

Maintain Healthy Watersheds Goal Implementation Team Meeting Minutes

December 19th, 2013

Participants:

Mark Bryer, Mike Fritz, Tuana Phillips, Jason Dubow, Lee Epstein, Wink Hastings, Donnelle Keech, Laura Gabanski, Owen McDonough, Keith Fisher, Ruth Thorton, Kevin Anderson, Jennifer Greiner, Mike Slattery, Helen Stewart, Renee Thompson, Christine Mazzarella, Bill Jenkins, Susan Spielberger, Pat Buckley, Diane Wilson, Lori Mohr, Angel Valdez, Todd Janeski, Gene Yagow, Nancy Arazon, John Wolf, Anne Hariston-Strang, Sally Claggett, Bevin Buchheister

Updates:

- Mark Bryer, TNC, updated us on the content and timeline of the New Chesapeake Bay Agreement:
 - Healthy Watersheds Goal:
 - Sustain state-identified healthy waters and watersheds, recognized for their exceptional quality and/or high ecological value.
 - Healthy Watersheds Outcome:
 - By 2025, 100% of state-identified currently healthy waters and watersheds remain healthy.
 - New Agreement Timeline:
 - Signatory draft comments are due on December 20th.
 - The draft will be released to the public in late January or early February for a 45-day public comment period.
 - Final signing will occur in the spring of 2014.
- Mark Bryer – Recent cross-GIT collaboration efforts:
 - Leaders of four CBP GITs (Sustainable Fisheries, Protect & Restore Vital Habitats, Foster Chesapeake Stewardship, and Maintain Healthy Watersheds) met on November 15th.
 - Consensus on general missions of GITs. GITs are:
 - Conveners
 - Aggregators
 - Supporters
- Donnelle Keech, TNC, updated us on GIT4's participation in the 2013 Chesapeake Watershed Forum:
 - GIT4 helped put together 2 sessions:

- “Healthy Watersheds: Status, Trends, and Opportunities.” This session was an overview of the scientific and conservation importance of healthy watersheds, status and trends, and emerging policy opportunities.
 - “Capturing Local Benefits of Healthy Watersheds.” This session included a facilitated discussion on the opportunities for capturing local benefits and incentivizing conservation of healthy watersheds.
 - The sessions were well attended and very successful.
- Helen Stewart, Maryland DNR, updated us on the Maryland Water Monitoring Council Conference Session – “Developing a Coordinated Strategy to Protect Maryland’s Healthy Watersheds.”
 - The session went very well; there were approximately 60 participants.
 - Maryland DNR and colleagues will continue their Healthy Watersheds strategy conversation in two sessions during the MET Land Conservation Conference in April 2014.

Other Updates:

- Laura Gabanski, Director of EPA’s National Healthy Watersheds Program:
 - Laura briefed the group on EPA’s December 5, 2013 “New Long-Term Vision for Assessment, Restoration, and Protection under the Clean Water Act Section 303(d) Program.” For a link to this vision statement:
 - http://www.chesapeakebay.net/channel_files/21119/vision_303d_program_dec_2013.pdf
 - Laura noted the linkage between EPA’s new vision and the Department of Interior’s focus on large landscapes, particularly in Secretary Jewell’s recent memo on mitigation and protection. For a link to this memo:
 - http://www.chesapeakebay.net/channel_files/21119/improving_mitigation_policies_and_practices_of_the_department_of_the_interior.pdf
 - Laura also expressed optimism that a nationwide growing interest in the integration of healthy waters and watersheds protection into traditional EPA programs will soon be supported with more resources for implementation.
 - Laura committed to keep the GIT informed on grant funding opportunities that are likely to be forthcoming through EPA’s Office of Water.
 - In addition, Laura shared that the CWA 319 non-point source pollution reduction grants program guidelines were recently updated to better address protection and conservation needs.
- Owen McDonough, EPA HQ Healthy Watersheds Program, announced that the California Integrated Assessment of Watershed Health Report was released in November. For a link to the report:
 - http://www.mywaterquality.ca.gov/monitoring_council/healthy_streams/docs/ca_hw_report_111213.pdf

