



Tidal Wetlands Private Landowner Community Engagement: Sustainability Blueprint



Photo credit: Native Shorelines

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Introduction

The Chesapeake Bay region has been losing wetlands to a combination of factors, including development and sea level rise. Additionally, researchers estimate that 85% of the Chesapeake Bay shoreline is managed by private landowners¹, meaning that the actions of private citizens can have a disproportionate impact on the tidal wetlands. This project was undertaken to develop tools and communication strategies that wetland professionals can use to encourage the conservation, restoration, creation, and enhancement of tidal wetlands on private lands.

The Tidal Wetlands Private Landowner Community Engagement: Outreach & Education Program, hereinafter referred to as the “Outreach Program,” was developed as a first step to support wetland professionals with community engagement efforts surrounding privately owned lands (see [Appendix A](#)). The purpose of this Outreach Program is to provide private landowners and coastal communities with resources that align with their concerns, needs, and interests and to account for the impacts of our changing environment.

To ensure the longevity of this tidal wetlands outreach and engagement efforts with private landowners, this sustainability blueprint highlights how to build momentum for this work and a path forward to continue it. The pages that follow detail: a continuity plan, funding recommendations, an explanation of workshops to increase visibility and buy-in for this effort, as well as a long-term communication strategy, a framework for monitoring and evaluation, policy recommendations, and a legacy and knowledge transfer.

Action Network

As part of the Outreach Program, Green Fin Studio is responsible for building an action network to support and drive forward the mission of the Outreach Program. The purpose of the action network is to share information among relevant state, federal, nonprofit, academic, and community partners from Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, and the District of Columbia in support of restoration and protection efforts for privately owned tidal wetlands.

Building this network means more than just connecting organizations, it’s about working together to reach the people who make decisions on private property or influence private property owners. One key goal is to recruit trusted local messengers who can help landowners understand their shoreline management options and how wetland solutions address property concerns. Landowners rarely call asking for a wetland, but they do reach out looking for answers to property challenges. By reframing outreach around the issues landowners care about most, practitioners can meet them where they are, offer meaningful solutions, all while building an informed, connected action network that advances shared conservation goals.

Wetland professionals play an important role in expanding this network by sharing information and resources with trusted messengers in their communities. For example, property and legal

¹ Chesapeake Bay Program Nutrient Subcommittee Sediment Workgroup’s Tidal Sediment Task Force. (2005, May). *Sediment In The Chesapeake Bay And Management Issues: Tidal Erosion Processes*. https://www.chesapeakebay.net/files/tidal_erosion_processes_report.pdf

professionals like real estate agents can help new homeowners adopt new behaviors and habits – as buying a home is a time where people are most receptive to property information and opportunities to protect their property. However, conversations with wetlands professionals also highlighted that some property professionals can have competing self-interests that could conflict with protecting wetlands. Another example, residential community groups like homeowners associations have pre-established relationships with their residents and could help practitioners meet with residents, host community meetings, or share educational materials.

Beyond professional circles, neighbors, family and friends, and contractors are among the most trusted voices for influencing coastal landowner behaviors². These trusted messengers often see the property firsthand and provide trustworthy feedback that can steer land use decisions. This audience group can be useful by providing testimonials and sharing success stories of projects to help create buy-in and socialize behavior changes on private tidal wetland properties.

Community-Based Social Marketing

[Community-Based Social Marketing](#), or CBSM, developed by Doug McKenzie-Mohr, is a framework for fostering sustainable behavior through 5 steps:

1. **Selecting Behaviors**
2. **Identifying Barriers and Benefits**
3. **Developing Strategies**
4. Piloting Test Strategies
5. Implementing and Evaluating



The Outreach Program uses a [Community-Based Social Marketing](#) (CBSM) approach to encourage homeowners to adopt desired behaviors that restore, enhance, and create tidal wetlands. Based on literature review² and expert interviews, Green Fin Studio selected three behaviors: alter wetland mowing practices, plant native species, and swap gray for green infrastructure. Barriers and benefits to the desired behaviors were identified, which inform the development of messaging and outreach strategies. The Training and Capacity Building

² Action Research. (2020, December 11). *Bay Protectors for Shoreline Management: Implementation Plan*. https://cbtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/16788_Action-Research_Final-Shoreline_Implementation_Plan_Jan2021.pdf

workshops targeted the intended user group of the products created to pilot test the strategies and ensure that they are practical and usable by wetland professionals.

The action network should use CBSM principles in their outreach as they test and implement these strategies.

Program Continuity Plan

Green Fin Studio recommends that the Chesapeake Bay Program's Wetlands Workgroup assume responsibility for ongoing tidal wetlands outreach and engagement efforts with private landowners via an action network. The purpose of the action network is to share information among relevant state, federal, nonprofit, academic, and community partners from Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, and the District of Columbia in support of restoration and protection efforts for privately owned tidal wetlands.

The Wetlands Workgroup is a large, pre-established group with membership representing Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia from various federal, state, nonprofit, and private organizations with wetland interests. The Workgroup has established funding, regular meeting schedules, and a proven track record of completed projects.

The connection to the Chesapeake Bay Program helps to ensure the continuity of the Outreach Program and supports the connectivity between partner organizations that will be involved in the action network. Taking this approach to utilize the existing workgroup could create an opportunity to ask members to work together and share regular updates, like a listserv, which we recommend that the Chesapeake Bay Program maintain a dedicated web page for easy access by action network members.

Funding and Resource Plan

In support of the longevity of the Outreach Program, a resource plan must be established to sustain the action network's activities.

The Wetlands Workgroup could oversee the action network and share funding opportunities that the action network could apply for to ensure maintenance and regular updates to the resources (especially to funding programs) for the action network. The Chesapeake Bay Program communications team and web team are two resources that can also support the capacity needed to sustain the momentum of this work.

Action network members should work on collaborative grant proposals and request additional funds for communication and marketing outreach for the work of the partner organizations. Members should refer to the work of Environmental Policy Innovation Center (EPIC), who was contracted by the Chesapeake Bay Trust's Tidal Wetland Steering Committee, to help identify

sources of funding and finance for tidal wetland restoration. The work is ongoing as of October 2025.

Case Study: James River Association's Living Shoreline Collaborative

The James River Association's Living Shoreline Collaborative (LSC) is an example of how this type of work can be sustained. The LSC is a group of regional and state partners that are working together to scale up the implementation of resilient practices across shorelines in the tidal James River watershed. The convener of the LSC is the James River Association, and the partners come together via meetings, workshops, and more, to share knowledge, increase capacity, build relationships, work to identify and respond to community concerns, and ultimately, ensure living shorelines thrive through education, outreach, monitoring, training, and implementation. The James River Association's LSC secured initial funding through NFWF SWG/INSR and the Virginia Environmental Endowment. Examples of the LSC's success are included in the [Digital Resources Library](#).

Training and Capacity Building Workshops

In support of growing a strong and connected network of experts, the Green Fin Studio team hosted two one-hour workshops tailored for the action network. 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. 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.

Below highlights our lessons learned from both workshops:

- The reaction to our materials was largely positive. Participants noted wanting more materials to aid in their capacity and to be usable with different audiences (i.e., agricultural landowners, non-resident landowners).
 - Additional topics to consider for future work could include: materials around salt marsh restoration and the methods, resources on where to purchase wetland plants, and what plants can enhance your viewshed.

- We received feedback about additional education opportunities for practitioners on how they can incorporate community input into the custom materials.
- We also received feedback about the logistics of tidal wetlands related projects including:
 - The importance of having honest conversations with landowners about the lifespan of project benefits, timelines, and how to use these materials as a way to manage those expectations to maintain trust with landowners.
- Participants shared resources that would benefit the action network and be useful for outreach
 - Navigating communications with people that involve topics that pertaining to changing environmental conditions: <https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/>
 - Resource for utilizing dredged material in tidal wetlands and shoreline projects: <https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/maryland-dc/stories-in-maryland-dc/sediment-strategies/>
 - Resources on wetland plants:
 - <https://covaresilience.org/resources/wetland-plant-hub/>
 - (Virginia specific) <https://www.plantvirginianatives.org/>
 - Bay-friendly shoreline management practices: <https://www.allianceforthebay.org/project/bay-protector-pilot-program/>

Long-Term Communication Strategy

This multi-year communication strategy for action network members builds awareness and engagement with private landowners while increasing information sharing among wetland practitioners. The goal is to shift shoreline management practices toward behaviors that protect, enhance, and restore tidal wetlands. The components of the strategy include:

1. **Social media strategy**
2. **Newsletter template**
3. **Press release template**
4. **A digital resource library**

Social Media Strategy

Social media outreach should engage private tidal landowners using the key messages outlined in the Outreach Program (property protection, economic benefit, recreation benefit). Action network members are encouraged to collaborate on posts and tag partners to increase reach and visibility.

This social media strategy includes two complementary streams of content:

1. **General awareness posts** – Ongoing posts that educate, inspire, and build a baseline understanding of the value of tidal wetlands. These posts highlight the benefits, visualize the process, and offer solutions to common landowner problems.
2. **Targeted behavior change campaigns** – Focused, local campaigns designed to motivate specific actions. Each campaign uses the same core messages but with tailored taglines, calls to action, and creative content to move landowners towards the desired wetland behaviors.

General posts and campaigns can use the following content categories to develop engaging social media posts.

