



2020

Chesapeake Legal Alliance Annual Report





CHESAPEAKE  
LEGAL ALLIANCE



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Dear Supporters,

For people everywhere, 2020 was a year unlike any other. First and foremost, we hope you are healthy and safe. This pandemic has caused a collective trauma that has felt impossible to escape. For many, however, the outdoors has served as a refuge from isolation and a sanctuary for renewal. Over the past year, it has become abundantly clear that wild spaces are imperative to our social and emotional health—not to mention our physical health. Here at Chesapeake Legal Alliance (CLA), we are working with a renewed sense of purpose to protect and restore these wild places and to ensure sustainable and equitable use of the Chesapeake watershed for everyone...because our lives depend on it.

Like so many others, CLA had to quickly adjust to the “new normal” of COVID-19. Despite this challenge, we are proud to report that throughout the year, CLA increased both its services and its impact. We started the year with an exciting merger with Environmental Action Center, a small nonprofit that specialized in environmental litigation. We added four new environmental lawyers/analysts to our staff, and significantly expanded the types of legal assistance that we provide to Bay advocates. Today, we are proud to be able to offer a full suite of free legal services through our three Centers: Education, Outreach, and Action, each of which is explained in the graphic on [page four](#).

CLA also started the year with a bold action plan to advance our mission: *to apply the power of the law to protect and restore clean water and promote healthy, resilient ecosystems for communities across the Chesapeake Bay watershed*. This plan includes reducing pollution by improving Maryland’s water permitting scheme, addressing industrial agriculture on Maryland’s Eastern Shore, and remedying environmental injustices.

Our plan could have been turned upside down by the pandemic. However, thanks to our generous donors, including a multi-year commitment from the Town Creek Foundation, CLA was able to both grow our programs *and* make significant progress toward our goals. Inside this report you will learn how your donation helped our team pivot to fulfill community needs that arose from the pandemic as well as increase our legal support on the ground. All of this was made possible by your generous support. Thank you.

Our work is far from complete, however. Advocates have been working for over 40 years to restore the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The simple fixes have already been implemented. The voluntary programs have not been enough. **Now, more than ever, the Bay needs a lawyer** to address the complex issues that stand in the way of a clean, healthy Bay for all. CLA’s team of dedicated legal advocates will continue to work for equal enforcement of the law and develop creative legal solutions for our Bay and our communities.

As we move into 2021, we are hopeful about the path forward. CLA is committed to conserving one of the most important estuaries in the country, and we work with deep dedication to ensure that the impact of our work together persists for many generations to come. We couldn’t do any of this without your partnership and we are so grateful for your dedication to our Bay!

With gratitude,

Eliza, Dave, and Russ



**Chesapeake Legal Alliance is a non-profit environmental law center dedicated to restoring the health of the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed.**

**Our tool is the law.**

Our donors help Chesapeake Legal Alliance provide free legal services to community members and environmental advocates working to protect the health of Chesapeake Bay and its communities. Because our services are free, our staff of environmental lawyers, together with over 200 volunteer attorneys, are able to serve hundreds of clients each year who would not otherwise have access to the legal system.

Your support allows CLA staff and volunteer attorneys to:

- 1
- 2
- 3

**Provide Legal Power to Protect the Bay**

CLA represents clients in enforcement and compliance cases, reviews permit applications, comments on proposed regulations, and much more.

**Craft Policies for Enduring Bay Protection**

CLA provides strategic policy counseling as well as innovative legal analyses of the complex issues related to protection and restoration of the watershed.

**Make the Law Accessible to the Public**

CLA educates the public about the laws and legal tools available to protect and restore the Bay, including how to participate in government decision-making on community issues such as pollution discharges, habitat protection, and zoning.

# Our Three Centers

In 2020, CLA created three distinct centers to streamline the services we provide: Legal Education, Community Outreach, and Environmental Action.

