

BMP Verification Communication Strategy

July 19, 2012

Initial Draft Presented to the WQGIT's BMP Verification Committee for Review and Feedback

Background: There is a growing demand for the tracking and reporting of practices and technologies to expand well beyond the sources the Bay watershed jurisdictions have traditionally relied upon—state agricultural departments and environmental agencies, USDA, and county conservation districts. Non-governmental organizations, private sector third party consultants, technical certified planners and businesses, agricultural producers, and even individual homeowners are now implementing and reporting on practices. One of the primary areas of concern expressed by the jurisdictions and local stakeholders regarding the accountability under the Bay TMDL is receiving credit for Best Management Practices implemented without state or federal cost share funding.

This chorus of calls for expanded tracking and reporting of practices is often countered by expressions of the need for strengthened verification of the installation and maintenance of the array of pollution prevention and reduction practices. Given the ever increasing importance that accounting for implemented practices is taking on within the partnership—Bay TMDL reasonable assurance, two-year milestones, offsets, tradable credits—the partnership is working on a framework whereby we can have both expanded tracking and reporting of practices AND verifiable confidence in the outcome of those implemented practices.

Timeline: By January 2013, the Water Quality Goal Implementation Team's BMP Verification Committee should be in a position to present a basinwide BMP verification program for review and adoption by the partnership's Principals' Staff Committee, after getting review and concurrence from the Water Quality Goal Implementation Team (October) and the Management Board (November).

Upon partnership adoption, the convened BMP Verification Review Panel—consisting of independent experts drawn from around the region and across the country—will be actively reviewing the seven watershed jurisdictions' BMP verification programs starting in the spring of 2013.

Therefore, upon PSC adoption of the basinwide BMP verification program on behalf of the partnership, we need to initiate a sustained period of active communications with and messaging to a series of target audiences.

Challenges:

- Developing sets of messages that are convincing enough to encourage individual land owners to allow for BMP verification on their properties and make local municipalities feel verifying implemented practices and treatment technologies will be worth the return on the investment.
- Setting up communication mechanisms for reaching the targeted audiences which number in the hundreds (e.g., conservation districts), to thousands (e.g., local municipalities), to tens of thousands (e.g., farmers).
- Sustaining the delivery of these consistent messages for the extended period of time necessary to essentially cause widespread attitude and behavioral changes leading to widespread tracking, verification and reporting of practices reducing nutrient and sediment pollution.

Audiences: Local implementers: agricultural producers, municipality employees, watershed organizations, non-governmental organizations.

State and local implementation assistance providers: local and state government agency officials, conservation districts, regional planning districts, agri-business, regional stormwater authorities, municipal authority associations.

Engagement:

- Initial press release/story coverage through broader interested media.
- Follow up with targeted media—editorial boards or direct media—outreach further directed towards specific pollution source sectors and/or jurisdictions.
- Then moving on to using town hall meetings to explain the verification process, roles of local implementers and implementation assistance providers, and the benefits to local communities.

Themes:

- **Rewarding efforts**
- **Accuracy**
- **Partnership**

Messages:

Rewarding efforts:

- The Chesapeake Bay Program partnership wants to ensure people implementing pollution reduction practices in all sectors and jurisdictions are getting the right credit for the steps they are taking to make their local waters clean.
- A lot of important pollution reduction practices has already been implemented, but may not have been fully recognized previously. This collaboration will change that.
- Verified BMPs will provide peace of mind that investments in implementation will have the desired impacts.

Accuracy:

- There is momentum toward providing for clean water throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed. In conjunction with local water quality monitoring results, verifying implemented practices will help identify those having the greatest impact on cleaning up local waters.
- We know a lot of practices have been applied for years – we need to use the best available science to verify they actually are having the impact we hope they will.
- Verifying implemented practices is critical to understanding monitoring data and other observed trends found in the water quality conditions of local streams and rivers.
- In order to account for all practices, we need people on the ground in all sectors to tell us and show us what they believe is working for them.

Partnership:

- Local implementers are important partners in restoration efforts – they know what is being done in their communities and their participation is essential to achieving our shared goal of clean water locally and throughout the Bay watershed.
- Basinwide BMP verification program has been developed through the partnership to fairly address all pollution sources and all seven watershed jurisdictions. Implementation through each individual jurisdiction will increase public confidence that efforts will have the desired results.
- Ensuring those who pollute the most are asked to reduce the most can only be done through building a complete picture pollution reduction practices implemented within local and regional watersheds.
- Everyone is part of the solution and we need everyone pulling in the same direction. Verified BMPs will help point the way.