- Benefits – Highlight the benefits of the desired behavior to the homeowner, not just to the environment.
- Before and after – Use visuals to show the progression of adoption of the desired behavior.
- Problem and solution – Connect a common property issue (flooding, erosion, rising seas) to the wetland solution that will address the problem.
- Success stories – Share homeowner testimonials to normalize the desired behavior.
- Partner spotlights – Feature wetland organizations and contractors to familiarize the audience with the faces behind the work.
- Engagement-oriented – Ask the audience questions to drive engagement around the behavior.
- Seasonal connections – Tie posts to existing holidays, wetland and habitat-related observances, and the seasons. Examples include:
 - Feb 2 – World Wetland Day
 - March 20 – Spring Equinox
 - March 22 – World Water Day
 - April 3 – World Aquatic Animal Day
 - April 22 – Earth Day
 - May – American Wetlands Month
 - 2nd Saturday of May – World Migratory Bird Day
 - First week of June – National Fishing and Boating Week
 - June - November – Atlantic hurricane season
 - June 8 – World Ocean Day
 - September 4 – National Wildlife Day
 - 3rd Saturday of September – International Coastal Cleanup Day

For all posts, let your imagery do most of the talking and keep captions brief. Choose photos that help private landowners see themselves and their experiences in the story by depicting homes, private shorelines, families recreating, and common infrastructure problems (failing gray infrastructure, erosion, flooding).

General Awareness Posts

Action network members should incorporate general tidal wetland posts into their organization’s content strategy. These posts should aim to broadly educate on the value of tidal wetlands to homeowners and local communities. Posts do not necessarily have to be tied to a local region, so content types such as success stories and partner spotlights may not be as effective as posts that highlight general benefits, visualize the unique ecosystem, and appreciate the role of wetlands in our communities.

Content Category	Topic	Explanation
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Benefits	Property protection	Highlight how tidal wetlands dampen wave energy, absorb water, and reduce erosion
	Recreation benefit	Connect tidal wetlands to the health of the Chesapeake Bay for fishing, swimming, boating, birdwatching, and more
Before and after	Growth progression	Show how nature-based solutions transform a backyard from a muddy, eroding shoreline to a green, lush paradise
	Time lapse	Visualize wetland loss using satellite photos dating back decades
Problem and solution	Erosion comparison	Show a shoreline without wetlands experiencing erosion versus a shoreline with healthy wetlands
	Storm impact	Depict wave energy being dampened by shoreline vegetation
Engagement-oriented	Wildlife identification game	Quiz followers on species commonly found in tidal wetlands
	True or false	“One in ten of the Chesapeake region’s endangered species rely on wetlands for survival.”
Seasonal connections	World Wetland Day (Feb 2)	Feature beautiful wetland images and explain the valuable role of wetlands
	American Wetlands Month (May)	Post a series of wetland facts each week for the month

Campaigns

Social media campaigns are short-term, high-visibility pushes that target a specific behavior change in an area. They use the same messaging strategies as the general awareness posts, but pair them with strong calls to action that encourage landowners to adopt specific shoreline practices. Campaigns should target a specific geographic area to ensure messaging aligns with local regulations and partners are available to support interested landowners. Thus, organizations with a more local focus, rather than state-wide or multi-state, are better suited for social media campaigns.

Campaign 1: Mowing

Target behavior: Alter mowing practices

Goal: Maintain existing wetland vegetation

Call to action: Raise your lawnmower blade six inches (or higher) in wet areas to protect your shoreline.

Taglines/hashtags:

- Mow smarter, not harder
- Slow your mow, let it grow
- Mow less, enjoy more / Less time mowing, more time enjoying
- Raise the blade, protect the Bay

Content Category	Topic	Explanation
Benefits	Root depth illustration	Create a simple graphic depicting grass height versus root length to show the taller the grass, the deeper the roots
	Recreation enjoyment	Show people fishing, kayaking, or relaxing contrasted with a neighbor spending their summer on a mower
Before and after	Homeowner lawn transformation	Document the change over time of less frequent mowing
	Address barriers	Show that mowing less doesn't block views or reduce the aesthetic appeal
Problem and solution	Animation	Depict how plant roots soak up water and hold the shoreline in place
	Shoreline defender	Visualize how shoreline vegetation lowers wave energy
Success stories	Video testimonials	Feature a landowner who changed their mowing behavior and noticed a positive change on their property's shoreline
	Landowner quote	Quote a homeowner about time saved on yard work while protecting their shoreline
Partner spotlights	Interview with a local contractor	Have the professional explain how to set mower blades higher
	Feature a conservation partner	Highlight a partner working to educate homeowners on wetland maintenance best practices
Engagement-oriented	Polls	"How often do you mow your yard in the summer?" "What's your lawnmower blade height set at?"
	Quiz	"Which lawn protects your house better during storms? with photos of a short and long vegetation shoreline

Seasonal connections	Spring kick-off	Remind people when shoreline plants start growing again in spring to set their lawnmower blade higher
	Storm season reminder	Emphasize flood and erosion protection before hurricane season

Campaign 2: Native species

Target behavior: Plant native species

Goal: Enhance shoreline and wetland vegetation

Calls to action:

- Plant native grasses, flowers, and shrubs along your shoreline to strengthen your buffer, reduce erosion, and attract wildlife.
- Contact a certified [Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional](#) to enhance your shoreline with native species.
- [The Center for Coastal Resource Management \(CCRM\)](#) has a webpage dedicated to native wetland plant species. Interested landowners can visit the page and connect with a local nursery or landscaper to plant native.

Taglines/hashtags:

- Landscape for your protection
- Bulk up your buffer

Content Category	Topic	Explanation
Benefits	Recreation enjoyment	Show the homeowner enjoying their beautiful shoreline buffer through birdwatching, fishing, or swimming
	Vegetation defense	Share how tidal wetland plants hold the shoreline in place and reduce erosion
Before and after	Transformation video	Create a time lapse or other video that shows the growth of wetland vegetation
	Photo carousel	Show multiple photos of the shoreline through the seasons (blooms, wildlife stopping by, holding up against storms, etc.)
Problem and solution	Split graphic	Depict a turf grass shoreline not offering much to the homeowner compared to a lush native shoreline that protects the property
	Roots to the rescue	Create an animation that shows different native species and their roots sucking up water and holding the soil in place

Success stories	Video testimonials	Feature a homeowner who planted native grasses or additional vegetation and saw reduced flooding or erosion
	Landowner quote	Quote a homeowner talking about the positive changes they experienced after planting more natives
Partner spotlights	Interview with a local contractor	Speak with a Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional about designing shorelines that are beautiful and offer protection
	Feature a conservation partner	Highlight the work of native plant-related organizations such as Master Gardeners or a local nurseries
Engagement-oriented	Poll	“Which of these beautiful wetland flowers would you plant on your shoreline?” with 2-4 photos of wetland plant species
	Quiz	“Guess which shoreline attracts butterflies AND protects against erosion” with a side by side of a simple vegetated shoreline and a buffer with various native species
Seasonal connections	Planting season	Remind homeowners that it is time to plant vegetation to see property protection results later in the year
	Peak bloom	Show off wetlands with flowers in bloom

Campaign 3: Green infrastructure

Target behavior: Swap gray for green infrastructure

Goal: Install living shorelines

Calls to action:

- Contact/visit __[insert contact info/website here]__ to learn how wetlands/living shorelines protect your property.
- When it’s time to repair or replace your bulkhead, contact ___[insert contact info]___ for more information about more cost-effective green infrastructure like living shorelines.

Taglines/hashtags:

- Fight nature with nature
- Don’t just hold the line, grow it
- Where protection meets beauty
- Spend less, protect more

Content Category	Topic	Explanation
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Benefits	Infographic	Depict the benefits of a living shoreline versus a bulkhead over time (cost, habitat, property protection)
	Recreation enjoyment	Show homeowners and families fishing, crabbing, kayaking, and swimming around their property's living shoreline
Before and after	Goodbye gray infrastructure	Show the transformation of a bulkhead to a living shoreline
	Better with time	Show the multi-year progress of a living shoreline growth from planting to full establishment
Problem and solution	Cost comparison	Explain how bulkheads can cost a homeowner more money in the long run due to maintenance and repairs but a living shoreline grows stronger over time
	Erosion concerns	Show how shoregrass roots hold sediment on the shoreline
Success stories	Video testimonial	Feature a landowner who replaced gray infrastructure with green and have them speak about the positive changes they've seen
	Case study	Spotlight a property that weathered a major storm better thanks to green infrastructure
Partner spotlights	Interview with a local contractor	Have a contractor explaining the process of applying for and installing a living shoreline
	Feature a conservation partner	Showcase regional partners who assist landowners with funding and permitting
Engagement-oriented	Quiz	"Which type of shoreline [insert living shoreline benefit – attracts more birds, absorbs more water, etc.]." with options for living shoreline, bulkhead, riprap, turf grass, etc.
	Crowd sourcing	"Send us your favorite picture of your living shoreline!"
Seasonal connections	Fish spawning	Explain the role of wetlands in fish spawning or juvenile habitat
	Bird migration	During migration season, let homeowners species might stop by to their backyard living shoreline

Newsletter Template

A periodic newsletter will help keep the action network connected in between meetings while celebrating progress and highlighting opportunities for collaboration. The newsletter should be sent monthly or every other month by the Wetlands Workgroup staffer to the action network mailing list. The suggested newsletter sections below will keep the newsletter engaging and celebrate the action network efforts and wins. Action network members are encouraged to submit relevant content.

