

CBT Tidal Wetlands Landowner Community Engagement Final Report

Prepared by Green Fin Studio | Submitted November 11, 2025

Green Fin Studio submits this report to satisfy the “Summary Blueprint and Final Report” deliverables due under Report #5. This report summarizes the overall outreach efforts, observed outcomes, and recommendations to continue this work. The Sustainability Blueprint has been submitted as a separate Word document upload. The two virtual training workshops for the action network replaced the 2-3 community events and were moved from Report 4 to Report 5. The presentation slides have been submitted as a separate Powerpoint upload. The recording of the second workshop has been uploaded as an MP4 file.

Project Overview

The purpose of this project was to develop and implement a comprehensive landowner engagement and outreach program focused on coastal wetlands restoration, with an emphasis on private landowners and coastal communities that will be disproportionately affected by sea level rise.

Green Fin Studio’s work focused on incorporating findings from a literature review, expert interviews, and community engagement best practices to provide recommendations on how to best engage private tidal wetland landowners and those trusted messengers who can influence landowners and their decisions. This work focused on Delaware, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia and how to incorporate a social marketing strategy, leveraging trusted messengers, to sustain landowner engagement and make progress towards wetlands restoration goals.

Outreach Efforts

Green Fin Studio developed Tidal Wetlands Private Landowner Community Engagement: Outreach & Education Program to provide resources for private landowners and coastal communities that align with their concerns, needs, and interests and to account for the impacts of our changing climate. Specifically, our work focuses on the trusted messengers and wetland professionals who work directly with landowners. The Outreach and Education Program includes customizable education and outreach materials including two fact sheets (one on living shoreline and another on waterfront living), four postcards (recreation benefit of wetlands, living shoreline installation, stopping mowing, and planting natives to protect your property), and social media templates (for posting about the benefits and connecting a problem to a solution).

Our team presented this work to the Tidal Wetlands Steering Committee on September 10, 2025 to explain our approach, share the customizable materials developed, and to answer questions and get feedback on the messaging strategy we developed.

To socialize the Outreach and Education Program, we also hosted two one hour webinars for those identified as potential action network members as a way to soft launch the action network and to connect many wetland professionals across the watershed with this work and the available materials. Instead of engaging with private landowners directly, our interview conversations and research underscored the importance of relationship building and the value

of trusted messengers to socialize wetland conservation, enhancement, and restoration with private tidal wetland landowners.

These workshops were recorded, and we recommend they be hosted with the Outreach Program materials for easy access. Additionally, slides or any other materials incorporated in the webinars will be accessible and available for download online. The webinar description and agenda are available [here](#). The workshop slides are available [here](#). The first workshop, on October 22, 2025, had 22 participants and the second workshop on October 28, 2025, had 16 participants.

During each workshop, Green Fin Studio presented on the Community-Based Social Marketing approach that factored into the Outreach Program and highlighted the strategies identified and the materials created to assist practitioners and trusted messengers with landowner outreach. Green Fin Studio shared the materials, including postcards, one-pagers, and social media templates, that we have created and how we envision them being used by the action network, so everyone understands how to customize the resources to reach their local audience(s). We recommend that these materials be hosted on a web page and shared via the action network.

Our team facilitated Q&A with participants to gather feedback on the Outreach Program and identify gaps in the materials. Our goal was to stay flexible and responsive to the needs of the action network member organizations while creating a space they can rely on for support and advice. We hoped to empower members to share knowledge, resources, and success stories from their work with private tidal wetland landowners. To ensure Outreach Program continuity and the sustainability of the action network, we provided resources and a platform for members to connect with peers and collaborate on shared challenges.

As part of the webinars, we also provided attendees the opportunity to provide our team with feedback about the messaging, materials, and our community-based social marketing approach to landowner engagement.

Observed Outcomes

Overall, we received overwhelmingly positive feedback from the action network on this work and excitement from wetland professionals eager to use it in current or upcoming efforts to engage private tidal wetland landowners (including the future DNR/ESLC/LSLT's Coastal Resilience Management Plans, TNC/DWR's VA voluntary wetland restoration workforce (tidal and non-tidal), Maryland DNR's EPA Climate Pollution Reduction Grant). Specifically, we heard excitement around the message framing and how these materials can aid capacity for outreach efforts to privately-owned lands.

From the Tidal Wetlands Steering Committee, we received feedback about the different uses for the same material as well as the message strategy. The approach our team took was to provide several behaviors that would make it easier for landowners to change their behavior. By removing barriers, like education, cost, and resources we are making it easier for landowners to adopt the behavior change requested. Further, these resources are fully customizable, so if

raising the mower bed is not in alignment with a local ordinance the user can customize the postcard to encourage private landowners to not mow at all. We took this approach to be inclusive and start with small actions, but we do recommend aligning messages with local and state ordinances and policies as well as with the social norms and culture of the service area.

Recommendations

Below highlights our recommendations to continue this work and how to best support tidal wetland professionals and trusted messengers.

1. Strengthen and sustain the action network
 - Formalize the network to support connecting wetland professionals, land trusts, and local governments across the bay watershed.
 - Establish and use regular communication channels (i.e., listserv, website), and processes for sharing information/resources.
 - Provide additional educational opportunities for practitioners on how they can incorporate community input into the custom materials via the action network (e.g., webinars, presentations at professional meetings, sharing success stories, surveys, etc.)
 - Provide language and recommendations to wetland professionals on how to speak honestly with landowners about the expected project benefits to them, lifespan and maintenance of projects, timelines from inception to maturity, and how trusted messengers can use these materials as a way to manage those expectations to maintain trust with landowners.
2. Expand outreach materials
 - Develop additional materials that could be created in another phase of this work
 - One suggestion we received was to design a utility bill flyer highlighting small, actionable steps that private tidal wetland landowners can take to protect wetlands and their property. Initial research suggests that the majority of residents may not receive utility bills by regular mail, preferring e-bills instead, which may reduce the effectiveness of such a flyer.
 - A fact sheet for agricultural landowners that addresses agricultural property concerns including farm-adjacent wetlands, drainage, and saltwater intrusion.
 - Materials on salt marsh restoration and living shoreline maintenance, highlighting adaptation benefits landowners will see.
 - Resources on where to purchase wetland plants and information on what plants can enhance your viewshed.
3. Support funding and integration into other work
 - Integrate policy recommendations, from the Sustainability Blueprint, into local and state initiatives.
 - Align policy and planning efforts around tidal wetland protection, adaptation, and nature-based solutions to shift norms and reinforce the behavior changes.

- Develop and advocate for policies that take future and currently changing conditions into account (e.g., creating pathways for marsh migration, designing wetlands projects to account for continuing sea level rise and storm surges, etc.)
- Secure sustained funding through partnerships to support ongoing material updates and maintenance of the action network.