

EPA Expectations for Near-Term Milestones

2026 – 2027

Purpose

The Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) partnership is committed to continuing to make progress toward meeting the nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment Interim Targets¹ while the partnership is updating its [modeling tools](#) and the [2014 Chesapeake Bay Agreement](#). During this transition period, the CBP partnership agreed to continue using the two-year milestones to maintain accountability toward implementing the partner-developed Phase III Watershed Implementation Plans (WIPs) and meeting the Interim Targets. This document provides EPA's expectations for the 2026-2027 milestones for water quality and explains EPA's intended process for evaluating progress toward those milestones.

Background

The CBP partnership has been using two-year milestones since 2009 to help plan and accomplish progress toward the partnership's water quality goals. In January 2025, the Principals' Staff Committee (PSC) approved recommendations related to "near-term" milestones and requested that expectations be developed for these milestones.² The milestone period will remain two years and cover January 1 of an even numbered year through December 31 of an odd numbered year. The near-term milestones will cover the timeframe of January 1, 2026-December 31, 2027 and may continue beyond 2027, if the CBP partnership has not yet reached consensus on a revised set of water quality planning targets or other changes to the milestones format and/or duration.

Milestone Development

For the 2026-2027 milestones, Chesapeake Bay watershed jurisdictions, the Conowingo WIP Steering Committee, and federal agencies (collectively referred to as Milestone

¹ Interim Targets are the Phase 3 Planning Targets factoring in 2025 changing environmental conditions and Unaccounted Additional Loads (UALs). In [September 2023](#), the Principals' Staff Committee (PSC) agreed to use these targets until the Phase 7 modeling tools were developed and new planning targets set.

² <https://www.chesapeakebay.net/what/event/principals-staff-committee-meeting---january-2025>

Partners) will each develop a 1–3-page document that identifies the high-level programmatic actions³ they plan to implement during the milestone period.

In accordance with the PSC-approved schedule, each Milestone Partner is expected to submit draft two-year milestones to EPA by February 13, 2026. EPA will provide feedback on those drafts within sixty days of receiving them, and each Milestone Partner is expected to submit final two-year milestones to EPA thirty days after receiving EPA’s feedback on the draft milestones.

EPA expects that the two-year milestones will:

- Identify the high-level pollutant reduction actions the Milestone Partner anticipates to occur in the 2026-2027 milestone period.
 - Examples of milestone actions include enhancements to existing water quality programs; establishment of new programs or initiatives; capacity-building actions; development or improvement of tools or datasets; and adoption of modified or new regulations, legislation, or policies.
- Include the following common attributes to ensure consistency, accountability and ease of communications within/across Milestone Partners.
 - Trackable, reportable and related to the Interim Targets. Where feasible, milestone descriptions should identify the measurable outcomes expected from implementing an action. Examples include: pounds of pollutant reduced; % necessary program(s) implemented; % closure in funding gaps; and number of segments delisted.
 - Include a date for completion.
 - Identify a deliverable for the time period.
 - Identify the relevant source sector(s) and lead agencies.
 - Continue using the partnership’s existing progress reporting mechanisms.
- Make a connection to the Milestone Partner’s priorities that would maintain or accelerate the rate of implementation to achieve the Interim Targets.
- Milestones should be streamlined to reduce the complexity from the current set (2024-2025) of milestones.
- If implementation will span a longer timeframe, identify which actions or outcomes are anticipated to occur during the two-year time period.

³ The term “programmatic milestones” is explained in the [2011 Milestones Guide](#) and may include new legislation, regulations, programs, and/or capacity-building actions to increase the resources needed to support or accelerate the implementation of pollutant load reduction measures.

- Develop milestones that are stretch goals but still attainable.

Considerations when developing the 2026-2027 milestones:

- Milestone Partners have the option to continue to develop more detailed programmatic milestones in addition to the high-level milestone commitments.
- Milestone Partners also have the option to include numeric milestone commitments or BMP projections as part of the milestones.
- Milestones may include new programs and activities as well as leverage existing programs and activities that reduce nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment (e.g., permitting program, nonpoint source program, etc.).
- Milestone Partners are encouraged to identify innovative actions to maintain and accelerate the pace of implementation. Innovative actions will be recognized but not evaluated based on their outcomes.
- Milestones may encompass more than water quality commitments. However, EPA will only evaluate commitments related to water quality.

EPA will develop a milestone template and share it with the Milestone Partners. Milestone Partners may choose to modify the template or not use it, as long as the milestones clearly identify the source sector(s), action, date for completion, and deliverable(s).

- [*Current optional template*](#)

Progress Reporting

At the end of the milestone period, Milestone Partners will develop a 1-2 page fact sheet summarizing their progress toward meeting their milestones. Each Milestone Partner will submit that fact sheet/progress summary for the 2026-2027 milestones period to EPA February 13, 2028. Milestone Partners are not expected to submit *interim year (i.e., in 2027)* progress summaries for the 2026-2027 near-term milestone period.

EPA expects the progress summaries for the 2026-2027 milestone period to include the following to ensure consistency, accountability and ease of communication within/across Milestone Partners:

- Describe the status of milestones actions (i.e., completed, not completed, adapted/revised) and the successes, barriers, and actions to overcome barriers in meeting programmatic initiatives and implementation.
- For incomplete or revised actions, indicate the remaining steps to achieve desired deliverables and the expected completion dates.
- Where feasible, milestone fact sheets should identify the measurable outcome(s) achieved by implementing an action.

EPA will develop a template for use by Milestone Partners to ensure progress summaries are easy to use and understand, contain consistent information, reduce duplicative communication efforts, and can serve as public communications documents. Milestone Partners may choose to modify the template or not use it, as long as the progress summaries clearly identify the above attributes.

EPA's Assessment of Progress

Every even-numbered year, EPA will evaluate the progress made by the Milestone Partners during the prior milestone period (e.g., 2024-2025). EPA will provide that evaluation to the Milestone Partners and the public in accordance with its oversight role under the CBP partnership's accountability framework. These evaluations will include an assessment of progress toward meeting sector-specific programmatic commitments for the milestone period and a numeric assessment⁴ of progress toward attaining nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment targets at the state and state-basin level. The evaluation also will provide the status of the relevant water quality monitoring trends.

For each sector-specific programmatic section, EPA will identify strengths and areas for improvement. EPA will seek to connect what was accomplished in the two-year milestone period with the overall goal of meeting the nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment targets.

⁴ EPA will continue to conduct annual assessments of progress toward numeric targets. This is reported annually as part of the Measured Load Reduction Indicator (MLRI) found on [Chesapeake Progress](#). The MLRI is a separate activity from the milestone evaluations, but the information will be used to inform the milestone evaluations.