



Narrative Analysis

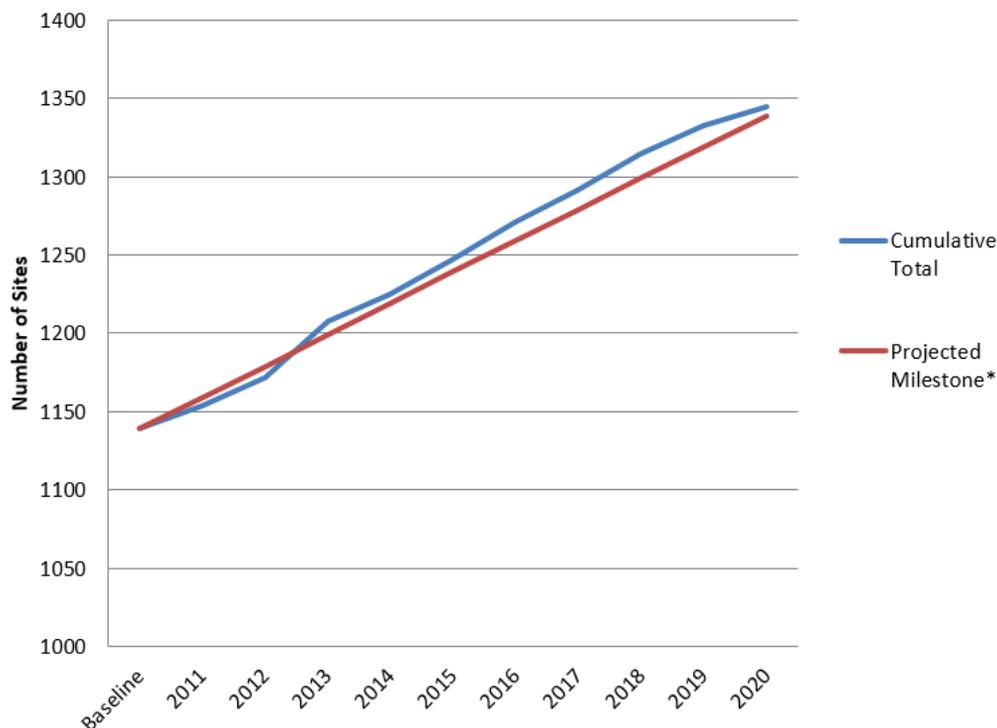
[PUBLIC ACCESS, 2022 QUARTERLY PROGRESS MEETING]

Public access site development within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed **is on track** to achieve the goal of adding 300 new public access sites, with strong emphasis on providing opportunities for boating, swimming and fishing, where feasible by 2025. The cost associated with maintaining existing public access sites has limited the funds available for the implementation of new public access. Public access implementation slowed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, while usage increased.

1. Are we, as a partnership, making progress at a rate that is necessary to achieve this outcome? Use a graph or chart to illustrate where feasible (replace example provided with your illustration).

The Public Access Outcome of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement outlines a goal of adding 300 new public access sites by 2025. As of 2020, a total of **206 new sites** have been developed in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed meaning 69% of the 300-site goal has been reached. The following graph shows that public access sites have been implemented at a rate higher than the projected milestone required to meet the Public Access Outcome of 300 new sites by 2025.

Existing Public Access Sites



2. Looking back over the last two or more years, describe any scientific (including the impacts of climate change), fiscal, and policy-related developments that impacted your progress or may influence your work over the next two years. Have these resulted in revised needs (*e.g.*, less, more) to achieve the outcome?