Suggested sections:

1. Outreach and engagement progress – Provide updates on the status of the implementation of the Outreach Program.
2. Partner spotlights – Feature the people working to implement tidal wetlands with private landowners.
3. Success stories – Showcase completed restoration projects and progress towards goals.
4. Events – Include upcoming action network meetings, workshops, clean-ups, and community science efforts. Action network members submit their events for inclusion in the newsletter.
5. Wildlife spotlight or wetland fun fact – Keep the newsletter engaging by including a quick feature that practitioners can enjoy reading.
6. Permanent links – Link to the Outreach Program document, Canva material templates, and a directory of action network members.
7. Funding opportunities – Include funding opportunities related to tidal wetlands and offer a way to connect interested partners.

The tidal wetland newsletter should match the brand guide of the Chesapeake Bay Program for colors, fonts, and tone of voice. Visuals should accompany sections where appropriate such as spotlights, success stories, and fun facts.

Press Release Template

Press releases are a valuable tool to share newsworthy updates with external audiences and raise visibility of efforts towards tidal wetlands goals. Press releases follow a standard format to ensure clarity and professionalism, see the template below. Distribute releases through partner networks, media outlets, and other relevant channels to maximize reach and impact.

Topics for press releases could include:

- Grant awards for tidal wetlands
- Completion of tidal wetland restoration projects
- New collaborative efforts around tidal wetlands
- Materials coming out from the Wetlands Workgroup
- Regulatory changes to make wetland restoration more streamlined

Name
Email
Phone Number (optional)
Release Date (Month Day, Year)

[insert your logo in the
upper right corner]

BOLD, ALL CAPS HEADLINE (Summarize the main point of your news with an
attention-grabbing title)
Optional subheader in italics

City, State – Begin with a compelling intro. Grab the media’s attention by saying why what you’re releasing is big news. Answer the questions: Why is this news significant? What’s “new” about it? Who is involved or made this work possible? Why should people care about it?

Use the rest of the press release to tell your story clearly and succinctly. Establish your credibility and background and don’t be afraid to toot your own horn a bit.

Include up to three quotes for a one-page press release. Make sure to include the name, title, and affiliation of each speaker. Where possible, include quotes from various stakeholders – partners, contractors, community leaders, or landowners – depending on the context of the release.

Adding a photo makes it easier for a journalist to run your story without having to contact you for one. Include a high-resolution photo relevant to the topic and a caption with photo credit.

Include details that a writer would need, including your call to action. Include any relevant links, upcoming events, or details associated with your news.

About [Your Organization]: End with a short paragraph about your organization/partnership. This could include how long you’ve been in business, a bigger picture of what you do than what is included in the release.

Press releases should balance brevity with rich details. Aim for it to be one page (not front and back). End with the series of ### marks below.

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Digital Resource Library

Educational Resources

This section compiles a non-exhaustive list of existing outreach materials, guides, and reports developed by various organizations around the Chesapeake Bay. These resources are designed for practitioners, landowners, and government officials to build understanding, foster buy-in, and encourage interest in tidal wetlands and living shorelines.

For practitioners:

- The National Center for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) evaluated the performance of natural infrastructure to understand if the coastal solutions provide habitat and protection. The results are displayed in a [StoryMap](#). NCCOS also has a [living shoreline infographic](#) available for download.
- Wetlands Watch created a resource, [Designing Living Shorelines for Sea Level Rise in Virginia](#), tailored for shoreline professionals seeking sustainable and adaptive solutions to combat the challenges posed by rising sea levels and coastal hazards. The guide provides technical guidance and real-world case studies. One-pagers are available to help distribute the information to [nonprofit organizations](#), [property owners](#), [government entities](#), [living shoreline professionals](#), and [real estate professionals](#).

For landowners:

- The Chesapeake Bay Program hosts the [Wetlands Work](#) website as a guide for agricultural landowners about the benefits of wetlands to clean water, wildlife, and the economy. Educational resources, case studies, FAQs, and funding programs are available to encourage agricultural landowners to restore wetlands on their property by connecting them with practitioners and funding programs.
- The Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission's [Fight the Flood](#) program is an information hub to connect property owners experiencing flooding and contractors/consultants to provide their services. The website provides information about potential flooding solutions and financial assistance programs available.
- NOAA Fisheries has a webpage dedicated to [understanding living shorelines](#) with information on the options, benefits, and steps to create a living shoreline. A [StoryMap on living shorelines](#) displays all of NOAA's living shoreline projects in the United States by region. Users can zoom in on a map of the Chesapeake Bay region and see projects implemented. This resource could be used to direct landowners to visit living shorelines installed on public properties.
- The Center for Coastal Resource Management (CCRM) has a [wetland plant gallery](#) with links to technical reports about each species. Use this resource to show landowners the variety of wetland species available and as a guide for landscaping their property.

For government officials:

- The Chesapeake Bay Program hosts the [Protect Local Waterways](#) website designed to support and inform local government leaders about how protecting the environment supports education, economic development, public health and safety, and infrastructure in their communities. The module [Preparing Your Community for Water Extremes](#)

educates local decision makers on how to better prepare for and reduce impacts caused by changing weather conditions and severe weather events, like flooding. Slide presentations, fact sheets, and infographics are available for download and customization.

Case Studies/Success Stories

To normalize the desired behaviors, locally relevant success stories allow private landowners to see themselves in others' stories and through shared property hardships and concerns. This section highlights a non-exhaustive list of case studies and videos that showcase successful projects, the people behind them, and the tangible benefits they've experienced. These stories help make the value of restoration relatable and attainable.

- The Wetlands Work website features six landowner [success stories](#) in the Chesapeake Bay watershed who have restored wetlands on their properties. In each story, you meet a landowner and learn about the funding programs that supported their work, the planners that helped them through the process and the benefits their restored wetlands have brought. Five of the profiles are agricultural landowners and one profile is a private landowner.
- The James River Association (JRA) has a five-minute video on their [Living Shoreline Cost Share Program](#) featuring property owners who have successfully used the program to fund and install a living shoreline on their property. JRA also developed a five-minute video about their [Living Shoreline Collaborative](#), a group of partners working together to implement resilient practices along shorelines in the tidal James River watershed.
- The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) created a three-minute video highlighting how Virginia [Waterfront Homeowners Fight Erosion with Living Shorelines](#) through partnership with the Elizabeth River Project. CBF also recorded a three-minute [Case Study: Homeowners Living Shoreline Stops Erosion](#) featuring a homeowner on the Eastern Shore of Virginia.
- The Elizabeth River Project (ERP) has a ten-minute video featuring one homeowner giving a testimonial on his [Living Shoreline Success on the Eastern Branch of the Elizabeth River](#). ERP also has a 30-second time lapse of a [Living Shoreline Installation with the Elizabeth River Project - Norfolk, VA](#) which is a resource to show landowners what the restoration process looks like.
- Wetlands Watch created a nine-minute video featuring a landscape professional discussing [Living Shoreline Installation, Permitting, & Maintenance at Roland Park](#) in Norfolk, VA.
- The State of Maryland has a seven-minute video [Learn about Living Shorelines](#) that explains the benefits, options, and installation process.
- The Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) has a five-minute video describing the installation of a [Living Shoreline](#) at Indian River Marina. DNREC also has a [Wetlands 101 series](#) with seven videos on wetlands.

Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

To successfully monitor and evaluate the success of a tidal wetlands Outreach Program to private landowners, both outreach and actual changes in wetland acreage would need to be tracked. The existing Chesapeake Bay Program Habitat Tracker could potentially be modified to include outreach efforts or these actions could be tracked through the Action Network and/or the Wetlands Workgroup.

To monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the Outreach Program, including landowner engagement levels and progress towards restoration goals, we recommend incorporating the following metric to track progress:

- Outreach Program Effectiveness: Gauge the degree of engagement and behavior change over time for tidal wetland landowners.
 - Social media
 - Time frame: Monthly
 - Metric(s): partner engagement (tagged posts, tracking likes/reactions, comments, reposts)
 - Action network metrics:
 - Organizational motivators (species goals, acreage goal)
 - Number of unique Canva visitors to the resources
 - Meetings of the action network
 - Number of landowners contacted
 - Number of informational materials distributed/downloaded
 - Number of attendees/views of the webinars
 - Pre/post survey
 - Landowner engagement metrics: For tidal wetland landowners, we want to move them from awareness to interest and ultimately action.
 - Awareness/interest (pre/post survey)
 - Number of landowners requesting site visits/technical assistance/applying for cost-share or permitting
 - Success stories/testimonials
- Restoration outcomes: Track the number of restoration projects and their overall impact.
 - Implementation
 - Number of projects completed
 - Total linear feet/acres of shoreline restored
 - Funding/cost-share
 - Environmental Impact
 - before/after photos showing reduced erosion
 - Habitat indicators (species observed, vegetative cover)
 - Water quality improvements
 - Reported maintenance needs

To highlight the effectiveness of this Outreach Program and the action network, we recommend pairing collected data with landowner testimonials, partner highlights, and relevant photos/video to visualize success and help grow demand for natural solutions.

Policy and Advocacy Roadmap

From our research and expert interviews, we have compiled a set of strategies aimed at integrating tidal wetland preservation and restoration goals into local and state policy agendas.

