



Chesapeake Bay Program

CHESAPEAKE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

## ENDORSEMENT OF WETLANDS PROTECTION AND RESTORATION GOALS

Wetlands, both tidal and non-tidal, play a critical role in the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem, a role the Chesapeake Bay Program recognized in the 1987 *Chesapeake Bay Agreement*, the 1989 *Chesapeake Bay Wetlands Policy* and Directive 97-2, *Wetlands Protection and Restoration Goals*. That directive called for the maintenance of existing wetlands and the restoration and preservation of wetland acreage and function in order to sustain habitats for breeding, spawning, nesting and wintering living resources, including those that are vital to the regional economy. Wetlands also play a valuable role in keeping the Bay healthy by retaining nutrients and minimizing the impacts of flooding.



TO SUPPORT A NET GAIN IN WETLAND ACREAGE AND FUNCTION, AND TO PROTECT, RESTORE AND PRESERVE WETLANDS TO THE MAXIMUM EXTENT PRACTICABLE, WE COMMIT TO:

- *Achieve a no-net loss of jurisdictional wetlands acreage and function through regulatory programs.* Federal and state regulatory programs require that losses of regulated wetlands from human activities be avoided, minimized and otherwise mitigated to achieve no net loss in wetlands acreage and function. The responsible federal and state agencies will assure that their regulatory programs achieve no net loss of wetlands in the basin and report annually to the public our progress on the regulatory programs' success in meeting the no-net-loss goal.
  - *Achieve a net resource gain by restoring 25,000 acres of tidal and non-tidal wetlands by 2010. To do this, we commit to achieve and maintain an average restoration rate of 2,500 acres per year basin wide by 2005 and beyond. We will evaluate our success in 2005.*
- purposes of this accounting, we adopt the definitions of the terms listed below.
- *Reestablishment* means the manipulation of a former wetland site to cause wetland conditions to return and persist on the site.
  - *Enhancement* means the significant and long-term sustainable improvement of the functions of a wetland. For example, restoring natural hydrology in an existing hydrologically disturbed wetland, Phragmites eradication or fencing to exclude livestock.
  - *Creation* means the establishment of a wetland where one did not formerly exist. Creation generally takes place in upland environments.

In addition, we commit to account for net gains in wetland acreage and function by calculating wetlands acreage in the following three separate categories: reestablishment, enhancement and creation. For

In the year 2005, and every five years thereafter, we will evaluate our progress toward achieving the net-gain goal in each of these categories, to assure that the gains are of the highest practicable quality and sustainability. We also commit to coordinate our accounting practices in order to maximize consistency.

While effective wetland regulatory programs and well-funded, creative wetland restoration programs are essential to achieving and sustaining a net gain in wetlands acreage and function, we recognize that many wetlands will not continue to perform their important ecosystem functions unless the landscapes upstream of those wetlands—their watersheds—are managed responsibly. We also recognize that responsible watershed management often is best pursued not by imposing federal or state regulations, but rather by supporting local communities and citizen stakeholders in working cooperatively to address the land, water and other natural resource management issues that concern them. Finally, we recognize that while wetlands and surrounding landscapes can be preserved by the outright purchase or acquisition of protective easements, there are many other effective methods to achieve responsible watershed stewardship and wetlands preservation within the context of local planning and private ownership, including, but not limited to, land trusts and tax incentives for natural resource preservation. In any local watershed management plan, the best combination of methods to achieve effective wetland preservation and protection of wetland functions should be determined locally.

With these principles to guide our efforts in assisting local communities, we include within this net-gain goal the following commitment to address the preservation of wetlands acreage and function in a local community and local watershed context. We commit to:

- *Provide information and assistance to local governments and community groups for the development and implementation of locally generated community or watershed-based wetlands preservation plans. The goal is to have such plans implemented in 25 percent of the land area of each state's Bay watershed by the year 2010. The plans would preserve key wetlands that are locally identified and address surrounding land use to preserve wetland functions.*

These goals have been included in the draft Chesapeake 2000 Agreement, which will undergo public review and comment early in the year 2000. By this endorsement, we provide additional background and definition to the goals, and welcome any suggestions for their improvement.

DECEMBER 8, 1999