Developments that have and will continue to impact our work:

- **The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in record usage of public access sites.** This increased usage highlighted inequities in the accessibility of public access sites and degraded some existing sites. The COVID-19 pandemic also slowed the construction of new sites.
- **Implementation of new public access sites has been impeded by a backlog of sites that need renovations or maintenance.** In some cases, there is hesitancy among states and local governments to open new public access sites when agencies can't adequately manage existing sites. Local municipalities are hesitant to dedicate staff or regular funding to maintenance of existing sites because of liability concerns if the sites aren't properly maintained. The workgroup expects this to be a continuing challenge in the future.
- **Funding mechanisms at state agencies often require match funds which local partners can struggle to find.** The consequence is that access sites are being developed in areas where partners have capacity and staff to write successful grant applications which can have implications for the equity of public access site implementation. Multiple state agencies plan to address this in the coming two years by lowering match requirements and updating grant scoring criteria to uplift projects that take place in previously underserved areas during the application process.
- **The cost of developing public access has increased as a result of the rising cost of materials.** Grant programs that fund access sites usually depend on a materials cost estimate which is sometimes inaccurate by a project's implementation date because the cost of materials has changed. As a result, state agencies have to identify money to cover the cost of public access sites that were committed to in the past.
- There is also an increased cost associated with building access sites that are ADA accessible, which in some cases has prevented implementation due to lack of available funds.
- Some funding programs at the state and local agencies target land acquisition and may not cover the infrastructure funding associated with implementing a new public access site, including both development/ construction and future maintenance.
- **Climate change.** The consequences associated with climate change will influence the development of public access in the coming two years as agencies make decisions about the placement and design of new public access sites.
- Policy developments like the formation of Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans (SCORPs) will influence public access in the coming years. SCORPs often include questionnaires to the public that aim to better understand user experience. This data can be used to inform the development of future sites.

3. Based on the red/yellow/green analysis of the actions described in your logic and action plan, summarize what you have learned over the past two years of implementation.

What worked?

Public access site development is largely opportunistic and dependent on the unique conditions of each site. Because the Public Access Workgroup itself can't implement sites, the group has functioned well as a learning community where workgroup members share best practices and learn from one another. The workgroup successfully competed for GIT Funding to pay for research on the benefits and barriers to public access, a project that is currently underway. The advisory team working with the contractor is representative of all of the watershed jurisdictions to ensure the results of that research are useful to each state.

Over the last two years the workgroup members have learned a lot while supporting the implementation of public access sites in their own jurisdictions. For example, pairing public access site development with other projects (ex. park improvements or stream restoration) can be a successful method for implementation. Decreasing match requirements of partners or changing scoring criteria can lower the barrier for small communities to apply for funding to implement public access sites.

What didn't work?

The workgroup also learned a lot based on what wasn't accomplished in the most recent Public Access Logic and Action Plan. First, members of the Public Access Workgroup have limited influence to change funding strategies to include public access site development. For this reason, some of the actions related to financing were analyzed as red or yellow. During the last Quarterly Progress Meeting the Public Access Workgroup identified limited funding for maintenance as a barrier that is impeding the implementation of new public access sites. As a result, the Workgroup asked the Management Board to encourage new funding strategies at their state and federal agencies that include funding for maintenance, planning, and development of public access sites. In response, the Management Board requested a breakdown of jurisdiction and federal funding sources from the Workgroup. This information was provided to the Management Board but did not result in new funding strategies. In the future, the Logic and Action Plan should be reflective of the areas of public access site development that are inside the Workgroup members' control or ability to influence, or a clear path forward should be identified early in the planning with higher level guidance.

Going forward

Based on our work during the last two years, the Public Access Workgroup is planning on increasing coordination between other Bay Program groups, specifically the others in the Stewardship GIT. The Public Access Workgroup coordinated with the Diversity Workgroup to prepare a proposal for the GIT Funding process to research the benefits and barriers to public access usage but additional coordination is needed to share the results of that research. The Workgroup will also be narrowing the scope of items included in the Logic and Action Plan to more accurately reflect the capacity or influence of its members.

4. Based on what you have learned through this process and any new developments or considerations described in response to question #2, how will your work change over the next two years? If we need to accelerate progress towards achieving our outcome, what steps are needed and, in particular, what specific actions or needs are beyond the ability of your group to meet and, therefore, you need the assistance of the Management Board to achieve?