Ultimately, for policy to be successful, it must have the funding in place to support its implementation. During these uncertain times, funding may not be available to support existing, new, or revised programs or the maintenance needs that these programs may require.

Policy category	Inconsistencies	Recommended strategies
Living Shorelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The permit application process can be complex and slow for landowners, which can frustrate and/or intimidate landowners. ● There is inconsistent interpretation across localities and states about the policies which leads to inequalities in how policies are enforced. ● Living shorelines are the preferred shoreline protection option where conditions support them in Maryland, Virginia, and Delaware, yet landowners often do not understand the process of permit applications, construction, maintenance, or how living shorelines work for them. ● Contractors are frustrated that permit requests for projects that build for future conditions are denied due to the conversion of low marsh to high marsh. This was a comment received from a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The general permit is designed to prioritize and streamline nature-based solutions and make it easier for landowners to install a living shoreline on their property. ● Ensure that the general permit applications allow for nature-based solutions, thin-layer placement, and resilience of projects under future conditions. ● Collect and provide documented performance data on how living shorelines perform over the long term compared to hardened or gray infrastructure solutions and show examples of impact to neighboring properties.

	Virginia-based contractor but may extend beyond this state.	
Wetland mowing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Policy inconsistency: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No regulatory agency is tracking or enforcing mowing activity. As a result, there is no enforcement of the mowing policy.³ ● Aesthetics and social norms about property maintenance are hard to change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In Virginia and Maryland, there is an opportunity to educate localities on the threat to tidal wetland ecosystems from mowing and to provide guidance on how best to reduce its prevalence.³ ● Work to shift social norms and highlight the benefits landowners will see if they raise their mower bed or do not mow altogether. ● Delaware leads educational programs for landscape architects and real estate professionals on sustainable landscapes that includes recommended practices related to wetland mowing. Other states could adopt similar programs.
Easements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conservation easements do not account for sea level rise and marsh migration. As a result, many landowners whose land is under easement are at a disadvantage when marsh migration occurs. ● Easements on wetlands are usually considered to be in effect in perpetuity. That permanent nature is a deterrent to some landowners who would consider wetlands conservation projects if it didn't tie their hands so completely. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create easement programs to account for marsh migration; no current programs are available. ● Develop a wetland easement structure that allows some landowner flexibility.
Sustainability and Environmental Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Existing policies, programs, and easements generally do not account for sea level rise impacts and marsh migration spaces that would allow tidal wetlands to persist and create new marsh areas. ● The lack of clarity with programs and policies can cause confusion or legal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Migration Easements: Creating conservation easements (or add-on clauses to traditional easements) that account for marsh migration. ● Update comprehensive plans to map migration corridors and incentivize set-backs.

	<p>disputes over property rights and land use.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Landowners may resist a perceived loss of usable land. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer incentives (i.e., tax credits) for property owners who participate in long-term adaptive strategies (i.e., nature-based solutions). Create a behavior shift that encourages marsh migration. As tides rise, marshes will migrate inland. Shifting behaviors will help landowners accept the realities facing their property.
Funding and Technical Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A lack of qualified wetlands scientists to advise on projects. A lack of funding from localities to fund landowner outreach and conservation advisors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Circuit Rider for Wetlands Professional as an opportunity for Soil Water Conservation Districts to share staff and help alleviate capacity concerns. ENGO's and Wetlands Work can be leveraged to provide tools, funding, and capacity to alleviate lack of technical expertise with wetlands scientists.

³ Chesapeake Bay Trust. (2025, January 27). *The intersection of vegetated tidal wetland mowing with wetland protection laws, regulations and policies in Virginia and Maryland.* <https://cbtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/Wetlands-Mowing-Final-to-CBT-1.27.25.pdf>

Legacy and Knowledge Transfer

The Action Network is intended as a forum for ongoing knowledge exchange among practitioners. A summary of lessons learned during the development of this project are provided below.

Lessons Learned

From the literature review and conversations with wetland professionals, here is a consolidated list of lessons learned.

- **Build excitement.** Show photos and use language to increase demand for wetlands for all the benefits they provide. Promote wetlands as a feature homeowners are lucky to have, because they are!
- **Use clear, accessible language.** Avoid overly technical or politicized terms that may alienate or anger your audience. Find ways to connect through relatable, neutral language.
- **Build trust through consistent engagement.** Follow up, show commitment, and take the time to understand landowners' needs. Established relationships can create new opportunities for collaboration.

- **Meet landowners where they are.** Don't push too hard – if the answer is no, respect it. Use conversations with landowners as an opportunity to learn more and identify solutions that address their priorities. Small wins can create space for larger projects.
- **Start small.** Simple, low-risk actions (i.e., raising mower beds or avoiding wet areas altogether) can demonstrate positive results and open the door for bigger behavior changes.
- **Always follow up.** Checking in after a landowner takes action reinforces the commitment and increases the likelihood of lasting behavior change.

Success Stories

The incorporation of success stories into outreach materials show landowners the potential for their property and circumstances. They are a valuable tool that can vouch for the actions we want to encourage property owners to take. When incorporating success stories into outreach materials consider:

- Sharing locally relevant examples
- Highlighting properties with similar property features, challenges, or goals
- Showing visible results to visualize success (i.e., before and after photos)
- Emphasizing the benefits beyond conservation:
 - Economic value (cost savings, property protection)
 - Public health/safety (flooding, storm resilience, water quality)
 - Recreation/access (swimming, fishing, boating, viewing wildlife)
 - Protecting the health of the Chesapeake Bay

Communication Best Practices

Successful communication with private tidal wetland landowners begins with building trust and understanding. When working with landowners consider the following:

1. **Listen to learn – first, seek to understand:** Listening helps to uncover priorities, concerns, and motivations, which can help shape how opportunities are framed.
2. **Work with trusted messengers and community voices:** Partnering with trusted messengers can help strengthen credibility and open doors to new conversations.
3. **Connect the problem with an achievable solution:** Be sure to leverage how the solution benefits the landowner directly as well as the greater environmental benefit.
4. **Keep an open line of communication:** Clear, consistent communication that aligns with landowners' interests, explains next steps, and keeps the conversation going creates opportunities for long-term collaboration.

Appendix A: Tidal Wetlands Private Landowner Community Engagement: Outreach & Education Program

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Program Purpose and Goals

The purpose of this outreach and education program is to provide private landowners and coastal communities with resources that align with their concerns, needs, and interests and to account for the impacts of our changing environment.

A successful tidal wetlands landowner outreach and education program for the Chesapeake Bay watershed will incorporate several engagement strategies to educate landowners and coastal communities and drive behavior change. The messaging campaign and engagement strategies detailed below were developed from existing behavior change research and conversations with experts and practitioners who work in wetland restoration and conservation. These conversations gave us insights that are integral to understanding the importance of functional wetlands for landowners and communities. It also provided insights into the potential changes residents would consider adopting to improve their properties, protect their investments, and/or support productive wetlands and the benefits they can provide. Ultimately, the hope of this program is to grow interest and drive demand for tidal wetlands across coastal communities, especially with private landowners.

Our approach included the community-based social marketing (CBSM) framework developed by Doug McKenzie-Mohr for fostering sustainable behavior. The steps of that approach are outlined in the graphic below (from [CBSM.com](https://www.cbsm.com/)):



This document covers steps one through three of the CBSM process: selecting behaviors, identifying barriers and benefits, and developing strategies.

Tidal Wetland Behaviors on Private Lands

Although the goal of the landowner outreach is to restore tidal wetlands, interview conversations and existing research suggest that this request might not be the most effective behavior change to lead with. Additional behaviors include:

1. **Maintaining existing wetland vegetation:** In some areas, wetlands already exist or remain partially intact. Asking coastal landowners to make the active decision to maintain the existing wetland plants may be an easier request. However, aesthetic value or perceived tradeoffs with well-groomed lawn alternatives (i.e. turf) could determine if a landowner is willing to take this action.
 - a. **Altering mowing practices:** Raising a mower blade by 6" in areas immediately adjacent to wetlands and natural shorelines is a reasonable behavior change to which landowners are more likely to be receptive. Not mowing wetland areas at

all is preferred but may not be as palatable to homeowners as it may restrict access and/or alter their viewshed.

2. **Enhancing shoreline and wetland vegetation:** While maintaining existing wetlands is the low effort, high impact option, enhancing degraded wetlands also strikes an effective balance.
 - a. **Planting native species:** Conservation landscaping, like planting native wetland species to buffer a property owner’s shoreline, has many perceived benefits for a landowner and has the highest likelihood of being enacted in the surveys conducted by Action Research (2020).
3. **Installing living shorelines:** Living shorelines will likely be a prominent conservation strategy for waterfront landowners. Installing a living shoreline supports the ultimate goal of wetland restoration, can be a more financially and aesthetically attractive option for coastal landowners, and has legislative support, as they are the preferred shoreline protection option where conditions support them in Maryland, Virginia, and Delaware.
 - a. **Swapping gray for green infrastructure:** Some landowners have opted to protect their property with gray infrastructure solutions (i.e. jetties, seawalls, and bulkheads). Issues that can emerge from gray infrastructure (such as initial costs and ongoing maintenance) present an opportunity for practitioners to pitch the value of a living shoreline alternative.