- Wisconsin and Alabama will release similar Watershed Health reports in the near future.
- Amy Handen, National Park Service:
 - Amy told us that the GIS layer of state-identified Healthy Watersheds is not currently in Landscape Chesapeake. GIT5 (Foster Chesapeake Stewardship) will discuss the layer's addition to Landscape Chesapeake in January 2014. For a link to Landscape Chesapeake:
 - <http://www.landscape.org/chesapeake/>
- Wink Hastings, National Park Service:
 - Wink reminded us of the Chesapeake Bay Program's Resource Lands Assessment (RLA), which is a useful tool to identify the most important remaining resource lands in the Bay watershed. For more information:
 - <http://www.chesapeakebay.net/about/programs/rla>

Presentation: West Virginia Watershed Assessment Pilot Project

- Ruth Thorton (TNC) and Keith Fisher (TNC) gave a presentation on West Virginia's Watershed Assessment Pilot Project. The purpose of this pilot was to develop and test a watershed assessment methodology that will eventually be replicated for all of West Virginia's watersheds.
- Please see the PowerPoint presentation available at:
 - http://www.chesapeakebay.net/channel_files/21119/wv_chesapeakebayprogram_20131219.pdf
- For more information:
 - <http://www.conservationgateway.org/ConservationByGeography/NorthAmerica/UnitedStates/wv/wvfw/wapp/Pages/default.aspx>
- For a link to the Draft Interactive Web Tool:
 - <http://wwwapp.s3-website-us-west-1.amazonaws.com/>

Status of State Strategies for Healthy Watershed Protection

- Maryland (Helen Stewart):
 - Will soon convene an effort to reconcile watershed prioritizations that exist among the several state programs from which the data was drawn to generate the current comprehensive MD healthy watersheds data layer.
 - MDNR healthy watersheds staff are working to engage with the State's Bay Cabinet executives to brief them on the healthy watershed initiative and to seek agency support.

- For more information, please see the “Maryland’s Approach for Healthy Watersheds Designation” document on the GIT4 12/19 meeting webpage:
 - http://www.chesapeakebay.net/channel_files/21119/marylandhealthywatershedapproach2013.pdf

- Virginia (Todd Janeski):
 - Working in-house to develop a prioritization model with which to focus efforts.
 - Increasing the capacity of the State’s healthy watershed initiative by adding a few staff to the program.
 - Prioritizing the upgrading of the quality and quantity of data that support the initiative.
 - Improving protection implementation efforts through existing and future easements.
 - Future issues of significant interest for attention:
 - Exploring improvements to the antidegradation program.
 - Combine efforts with Trout Unlimited on the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture.
 - Coordination with VDOT on a prioritization tool to target mitigation sites for healthy watershed protection.

- Pennsylvania (Diane Wilson):
 - PA’s “Special Protection Waters” are the core of the State’s healthy waters program. These waters account for 30% of all waterbodies in PA, and less than 1% of those waterbodies are impaired.
 - Within PA’s large Growing Greener grants program, there is a new smaller initiative to recognize and target for protection action those special protection waters that are particularly threatened.
 - Attention to these waters will include use of local monitoring information to determine vulnerability and help develop BMPs and ordinances.
 - Recently de-listed waters can be included. The initiative will also enable groups to apply to grants for waterbodies that have been delisted.
 - Some targeted public outreach will be done to advertise this initiative.

- New York (Ben Sears):
 - NY’s focus is on water quality in individual waterbodies.
 - Water quality is used as a surrogate measure of watershed health.
 - NY is currently updating the statewide database of water quality information to more specifically track No Known Impact waterbodies. This may result in additional information that would be useful to GIT4.

- Delaware (John Schneider):
 - DE is fully invested in the Clean Water Act approach to protecting watersheds. DE has strict water quality criteria and ambitious TMDLs and implementation plans. Furthermore, DE has promulgated very strict regulations that apply to point sources and agricultural/urban nonpoint sources, including on-site wastewater systems.
 - DE has designated Waters of Exceptional Recreational or Ecological Significance. The Nanticoke River is one of those waterbodies, and the goal is to return those waters to their natural condition.