## LEGAL EDUCATION CENTER

*This Center is dedicated to increasing Chesapeake Bay communities' understanding and use of environmental laws to protect their environmental rights and the watershed.*

### WHAT WE DO

#### Community Education

Empower advocates with tools to effectively use the law to promote clean water and healthy communities, and to achieve Chesapeake Bay protection and restoration.

#### Attorney Education

Educate members of CLA's volunteer attorney network about Chesapeake Bay-specific legal issues so they can best serve CLA clients.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH CENTER

*This Center is designed to grow our network of pro bono attorneys and philanthropic supporters.*

### WHAT WE DO

#### Pro Bono Case Intake & Matching

Work with clients to understand current community legal needs and match them with a CLA lawyer.

#### Volunteer Attorney Network

Recruit, retain, re-engage volunteer attorneys in support of the CLA Centers.

#### Philanthropy

Engage supporters in CLA's work.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION CENTER

*This Center is committed to ensuring effective implementation and enforcement of environmental laws and policies for CLA clients.*

### WHAT WE DO

#### Direct Client Services

Provide free legal services for those working to protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay and its communities.

#### Research & Analytics

Enhance the capability and capacity of CLA by converting strategic research into actionable analysis.

#### Legal Innovation

Develop & execute innovative community-driven legal theories to restore the Bay.

# Our Commitment to the Community

## Fighting Environmental Injustice is a CLA Priority

Pollution. Climate change. Sprawl.

These are some of the biggest issues facing the Chesapeake Bay today. But these harms are not borne equally across the 18 million people who call the Chesapeake “home.” Communities of color as well as linguistically isolated and income-challenged communities have been historically excluded from environmental decision-making. Environmental injustice is the result. For 2020 and beyond, we are dedicated to prioritizing the needs of these communities and working towards a more inclusive and equitable Chesapeake for all of our neighbors.

Our commitment to justice extends not only to the work we do with our clients and partners, but also to the culture of our organization. We have memorialized this commitment in our Core Values and current [Strategic Plan](#).

**“There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.”**

—Audre Lorde

## CLA Legal Education Center Helps Fellow Non-Profits Navigate the Law During the Pandemic

As we all faced the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the CLA team found numerous opportunities to share our knowledge, use our legal expertise, and provide mentorship opportunities. For example:

1. CLA attorneys worked with 26 environmental groups to access CARES Act funding to keep their organizations afloat and support their staff.
2. CLA educated the public about open-meeting requirements in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia to ensure transparency and public access to government decision-making during COVID-19 closures.
3. When the firms that typically host law clerks were unable to accommodate students due to the pandemic, CLA jumped at the chance to empower a new generation of environmental lawyers to protect our Bay. We provided pro bono opportunities to more than 27 additional law students from around the country. These law students worked diligently to defend our watershed, while simultaneously fulfilling their law school graduation or bar admissions requirements.

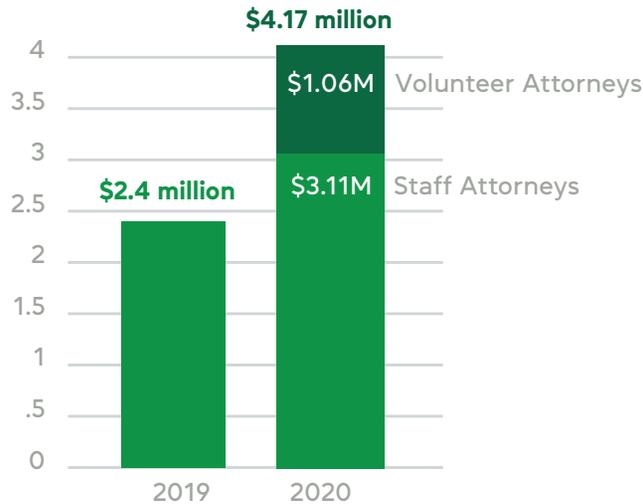
# 2020 by the Numbers

## FREE LEGAL SERVICES

**15,000:** total # of pro bono hours provided to CLA clients & partners.

**\$4.17M:** market value of CLA's free legal services.

**140:** # of legal matters handled by CLA staff & volunteer attorneys.



Since CLA's merger with Environmental Action Center, **we nearly doubled our impact from \$2.4 million in legal services in 2019 to over \$4.17 million in 2020!**

