

The main purpose of the Maryland Forest Conservation Act, enacted in 1991, was to minimize the loss of Maryland's forest resources during land development by making the identification and protection of forests and other sensitive areas an integral part of the site planning process. Identification of priority areas prior to development makes their retention possible. Of primary interest are areas adjacent to streams or wetlands, those on steep or erodible soils or those within or adjacent to large contiguous blocks of forest or wildlife corridors

With the exception of those projects that fall under the exemption of Section 3.2 of the Cecil County Forest Conservation Regulations, all subdivisions and site plans must address forest conservation, even if no forest exists onsite. The first step of the process is the submission and approval of the Forest Stand Delineation. The purpose of the Forest Stand Delineation is to identify the environmental features of the site, including streams, forest, wetlands, sensitive species habitats, and erodible or hydric soils. The next step is the Preliminary Forest Conservation Plan. This phase of the process is designed to preliminarily show where the future lots will be located and the forest to be retained, cleared, and afforested or reforested. The Final Forest Conservation Plan provides the same information as the Preliminary Forest Conservation Plan; however, it's completed at the final stage of development, once the layouts have been finalized. Once the Final Forest Conservation Plan is approved, the developer may be required to post surety with the county and complete a landscape agreement to cover any afforestation/reforestation that is required. Those who make the threshold simply by retention credit are not required to post surety. The areas are finally protected by deed restrictions, which must be recorded prior to the signature of the record plats.

Afforestation/Reforestation areas are inspected annually for a minimum of two growing seasons to ensure survivability. Once the monitoring process is completed and the bonds have been released, inspections are only warranted if a complaint is filed. If a complaint is filed, either in a retention or afforestation/reforestation area the property is inspected and the county sends a certified letter to the property owner advising them how to remedy the situation. The property owner is either issued a cease and desist notice and required to allow the property to regenerate naturally or they are required to submit a new Forest Conservation Plan or replace plantings on a 1:1 basis. If they fail to contact the county prior to the 15 day deadline, the file is turned over to the county attorney. If the violation is remedied within the fifteen day or any extended deadline thereafter, the site is monitored for 2 growing seasons to ensure compliance. The county is required to report violations to the State yearly in our Forest Conservation Annual Report. The State also does a biennial review of the Counties Forest Conservation Program.

Since the implementation of the Cecil County Forest Conservation Regulations, 6,361.08 acres of forest has been retained and 714.26 acres of forest has been created through reforestation/afforestation.