- West Virginia (Timothy Craddock):
 - WV DEP has sent GIS coverage regarding WV's Tier 3 list of streams in the Potomac basin. This data layer is on the State-Identified Healthy Watersheds and Waters portion of Chesapeake Bay Stat. Also on this site is WV's language regarding Antidegradation policy.
 - WV uses 319 and other funds to develop watershed protection plans (WPP). These plans target watersheds that are in good condition but may be threatened by NPS pollution. A WPP for the Upper Elk watershed has been approved so far and DEP plans to approve additional WPPs in the future.

- Group Discussion:
 - On funding sources:
 - When applying for funds, we need a more integrated, balanced approach that focuses on both restoration and protection. There is a big opportunity to leverage the significant amount of restoration funding in healthy waters.
 - Suggestion by Wink Hastings: as a Goal Team, we can put build a portfolio or catalog of funding sources.

GIT4 Collective Strategies Discussion:

Based on past discussions, certain strategic themes have emerged:

- Communications
- Tracking
- Local engagement
- Policy/Program Development

Results of the Survey on GIT4 Strategic Priorities (Tuana Phillips):

- The survey was sent out to members by email. 29 members participated in the survey.
- The survey results affirmed that the following strategic items are considered to be very important or important to the majority of GIT4 members:
 - Develop a method to track and report watershed health and protection.
 - Engage with local governments.
 - Engage with Land Trusts and other NGOs.
 - Healthy Watershed vulnerability assessments.
 - Work collaboratively with other GITs.
 - Find funding opportunities.
 - Outreach and communications messages/tools.
 - Build upon current policy (e.g., Antidegradation).
 - Pursue how to credit conservation in Bay TMDL.
 - Innovative Land Use, TDR, and Zoning practices.
 - Develop a local pilot demonstration project.

These items can be grouped under our strategic themes:

Technical/Analytical (Tracking)	Local Engagement + Communications	Policy/Program Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop a method to track and report watershed health and protection. ○ Healthy watershed vulnerability assessments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Outreach and communications messages/tools. ○ Engage with local governments. ○ Engage with Land Trusts and other NGOs. ○ Develop a local pilot demonstration project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Work collaboratively with other GITs. ○ Find funding opportunities. ○ Build upon current policy (e.g., Antidegradation). ○ Innovative Land Use, TDR, and Zoning practices.

Survey discussion:

- GIT4 members affirmed general strategic priorities for the GIT’s work:
 - Development of the capacity to track and report on the health and protection status of state-identified healthy waters and watersheds.
 - Local engagement – including local government and other local stakeholder and interest groups, particularly land trusts.

Other discussion points:

- Developing a tracking and reporting method is especially important because of its relevance to GIT4's goal and outcome under the New Chesapeake Bay Agreement.
- Under the local engagement theme, Mark Bryer suggested engaging with the CBP's Local Government Advisory Committee.
- There is some overlap among the three strategic themes. For instance, local engagement and communications items can overlap with policy/program development items.

Presentation: Frederick County, Maryland Green Infrastructure – Shannon Moore

- Shannon Moore (Frederick County Office of Sustainable and Environmental Resources) gave a presentation on Frederick County's Green Infrastructure project. The project is a multi-year effort to identify and protect environmentally rich and valuable areas in Frederick County.
- Please see the PowerPoint presentation available at:
 - http://www.chesapeakebay.net/channel_files/21119/wv_chesapeakebayprogram_20131219.pdf

Discussion on the Next Steps and Action Items:

- Tuana Phillips will contact GIT4 members in January to convene an ad hoc group to explore practical methods by which to track and report the health and protection status of state-identified healthy waters and watersheds
- Tuana Phillips will coordinate with Donnelle Keech to convene a discussion of local engagement, including development of strategic communications priorities and messages for use in local engagement. Discussion with other CBP GITs, particularly the Habitats and Stewardship GITs to coordinate local engagement strategies will be part of this effort.
- Donnelle Keech will again participate in the planning of the fall Chesapeake Watershed Forum for the purpose of using that important opportunity to reach target audiences to promote local action to protect healthy watersheds.
- As a Goal Team, we will respond to comments on the New Chesapeake Bay Agreement draft after it is made available to the public in 2014.
- Mark Bryer and Mike Slattery will work on a short, formal description of the new cross-GIT collaboration effort for communication to the Management Board and the Bay Program.