*"The help we get from CLA is unmatched by any of our other partners. They are the best legal instrument that we have. We are excited about the depth of in-house expertise and legal knowledge that CLA has gained in the last few years, and we are eager to continue working with the CLA team. Without CLA's free legal help, we would not have been able to make the impact we have in protecting the water quality on the Eastern Shore."*

—Matt Pluta, ShoreRivers

## Successes

**Halted the destruction of 300 acres** of coastal forest in the **Bush River** watershed in Maryland.

**Increased wetlands protection by 250%** in the **Pamunkey River** watershed in Virginia.



### 34 Wetland and Water Pollution Permits

CLA reviewed 34 wetland & water pollution permits, 3 of which were taken to court to prevent pollution from entering rivers like the Choptank and Gunpowder and to protect the health of our coastal bays.



### Helped 51 Bay Organizations Analyze Environmental Impacts

On behalf of 51 Bay groups, CLA volunteer lawyers analyzed the legality of the Washington DC Beltway Expansion Project given its proposed impact on Rock Creek and National Park lands. This analysis provided the community with a strong voice during the public process on this complex project.



### 5 State Bills

CLA provided research and policy analysis for 5 state bills to improve government transparency and accountability, and increase funding to protect the Chesapeake Bay watershed.



### 24 Educational Products

- 10 Presentations
- 8 Publications
- 3 Workshops
- 3 Webinars on Bay Issues



### 130 Community Members

CLA lawyers educated over 130 community members on how to harness the power of the Clean Water Act to protect their local waters.

# Wins for the Watershed

## CLA's Environmental Action Center Achieves Landmark Legal Win to Protect Community Health and Restore Water Quality from the Impacts of Industrial Agriculture

The amount of waste generated by Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) is a significant public health concern, especially in areas like Maryland's Eastern Shore, where approximately 300 million chickens are housed in over 500 massive warehouses. These industrial-scale operations emit vast amounts of pollutants into Bay waterways and airways creating dead zones where fish, crabs, oysters, and other wildlife are unable to survive.

Representing Assateague Coastal Trust, CLA challenged the legality of the state-issued CAFO water pollution permit and WON! In a case against Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), CLA achieved a landmark legal win that will prevent millions of pounds of CAFO pollution from entering our waterways. The Maryland Circuit Court judge ruled that Maryland's own water pollution law (MD Environment Code, Title 9) requires MDE to regulate the ammonia pollution emitted from these industrial poultry facilities because this pollution lands in local waters and ultimately the Bay. Fortunately, the solutions are low-tech and low-cost, and include things like planting trees and grass buffers!

## CLA's Community Outreach Center Brings Community Advocates and Farmers Together to Preserve the Rappahannock

Originating in the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia, the Rappahannock is the longest free-flowing river in the Chesapeake Bay watershed *and* the eastern United States. Today, much of the river's watershed is rural and forested, but is facing increasing pressure from development and agriculture, including pollution from fertilizers used on nearby farmlands.

Our partners at Friends of the Rappahannock (FOR) devised a solution that would preserve the health of the river and encourage farmers to get involved with conservation—they just needed an attorney to bring it to life. The FOR team, together with CLA lawyers, spearheaded an effort to accelerate conservation of the river using a simple legal tool: a cost-sharing agreement. By reducing upfront costs to local farmers, they were incentivized to allow the installation of pollution-reducing measures such as fences and trees on their farmland.

It was a Win-Win for the farmers and for the Rappahannock River!