Barriers and Benefits

Several perceived barriers to the adoption of the above wetland protection behaviors with tidal landowners were identified through existing research, reports, and interviews conducted to support the development of this document. The largest barrier is lack of landowner knowledge about the availability of technical assistance. Taking advantage of this assistance would likely reduce or eliminate associated barriers which include confusion about permitting, concerns about maintenance, and not knowing how to get started. Other perceived barriers include practitioners not being trusted messengers, social nonconformity, high cost, and concerns about wetlands attracting pest species.

Perceived benefits include preventing erosion and flooding, habitat creation (for birdwatching, fishing, crabbing, and more), aesthetics, and protecting the health of the Bay for living resources (fish, crabs, birds, etc.) and recreation.

The communication strategies that follow aim to help landowners overcome these perceived barriers, emphasize the perceived benefits, and achieve additional, unperceived cobenefits.

Behavior	Perceived Barriers*	Perceived Benefits*	Additional Benefits
Altering mowing practices	<i>Not known</i>	<i>Not Known</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased root density means more water absorption ● Less maintenance

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flood and erosion protection • Wildlife habitat
Planting native species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not wanting additional vegetation • Care commitment • Access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect the Bay • Right thing to do • Prevent erosion damage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wildlife habitat • Less maintenance
Installing a living shoreline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permit application • Cost of installation • Not confident in the solution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect the Bay • Aesthetics • Habitat for fish and shellfish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flood and erosion protection • Cleaner water • Long-term cost savings compared to hardened shorelines

*Top three perceived barriers and benefits from the 2020 Action Research report that surveyed attitudes for planting upland vegetation and installing a living shoreline. The report did not survey about altering mowing practices.

Communication Strategies

This section incorporates key takeaways from research and interviews to outline messaging strategies that support productive outreach and education and to engage private tidal wetlands landowners and coastal communities. Ultimately, there is no “one-size-fits-all” messaging strategy that will engage and motivate all audiences. However, private tidal landowners and coastal communities have several common interests that can be incorporated into an outreach strategy and the associated materials. Any communication and outreach campaign should include a clear call to action (CTA). CTAs are the bridge between the engagement component of outreach materials and the desired outcome of a target audience member taking the first step towards action.

Messaging that Works

To encourage adoption of the desired tidal wetland behaviors (maintain existing wetland vegetation, enhance shoreline vegetation, install living shorelines), practitioners must emphasize the benefits that will resonate with private tidal landowners.

It is important to remember that landowners have their own perspectives, values, and level of concern for the environment. The 2020 Action Research report found that coastal homeowners consistently ranked “protecting the health of the Chesapeake Bay” as a top attitude and benefit of adopting the desired behaviors. When a practitioner says “health of the Chesapeake Bay” they may be thinking about water quality, nutrients and sediment, and biodiversity. When a waterfront landowner says “health of the Chesapeake Bay” they are likely referencing their ability to enjoy the resource found in their backyard through swimming, fishing, boating, or viewing wildlife. Although they have different values underlying the use of the same terminology, adopting the desired behavior will benefit both parties’ values. The graphic below depicts this common scenario.



Messages that highlight personal benefits, including property protection, economic incentives, and recreation opportunities, are more likely to resonate with a landowner than the environmental benefits alone. Consider the following messaging frames to address landowner barriers and highlight landowner benefits, and use the calls to action (CTAs) to motivate them to take the next step towards the desired behavior.

Property Protection Benefit

Frame messages about tidal wetlands and living shorelines as the first line of defense for the landowner's waterfront property and a more effective alternative to hardened defenses like seawalls, riprap, and bulkheads. Coastal landowners deal with concerns like erosion, flooding, and sea level rise, so make it clear how maintaining or enhancing shoreline vegetation or implementing a nature-based solution can directly provide long-term resilience to those threats.

Core message: Wetlands are your natural shoreline defense.

Some potential taglines to use in outreach materials include:

- Fight nature with nature. / Landscape for your protection.
 - By lowering wave energy and holding your shoreline in place, wetland plants are natural defenders against storms
- Plant a wetland and watch the benefits grow. / Don't just hold the line, grow it.
 - In addition to protecting you from storms and erosion, wetlands/living shorelines provide other benefits like more birds to watch and fish to catch.
- Where protection meets beauty.
 - Wetlands/living shorelines are a beautiful, natural solution to defend your shoreline against storms and erosion. Alternative hard structures like riprap and bulkheads do not offer the aesthetic and wildlife habitat benefits provided by wetlands/living shorelines.
- Bulk up your buffer.

- Adding native plants to your shoreline strengthens its ability to protect your home by lowering wave energy and holding your shoreline in place.

Economic Benefit

Hardened shoreline options like seawalls, bulkheads, and riprap typically cost more than a living shoreline in terms of installation and maintenance. They also degrade over time from wave and storm damage, leading to expensive repairs. In contrast, living shorelines grow stronger over time as plants and root systems mature, helping to absorb more wave energy and stabilize the shoreline. (Source: [NOAA Fisheries](#))

Despite the cost benefits for a nature-based shoreline solution, the financial cost of installing a living shoreline is cited as a major barrier for many coastal landowners (Action Research, 2020). Thus, messaging should address the economic cost, long-term cost savings associated with a wetland over a hardened shoreline, and the programs available to offset costs, if applicable.

Core message: A tidal wetland/living shoreline is a smart, cost effective, long-term investment in your property.

Some potential taglines to use in outreach materials include:

- Spend less, protect more.
 - Living shorelines cost less than hardened shorelines (bulkheads/riprap) for both installation and maintenance and perform better during major storms.
- A natural investment. / Invest in nature.
 - Over time, living shorelines become more stable as plants and root systems grow, decreasing wave energy and holding your shoreline in place. Hardened shoreline alternatives like riprap and bulkheads degrade over time and are costly to repair.

Recreation Benefit

Coastal landowners often choose to live along the water because they love the views and easy access to their favorite outdoor activities (boating, kayaking, fishing, hunting, swimming, birding, and more). These recreational experiences depend on clean water, healthy habitats, and thriving wildlife, which are directly supported by wetlands and living shorelines. Connect your messaging with the recreation activities that coastal landowners enjoy.

Core message: Wetlands and living shorelines protect what you love about waterfront living – clear water, abundant wildlife, and easy access to the outdoors.

Some potential taglines to use in outreach materials include:

- Tidal wetlands are for nature enthusiasts. / Experience nature up-close in your own backyard. / Birds, butterflies, and crabs – oh my!
 - Wetlands/living shorelines support thriving, diverse habitats for birds, fish, crabs, butterflies, and more.
- Living shorelines work hard, so you can play harder.

- Wetlands/living shorelines filter pollutants and trap sediment for clean water—that means safer water for fishing, swimming, and boating.
- (birding) Tidal wetlands make for the best birdwatching!
 - Waterfowl, wading birds, and shorebirds visit wetlands for foraging, nesting, and raising their young.
- (fishing) Reel in the benefits of tidal wetlands/living shorelines.
 - Tidal wetlands/living shorelines support spawning and hatching grounds for many species of fish and shellfish.
- (swimming) Safer swims start with smarter shorelines.
 - Living shorelines filter pollutants and trap sediment for cleaner water in your backyard.

Calls to Action

Behavior	Calls to Action
Altering mowing practices	Raise your lawnmower blade six inches (or higher) in wet areas.
Planting native species	<p>Contact a certified Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional to enhance your shoreline with native species.</p> <p>The Center for Coastal Resource Management (CCRM) has a webpage dedicated to native wetland plant species. Interested landowners can visit the page and connect with a local nursery or landscaper to plant native.</p>
Installing living shorelines	<p>Contact/visit __[insert contact info/website here]__ to learn how wetlands/living shorelines...</p> <p>... protect your property. (protect)</p> <p>... are a cost-effective alternative to hardened shoreline options. (econ)</p> <p>... enhance your property for recreation. (recreation)</p>

Case Study: Mow Smarter, Not Harder

Literature review and expert interviews revealed a common but unrecognized threat to tidal wetlands: mowing. Many coastal landowners like the backyard aesthetics of a mowed lawn and may not know the benefits to allowing wetland vegetation to grow near the shoreline.

The Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control has found greater success when asking landowners and homeowners associations (HOAs) to make a small mowing behavior change instead of asking them to stop mowing entirely. In community-based social marketing, agreeing to a small request leads people to agree to a subsequent larger request. A public commitment, such as a yard sign, could further reinforce the behavior and contribute to social diffusion.

Target behavior: Raise the mower blade to six inches or higher when cutting in wet areas.

Perceived barriers:

- Aesthetics – Prefer the turf grass look
- Blocks waterfront views
- Attracts pests (mosquitoes, snakes)
- Reduces access to shoreline

Perceived benefits:

- Improves flood and erosion protection – Taller plants support deeper root systems that absorb runoff and stabilize shorelines.
- Enhances wildlife habitat – Healthy wetlands support birds, butterflies, fish, crabs, and more.
- Reduces mowing effort – Less frequent or intense maintenance.

Messaging strategy:

Coastal landowners don't have to give up access or views to enjoy a healthier shoreline. Simply raising your lawnmower height gives you more: more protection, more wildlife, and more free time. Normalize the behavior as easy, beneficial, and still compatible with scenic views. Reframe taller vegetation as a natural asset for your protection, not a nuisance.

Suggested messaging taglines:

- Mow smarter, not harder
- Slow your mow, let it grow
- Mow less, enjoy more / Less time mowing, more time enjoying
- Raise the blade, protect the Bay

Call to action:

- Raise your lawnmower blade six inches (or higher) in wet areas to protect your shoreline.