State agencies and local governments within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed are implementing public access sites at a rate necessary to achieve the Public Access Outcome of the 2014 Watershed Agreement. In the coming two years, the Public Access Workgroup will continue to support the states by convening as a community of practice on a bi-yearly basis to learn from each other. The Workgroup will also pursue opportunities that support public access site development in all of the jurisdictions. This includes distributing the results of the Benefits and Barriers to Public Access research paid for by GIT Funding. The outcomes of this research will include information around how residents in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed utilize public access, the relationship between usage and practicing stewardship behaviors, and increased knowledge around what barriers prevent traditionally underserved populations from utilizing public access sites.

Numerous factors, including funding, will impact the ability of Public Access Workgroup members to support new site development in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. In the coming two years, there is an expected influx of funding from the Infrastructure Investments & Jobs Act, however it is unclear if and how this funding will be used by the states to advance public access. This will be subject to how individual states decide to spend that potential funding. The consequences of climate change will continue to impact the design and implementation of public access sites in the future. Some agencies, like Maryland Department of Natural Resources, for example, expect to continue collaborating with colleagues at other state agencies to address degradation in current public access infrastructure and to identify new opportunities for purchase.

In order to continue progress towards the Public Access Outcome at a rate necessary to implement 300 new public access sites by 2025, it is recommended that the Management Board consider taking the following actions:

- Encourage pairing public access site development with other projects taking place in their agencies (e.g., stream restorations, park improvements, land acquisition projects).
- Continue public access site development work going on in their agencies and consider dedicating a portion of the coming infrastructure funding to accelerate progress.
- Explore solutions for the ongoing issue of maintenance in their individual agency.

The findings from the GIT Funded project to research the benefits and barriers to public access, with special emphasis on traditionally underserved communities, is expected in 2022. The results and recommendations identified in the final report could result in additional assistance needed by the Management Board. If so, the workgroup will communicate those requests to the Management Board.

5. What steps are you taking, or do you recommend, to ensure your actions and work will be equitably distributed and focused in geographic areas and communities that have been underserved in the past?

The Public Access Workgroup secured GIT Funding from the Chesapeake Bay Program to hire a contractor to research the benefits and barriers to public access in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. This research includes special emphasis on the barriers that prevent previously underserved communities from utilizing public access sites. The contractor will develop recommendations based on this data and

distribute to the states to inform improvements to existing sites or the design and development of future sites. Each of the watershed states are represented on the smaller advisory team working with the contractor to ensure the outcomes of this research will be relevant to their work.

Public access sites are implemented at the federal, state and local level. Here are some examples of how state agencies are working to ensure public access is equitably distributed and focused in geographic areas and communities that have been underserved in the past:

- Pennsylvania completed its Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) in 2020. The plan includes a “Recreation for All” priority which strives for equity in access to Pennsylvania’s outdoors. The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources worked with the Trust for Public Land to develop mapping that identifies high need areas for water access, trail access, and park access. Grant proposals working in areas of high need will be weighted appropriately.
- Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation has updated the scoring criteria for the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Recreational Trails Program to weight projects taking place in underserved communities.
- Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources hired George Braxton as Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer. Serving geographic areas and communities that have been underserved in the past is weighted as part of the selection process for the development of new public access sites.
- Delaware administers the Outdoor Recreation, Parks and Trails Program. Last year, the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control chose to lower match requirements after analyzing the barriers that have prevented underserved communities from applying.
- Maryland DNR uses its public water access data to generate proximity analysis maps that identify areas that may have gaps in the availability of public water access.
- Maryland DNR in partnership with the University of MD developed the Maryland Park Equity Tool/Analysis to provide a quantitative statewide analysis and decision support tool identifying locations across the State with barriers to accessing public lands for a variety of factors.
- Maryland DNR supported development of the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ) strategy signed by the Bay partners to increase participation and engagement of underrepresented communities in our Chesapeake Bay restoration efforts.