# Donor Spotlight: Caroline Gabel, Shared Earth Foundation

*"My decision to invest in the Chesapeake Legal Alliance was a strategic one—the Bay is guarded by so many small groups that I would never otherwise know or hear from. By supporting CLA, I can help those smaller groups and advocates accomplish their conservation goals. I made a strategic decision to support legal actions that solve Bay-wide issues as opposed to operating or project assistance. I also chose a sustainability grant to assure that CLA's work goes on well beyond my lifetime."*

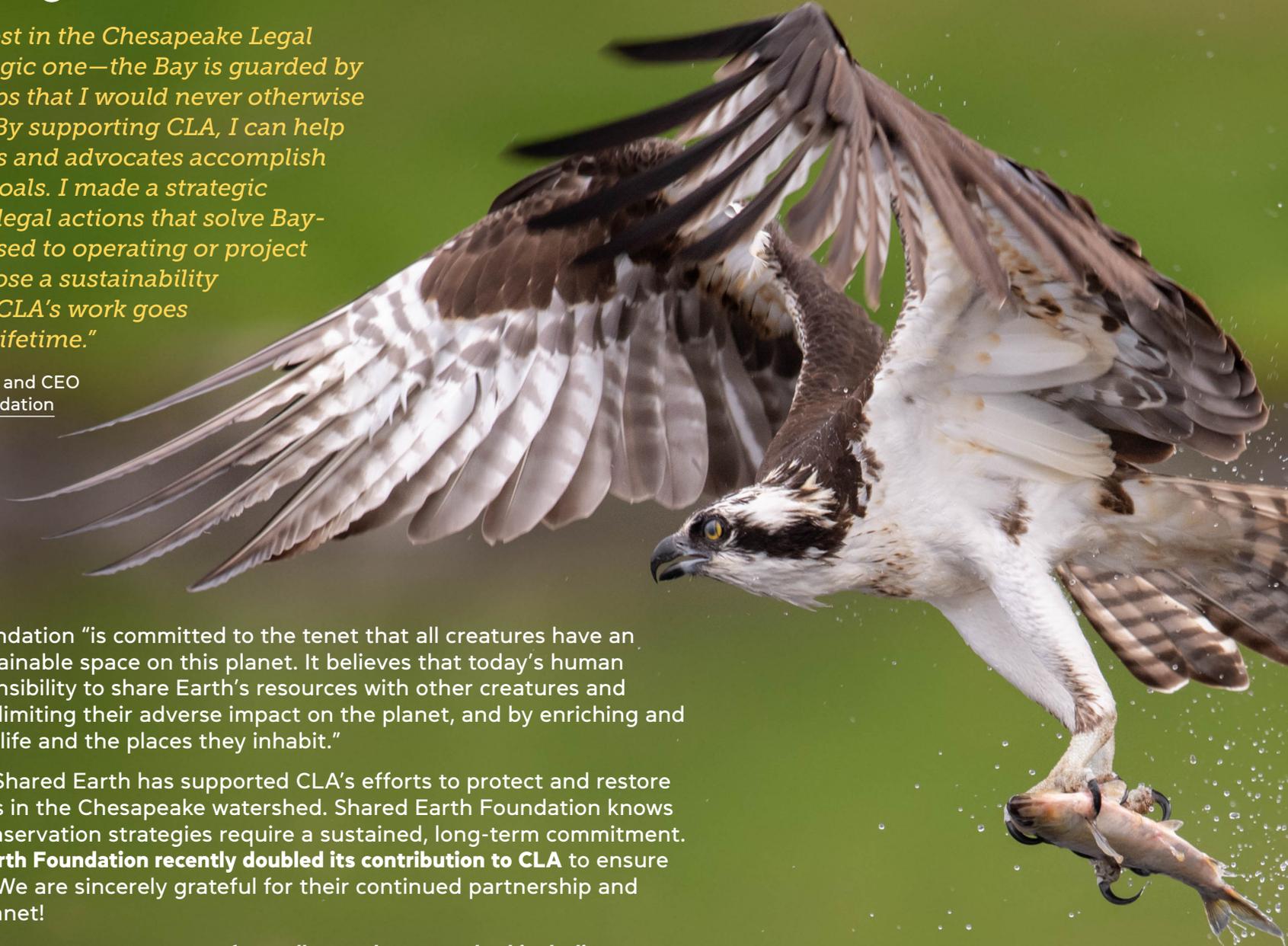
—Caroline Gabel, President and CEO  
of the [Shared Earth Foundation](#)



The Shared Earth Foundation "is committed to the tenet that all creatures have an enduring claim to sustainable space on this planet. It believes that today's human beings have the responsibility to share Earth's resources with other creatures and future generations by limiting their adverse impact on the planet, and by enriching and protecting Earth's wildlife and the places they inhabit."