Tips for Successful In-Person Engagement

Face to face meetings, whether one-on-one with a landowner or in a public meeting setting with a community, are an important part of the engagement process. In addition to providing an opportunity to educate and inform, this is also the time for you to listen and learn. Because social marketing is an iterative process, it is critical to take advantage of opportunities to reevaluate the information needs, motivations, perceived barriers to, and perceived benefits of wetland conservation and restoration for tidal landowners and coastal communities. This allows you to tailor your message or pitch to meet the audience where they are and have the audience be receptive to your request.

This document will give some insight into this, but it is important to remember that every individual and community has a different background, perceived knowledge and value of

wetlands, understanding of the issues, experiences on their property or neighborhood, and unique features that define their landscape. There are also locally specific regulations that dictate what options are available to homeowners to consider. Additionally, the relationship that property owners have with wetlands vary. Not every person wants or sees the value of a wetland on or adjacent to their property. Further, there are place-based histories connected to wetlands, especially in rural communities, that should be considered.

Incorporating the following strategies into your face-to-face engagement with landowners and community members will help put you on the path to success.

Ask intentional questions

To overcome the perceived barrier of distrust in practitioners, make a point to ensure that a landowner or community member feels heard. Basic questions that allow you to understand the nature of the issues being faced as well as the individual's understanding about what is going on will give you the information you need to tailor your communication approach. Some example questions include:

- What issues are they experiencing on their property? (i.e. flooding, shoreline erosion, saltwater intrusion, regularly inundated areas, restricted access, septic system concerns, groundwater impacts).
- What do they think is causing the issues? This gives you some insight into how to continue the conversation. The point after all is not to get into a debate about cChanging environmental conditions or sea level rise but to find solutions that work for everyone.
- What do they think the possible solutions are to these issues? This helps make the encounter conversational and lets the landowner know that you value their input.

Listen to learn

The questions you ask are important, but the answers you receive may provide key insights into the condition of the property as well as problems the landowner is facing. When you listen to learn, you create an opportunity to meet the landowner with solutions that are tailored to their specific situation.

Use local success stories

Sharing success stories and connecting landowners to locally-relevant examples will help normalize the idea of tidal wetlands on private property. Seeing that a “neighbor” addressed similar problems using a wetland makes the idea relatable. It also dispels a perceived social barrier that they would be the only one in their region adopting this approach. See the [Outreach Toolkit](#) for examples of wetland success stories.

Keep an open line of communication

After connecting a landowner to a solution that fits their needs, you should always make the effort to keep in touch. Lack of support and not knowing where to go with questions are perceived barriers that can be addressed. When a landowner knows they have a well-informed

and supportive person in their corner, it helps keep them engaged, builds trust, and may present you with future opportunities to work together.

While trusted messengers keep landowners engaged and improve chances of funding success, capacity limitations are common for outreach partners. Having materials to share with landowners, such as one-pagers and FAQs, can help alleviate the people-power needed to share information. Pointing landowners towards existing resources maintained by partners is another way to lighten the outreach load (see the [Outreach Toolkit](#) for examples of educational resources).

Recruit local trusted messengers

As described in the 2020 Action Research report, shoreline property owners in Maryland and Virginia are tight-knit communities with respected and knowledgeable long-term owners; neighbors are the most trusted information source when it comes to shoreline management. Residents often ‘scope out’ their neighbor’s management practices on their property when they are recreating on the water. Recruiting these respected community members is key to advance behavior adoption in these insular communities. Not only do local messengers increase the chances of other landowners changing their behavior, but they reduce some of the capacity limitations of outreach partners by empowering community members to champion behavior change themselves.

The next highest tiers of trusted messengers for information about managing their shoreline would be friends and family followed by contractors. Similar to neighbors, family and friends are tight-knit, see the property firsthand, and can provide trustworthy feedback that property owners use as inspiration for their land use decisions. Contractors are viewed as technical experts who are well-versed in landscaping, hardscaping solutions and can help homeowners decide how to navigate issues they may be facing on their property. The [Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professionals](#) network is an existing group with a directory of certified professionals that could be explored to see if they would benefit from any outreach support.

Literature review and expert interviews identified additional professionals and organizations that could serve as trusted messengers.

- Property and legal professionals: Real estate agents, real estate attorneys, and appraisers all interact with a homeowner at some point during the real estate transaction process. This group of professionals could be outreach targets to help identify new waterfront property owners and provide educational resources when properties turn over. From a social marketing standpoint, research has shown that when people’s circumstances have changed such as moving into a new house, they are more inclined to adopt new behaviors and habits (McKenzie-Mohr, 2025). Property and legal professionals are therefore ideally positioned to provide information on living shorelines and wetlands as their clients are likely to be at their most receptive during the purchasing and moving process. It is important to note that real estate agents may have competing self-interests that do not align with conservation goals.

- [The Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control \(DNREC\)](#) has experienced success with training real estate agents to steer homeowners to DNREC resources. They offer a three-hour course with Continuing Education Credits for real agents on land use and flood planning. Real estate agents must take a certain number of continuing education credits per year (variable by state) to maintain their licenses.
- Residential community groups: Homeowners associations, civic leagues, and other hyper-local groups centered around a specific community could be prime outreach targets, especially focused on neighbor-to-neighbor conversations and how wetlands benefit and safeguard their neighborhood.

Based on Action Research’s survey, universities and nonprofits are the least trusted messengers. Therefore, extra effort should be made to distribute information from other messengers, or at the very least, university and nonprofit branding should be left off of materials developed for landowners. For this reason, the fact sheet templates in the [Materials](#) section of this document do not carry the Chesapeake Bay Trust logo. Organizations can add their brand information to the footer of the templates, but should keep trusted messengers for their audience in mind.

Outreach Toolkit

This toolkit compiles resources to support engagement with private landowners about tidal wetlands and living shorelines. It draws from newly developed materials and existing resources created by other organizations.

The four sections include:

1. Educational Resources – Curated examples from government, nonprofit, and academic groups to help explain tidal wetlands and living shorelines to different audiences.
2. Case Studies & Success Stories – Homeowner testimonials developed by various organizations in the Chesapeake Bay that show the process and benefits associated with wetland restoration and living shorelines.
3. Materials – Original, customizable templates developed for this program, including fact sheets, postcard mailers, and social media posts that can be tailored to fit your outreach needs.
4. Outreach Recommendations – Additional outreach and engagement ideas identified through background research and expert interviews that are worth exploring in the future.

Use this toolkit to save time, build on what already works, and adapt outreach for your specific audience and location.

Educational Resources

This section compiles a non-exhaustive list of existing outreach materials, guides, and reports developed by various organizations around the Chesapeake Bay. These resources are

designed for practitioners, landowners, and government officials to build understanding, foster buy-in, and encourage interest in tidal wetlands and living shorelines.

For practitioners:

- The National Center for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) evaluated the performance of natural infrastructure to understand if the coastal solutions provide habitat and protection. The results are displayed in a [StoryMap](#). NCCOS also has a [living shoreline infographic](#) available for download.
- Wetlands Watch created a resource, [Designing Living Shorelines for Sea Level Rise in Virginia](#), tailored for shoreline professionals seeking sustainable and adaptive solutions to combat the challenges posed by rising sea levels and coastal hazards. The guide provides technical guidance and real-world case studies. One-pagers are available to help distribute the information to [nonprofit organizations](#), [property owners](#), [government entities](#), [living shoreline professionals](#), and [real estate professionals](#).

For landowners:

- The Chesapeake Bay Program hosts the [Wetlands Work](#) website as a guide for agricultural landowners about the benefits of wetlands to clean water, wildlife, and the economy. Educational resources, case studies, FAQs, and funding programs are available to encourage agricultural landowners to restore wetlands on their property by connecting them with practitioners and funding programs.
- The Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission's [Fight the Flood](#) program is an information hub to connect property owners experiencing flooding and contractors/consultants to provide their services. The website provides information about potential flooding solutions and financial assistance programs available.
- NOAA Fisheries has a webpage dedicated to [understanding living shorelines](#) with information on the options, benefits, and steps to create a living shoreline. A [StoryMap on living shorelines](#) displays all of NOAA's living shoreline projects in the United States by region. Users can zoom in on a map of the Chesapeake Bay region and see projects implemented. This resource could be used to direct landowners to visit living shorelines installed on public properties.
- The Center for Coastal Resource Management (CCRM) has a [wetland plant gallery](#) with links to technical reports about each species. Use this resource to show landowners the variety of wetland species available and as a guide for landscaping their property.

For government officials:

- The Chesapeake Bay Program hosts the [Protect Local Waterways](#) website designed to support and inform local government leaders about how protecting the environment supports education, economic development, public health and safety, and infrastructure in their communities. The module [Preparing Your Community for Water Extremes](#) educates local decision makers on how to better prepare for and reduce impacts caused by changing weather conditions and severe weather events, like flooding. Slide presentations, fact sheets, and infographics are available for download and customization.

Case Studies/Success Stories

To normalize the desired behaviors, locally relevant success stories allow private landowners to see themselves in others' stories and through shared property hardships and concerns. This section highlights a non-exhaustive list of case studies and videos that showcase successful projects, the people behind them, and the tangible benefits they've experienced. These stories help make the value of restoration relatable and attainable.

