Community is rooted in the partnership formed when Senator Gladden was introduced to another of Maryland’s

environmental justice champions: Carnelious Jones, Chairman of the Blacks of the Chesapeake Foundation and a Baltimore-based petroleum executive. Based on consultations with Jones and the research of the foundation, Senator Gladden crafted Senate Bill 350 and garnered support from Senate President Thomas “Mike” Miller and other members of the General Assembly to move the initiative forward.

The 26-member task force is composed of representatives of governmental agencies, higher educational institutions, environmental commissions and non-profit groups, and local activists. They include Maryland State senators Ulysses Currie (Dist. 25) and Nathaniel McFadden (Dist. 45); Maryland State delegates Rudy Cane (Dist. 37A) and Marvin Holmes (District 23B); David Bancroft, president of Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay; Fred Tutman, Patuxent River Keeper; Dr. Joan T. Robinson, provost and vice president for Academic Affairs of Morgan State University; Scot T. Spencer, chair of the Maryland Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities; Dr. Joseph Okoh, chairman of the Department of Natural Sciences at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore; and Robert W. Keddell, director of Educators Connecting Research to the K-16 Classroom.

“This task force has reached out to minorities from the mountains of Western Maryland to the sandy beaches of Ocean City, and the responses have all been the same,” Senator Gladden said. “The report shatters the myth that minorities are too busy or have too many other pressing issues to care about the environment. In this state, we have been trying to win the war of saving the Chesapeake Bay with one arm tied behind our backs. Now we have a vehicle, the Maryland Minority Environmental and Land Trust, to engage African Americans, Hispanics, and other minorities in the efforts to restore the bay.”

“Traditional environmental organizations are looking for ways to reach out in a more meaningful way to minority communities. The recommendations of the task force parallel the longtime goals of the Blacks of the Chesapeake Foundation,” Jones said. “We see that the African American community has been bursting at the seams to become more fully engaged in efforts to restore the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries running through their neighborhoods. If we are to reach the 2010 goals of restoring the bay, we will need to find ways to engage all stakeholders. This is particularly true in our urban centers surrounding the Baltimore and Washington beltways.”

“The minority environmental trust is a great opportunity for the minority business community to partner with the state, and for universities to increase the capacity of community-based organizations having a positive impact on improving the environment for all Marylanders,” said Delegate Oaks.

The report is available through the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, c/o Vincent O. Leggett, Minority Engagement Coordinator, (410) 260-8744 or [vleggett@dnr.state.md.us](mailto:vleggett@dnr.state.md.us); or through the department website, [www.dnr.state.md.us/education](http://www.dnr.state.md.us/education).