For over seven years, Shared Earth has supported CLA's efforts to protect and restore habitat and wild places in the Chesapeake watershed. Shared Earth Foundation knows that truly effective conservation strategies require a sustained, long-term commitment. To that end, **Shared Earth Foundation recently doubled its contribution to CLA** to ensure its long term success. We are sincerely grateful for their continued partnership and commitment to our planet!

***CLA is honored to have generous supporters from all over the watershed including individuals, families, and foundations.***



# Financials

Thanks to our generous community of donors, Chesapeake Legal Alliance ended 2020 in a strong financial position.



For every **\$1** donated in 2020, CLA lawyers provided **\$5** in free legal services to those in need.



## IN 2020 WE RAISED:

**\$932,442** to protect the Bay

## IN 2020 WE SPENT:

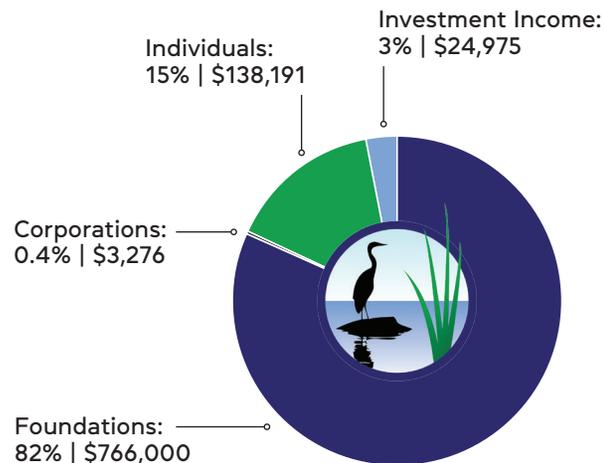
**\$721,093** in Program Services

**\$59,638** in Operating Expenses

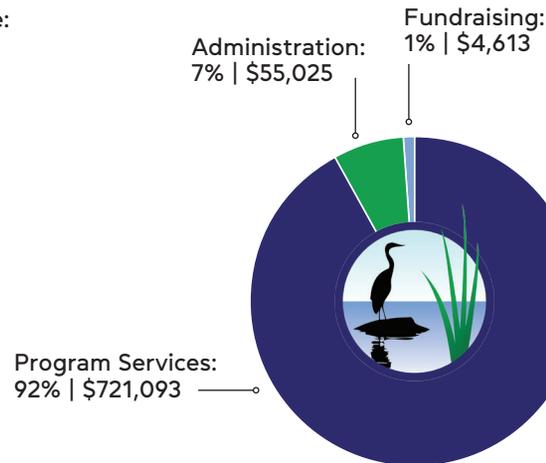
## IN 2020 WE INVESTED:

**\$151,711** in Reserve Assets

### INCOME



### EXPENSE



Our most recent audit and IRS 990 are available upon request at [info@chesapeakelegal.org](mailto:info@chesapeakelegal.org).

# How to Donate

## A GIFT TO CHESAPEAKE LEGAL ALLIANCE IS A POWERFUL ACTION.

With your support, CLA lawyers insure that the Chesapeake we leave to future generations is cleaner, healthier, and even more abundant than the Chesapeake of today.

To make your gift online, visit [chesapeakelegal.org/donate](https://chesapeakelegal.org/donate)

To donate via mail, please send a check to: Chesapeake Legal Alliance, 501 Sixth St., Annapolis, MD 21403

For information about more giving opportunities, please contact Erin Mezgar, Director of Philanthropy at [erin@chesapeakelegal.org](mailto:erin@chesapeakelegal.org) or 410-216-9441 ext. 208.