- The Wetlands Work website features six landowner [success stories](#) in the Chesapeake Bay watershed who have restored wetlands on their properties. In each story, you meet a landowner and learn about the funding programs that supported their work, the planners that helped them through the process and the benefits their restored wetlands have brought. Five of the profiles are agricultural landowners and one profile is a private landowner.
- The James River Association (JRA) has a five-minute video on their [Living Shoreline Cost Share Program](#) featuring property owners who have successfully used the program to fund and install a living shoreline on their property. JRA also developed a five-minute video about their [Living Shoreline Collaborative](#), a group of partners working together to implement resilient practices along shorelines in the tidal James River watershed.
- The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) created a three-minute video highlighting how Virginia [Waterfront Homeowners Fight Erosion with Living Shorelines](#) through partnership with the Elizabeth River Project. CBF also recorded a three-minute [Case Study: Homeowners Living Shoreline Stops Erosion](#) featuring a homeowner on the Eastern Shore of Virginia.
- The Elizabeth River Project (ERP) has a ten-minute video featuring one homeowner giving a testimonial on his [Living Shoreline Success on the Eastern Branch of the Elizabeth River](#). ERP also has a 30-second time lapse of a [Living Shoreline Installation with the Elizabeth River Project - Norfolk, VA](#) which is a resource to show landowners what the restoration process looks like.
- Wetlands Watch created a nine-minute video featuring a landscape professional discussing [Living Shoreline Installation, Permitting, & Maintenance at Roland Park](#) in Norfolk, VA.
- The State of Maryland has a seven-minute video [Learn about Living Shorelines](#) that explains the benefits, options, and installation process.
- The Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) has a five-minute video describing the installation of a [Living Shoreline](#) at Indian River Marina. DNREC also has a [Wetlands 101 series](#) with seven videos on wetlands.

Materials

Practitioners find it helpful to have simple materials to use with landowners that explain program options, the value of wetlands, and overview the process. The following material templates are for practitioners to use with coastal homeowners during the outreach process. Two fact sheets, four postcard mailers, and three social media templates that can be customized with your organization's branding, photos, and locally relevant information. The fact sheet and postcard

templates have been created in Canva, a free, user-friendly graphic design tool, so organizations can customize the text, photos, and contact information. See [Appendix A](#) for instructions to access, customize, and download in Canva.

Fact Sheet

Below are two fact sheets for practitioners to customize with their organizations information and locally relevant photos and examples for use with coastal landowners. The first focuses on the challenges and concerns waterfront landowners face and tips to make waterfront homeownership more enjoyable. The second focuses on a nature-based solution to support shoreline stabilization, reduce flooding, and runoff.

[Waterfront Living: How to Protect Your Property](#)

Waterfront Living How to Protect Your Property

Waterfront living offers stunning views and direct access to nature. It can also present unique challenges for coastal landowners, including increased flooding risks, shoreline erosion, and potential property damage from coastal storms. Tidal wetlands are a natural and cost-effective solution to these challenges.

Top 5 tips for waterfront living

- 1** **Keep what you have.** Wetlands are a benefit, not a problem - if you have a wetland on your property, consider yourself lucky! Wetlands soak up flood waters and are a first line of defense for your property.
- 2** **Mow smarter, not harder.** Do you have an area of your property that is constantly or periodically wet? Do yourself and your shoreline a favor: raise your lawnmower blade six inches (or higher) in damp areas to allow wetland plant roots to grow deep and lock soil into place, preventing erosion.
- 3** **Plant native.** Native wetland species are great at stabilizing shorelines that protect your property; let them! Locations where wetlands used to be are the obvious places to plant wetland species.
- 4** **Invest in nature.** Waves, wind, and storms can erode coastal properties. A living shoreline is a great solution that decreases wave energy, reduces runoff, keeps your shoreline in place, and also saves you money on maintenance and repairs. This investment also attracts wildlife, like fish, birds, and crabs, for you to enjoy.
- 5** **Don't just hold the line, grow it.** Preserving or enhancing a wetland or investing in a living shoreline provides much more than shoreline protection; choosing a natural solution over jetties, seawalls, and bulkheads is preferred by your state and has proven cost-savings. They are also more visually-pleasing and can grow your property value!

Grow your expectations

When you invest in restoring a wetland or installing a living shoreline, you will reap the benefits for years to come. After they are established, these solutions are generally self-maintaining and require little to no additional effort from you. Natural buffers fight nature with nature, rather than trying to stop natural processes. Grow a lasting resilient and scenic asset to support your property's shoreline!

How to get started

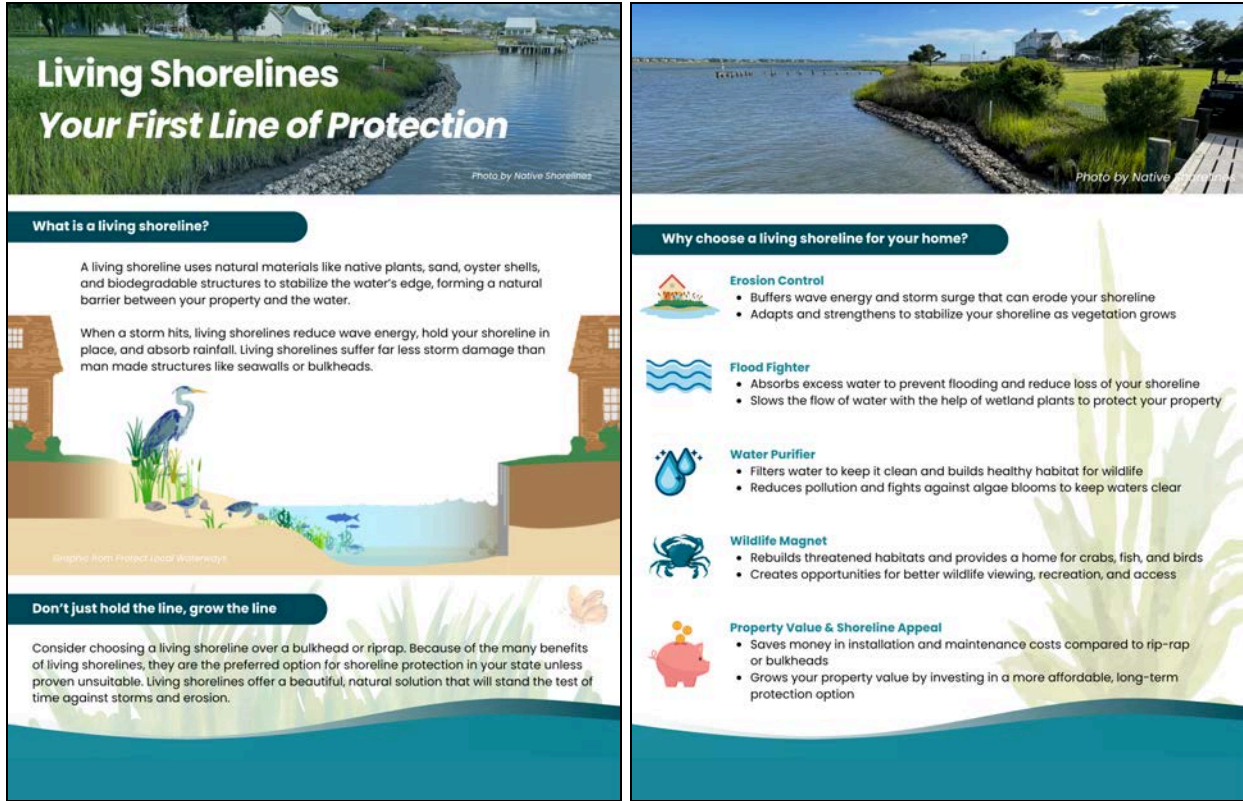
- Research options available in your area by talking to neighbors with living shorelines and reach out to local professionals.
- Permit applications can be time consuming, but experts are available to help.
- Some natural solutions are free or low-cost, like mowing less and planting more. A living shoreline is comparable (if not cheaper) than riprap and bulkheads.
- Funding opportunities are available to offset the costs for qualifying homeowners.

Want more information?

Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professionals (CBLP) - CBLP is a network of certified landscape professionals who are familiar with nature-based solutions and can help you implement them on your property.

The Center for Coastal Resource Management (CCRM) - CCRM has a webpage dedicated to native wetland plant species. Interested landowners can visit and connect with a local nursery or landscaper to plant native vegetation.

[Living Shorelines: Your First Line of Protection](#)



Postcard Template

The following customizable [postcard](#) templates are for organizations to send through targeted mailing efforts to initiate first contact with private landowners. The selected messages are intended to be eye-catching and encourage landowners to take the next step to adopt the desired behavior.

Four versions are available to align with various behavior targets and messaging strategies.

Nature

Behaviors – Plant native species/install living shorelines

Messaging strategy – Recreation benefit



ADDRESS

Living shoreline-specific

Behavior – Install living shorelines

Messaging strategies – Property protection/economic benefit



ADDRESS

Wetland mowing

Behavior – Altering mowing practices

Messaging strategy – Property protection



Enhancing vegetation

Behavior – Plant native species
 Messaging strategy – Property protection



Social Media Templates

Social media is a powerful tool to reach coastal landowners. When used strategically, it can raise awareness, normalize the desired conservation behaviors, and inspire action.