*Thank you!*



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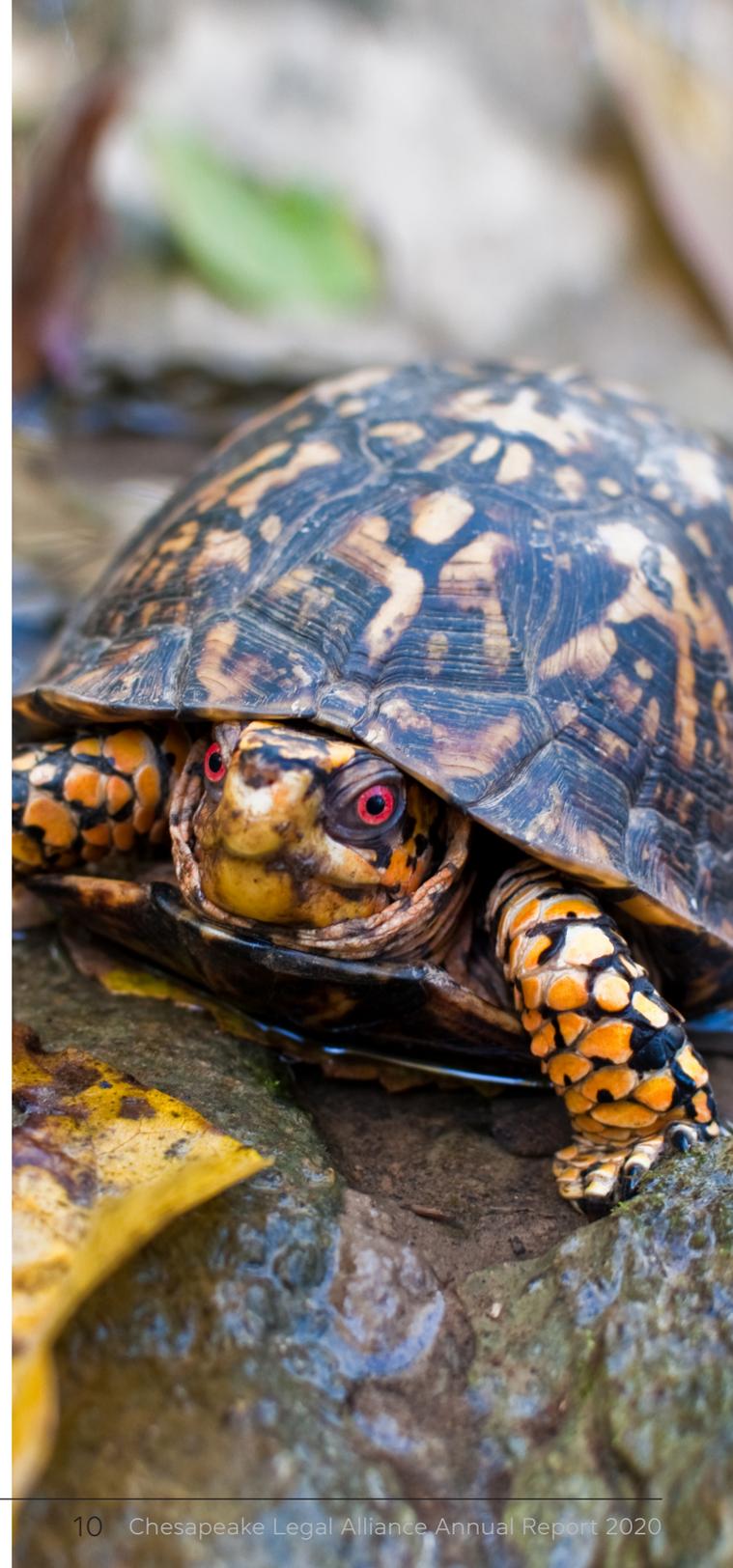
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