Social media is for a general audience and users do not want to read paragraphs of text. So, use plain, relatable language and rely on your imagery to tell most of the story. These templates are intended to be customized by tidal wetland-focused organizations, so they should incorporate their own local examples and success stories. Always end with a clear call to action to encourage the user to take a specific next step such as visiting a website or sending a message for more information. Use hashtags to take advantage of the platform's algorithm, such as: #TidalWetlands, #LivingShoreline, #ShorelineSolutions.

Like the messaging section of this strategy, your goal is to sell how wetlands benefit the landowner directly, so focus on property protection, economic incentives, and recreation opportunities. Use the following social media templates to build your own locally relevant posts that will speak to your community of coastal landowners.

Before & after

Show, don't just tell. Visualize the progression of a tidal wetland or living shoreline construction and growth. Where possible, use before, during, and after photos to visualize to landowners what the process looks like.

Suggested copy:

How it started vs. how it's going: Living shoreline edition

A homeowner in Hampton Roads, Virginia, worked with the James River Association to fight erosion with a living shoreline.

Now? No more worrying about collapsing banks or falling trees, just peaceful days fishing off the dock and watching oysters thrive right under their feet.

Want to see if this could work for your shoreline? Visit our living shorelines webpage for more information: ____.

Suggested imagery:

Photos can be uploaded as separate photos or put side-by-side in a collage. The Instagram platform is well-suited for 'carousel' posts where users swipe to see additional photos.

Before / After (year 2)



Before / During / After (year 2)



Photo credits: James River Association

Talk about the benefits

People are more likely to act when they believe the action benefits them, not just the environment. Refer to the messaging section of this outreach and education program for recommended ways to frame the benefits of tidal wetlands to private landowners.

Suggested copy:

Tidal wetlands aren't just good for the environment – they're good for you.

- ✓ Storm protection
- ✓ Erosion control
- ✓ Water filtration
- ✓ Clean water for recreation
- ✓ Wildlife viewing

Wetlands offer property protection plus enhanced recreation opportunities for all your fishing, birding, and boating fun!

Visit our webpage on tidal wetlands to learn more: _____

Suggested imagery:

Where possible, photos should depict homeowners on their private tidal wetland or living shoreline, so the audience can picture themselves adopting the desired behavior. Having the home in the photo is a plus.



Photo credits: Green Fin Studio

Connect a problem to the solution

When landowners are experiencing an issue on their property, they will want to know exactly how your suggested tidal wetland or living shoreline solution is going to address their problems.

Suggested copy:

The problem? Erosion, flooding, and rising seas on your shoreline.

The solution? Tidal wetlands.

Let nature do the work by choosing a wetland that holds your soil in place, buffers storms, and filters out pollutants.

Learn more about wetland solutions for your property on our website: ____.

Suggested imagery:

Photos should depict common problems landowners may encounter on their property. Shoreline erosion, high wave energy, high tides, and wet spots on lawns or farms.

Photo credit: Adrian Jones,
Integration and Application Network



Outreach Recommendations

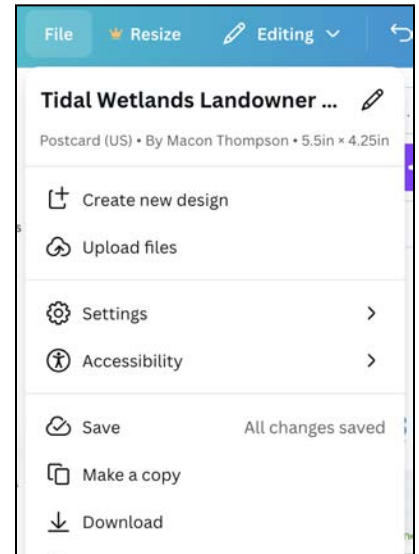
Background research and interview conversations identified additional opportunities to strengthen outreach to private tidal wetland landowners. The recommendations in this section outline potential strategies that could be explored when future capacity and funding allow.

- Maintain the [Wetlands Work website](#) as a resource for practitioners and landowners. Expert interviews reveal that practitioners use the website as a centralized place to send interested agricultural landowners. These resources support informed decision-making for private lands and offer success stories, information on programs, and answers to frequently asked questions. If resources allow, Green Fin Studio recommends that Wetlands Work be expanded beyond just agricultural landowners so that the resource can be used by all wetland landowners. This expansion would require significant revisions to the existing copy and structure of the websites along with semi-regular updates as program and funding opportunities change.
- Design a landowner education campaign around wetland mowing to discourage the destructive practice. Property owners may not be aware that mowing their shoreline vegetation is not a preferred practice. A community-based social marketing approach to wetland mowing could involve backyard signage for coastal landowners to make the behavior more visible to neighbors and more quickly diffuse the behavior in the community.

Appendix A: Canva Template Instructions

To access the editable fact sheet and postcard template:

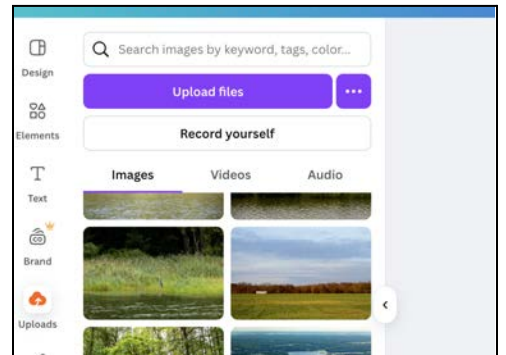
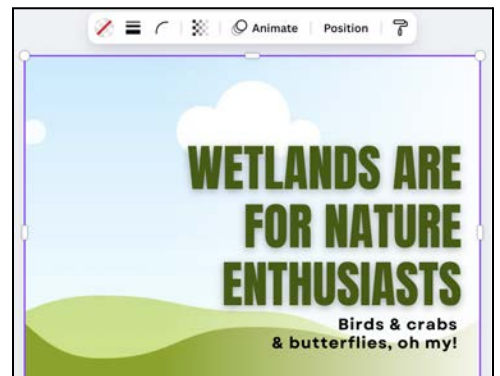
1. Log in or create a free [Canva](#) account.
2. Open the tidal wetlands fact sheet template ([Waterfront Living](#) or [Living Shorelines](#)) or [post card template](#). The files are shared as “view only” so you will need to make a copy of the desired file to begin editing.
3. In the upper left corner, click “File” to open the dropdown menu. Then, click “Make a copy”.
4. Your editable copy should automatically open.



To customize the fact sheet and postcard template:

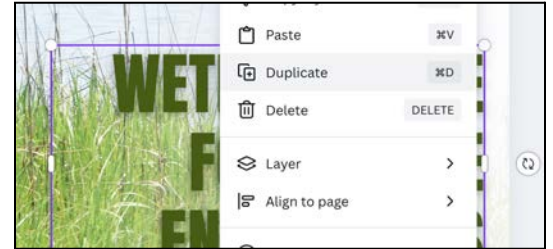
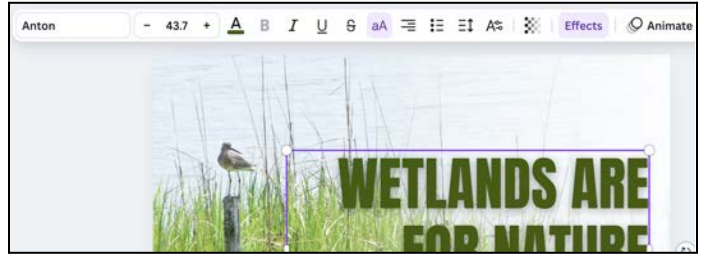
1. Replace photos:

- a. The template uses photo frames to easily allow photos to be swapped. Click on the existing photo and either hit the ‘delete’ key on your keyboard or click the trash can icon to delete the image. The frame will stay behind and have blue sky and rolling hills imagery.
- b. To upload your own photo, select “Uploads” in the toolbar on the left. Click the purple button “Upload files.”
- c. This will open your computer’s file system. Select the desired image file.
- d. Once uploaded, the photo will appear under uploaded images. Click the photo to add it to the page.
- e. Click on the photo and drag it on top of the empty frame and it should auto fill into the frame.
- f. To resize the image, double click and use the white circles at the corners to make the image larger within the frame (more zoomed in) or click and drag to reposition the image within the frame.



2. Edit text:

- To customize the text boxes, hover over the text and a text box will appear. Double click on the text box to begin editing.
- To change the text font, size, or color, click on the text box and a menu will appear at the top of the screen with tools to customize the look of the text.
- There are two ways to make a new text box. Make a copy of an existing text box by right clicking on the text box and clicking "Duplicate." Or, in the left toolbar, click "Text" and then click the purple button "Add a text box." The second option will be a text box with a default font and size, so make customizations as needed.



3. Add your logo:

- In the toolbar on the left, select "Uploads" and then click the purple button "Upload files."
- This will open your computer's file system. Select the desired logo file.
 - TIP: Upload a high-resolution, transparent background copy of your logo file (usually a PNG file type).
- Once uploaded, the logo will appear under uploaded images. Click the logo to add it to the page. Use the white circles at the corners to resize the logo. Click and drag to reposition on the page.



4. Download your completed file:

- In the upper right corner, click "Share" and a menu will open.
- In the bottom left of the menu, click "Download" and the download menu will open.
- Select your desired file type (PNG, JPG, PDF). PNG is the suggested file type for a postcard to ensure the images and text remain high-resolution.
- Select if you would like to download just one page or multiple pages.
- Once your settings are complete, click the purple "Download" button.

