

## Agriculture Workgroup (AgWG)

### Meeting Minutes

June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

### Meeting Materials

### Summary of Actions & Decisions

**Decision:** The AgWG approved the [minutes](#) from the May AgWG meeting.

**Action:** AgWG members with additional comments, questions, or concerns on the Agroforestry recommendations and path forward, please contact Eric Hughes ([hughes.eric@epa.gov](mailto:hughes.eric@epa.gov)), Katie Brownson ([Katherine.brownson@usda.gov](mailto:Katherine.brownson@usda.gov)), Ruth Cassilly ([rcassilly@chesapeakebay.net](mailto:rcassilly@chesapeakebay.net)), and Caroline Kleis ([kleis.caroline@epa.gov](mailto:kleis.caroline@epa.gov)). The AgWG will be asked to vote on the recommendations at a future meeting.

**Action:** Please reach out to Bill Keeling ([William.keeling@deq.virginia.gov](mailto:William.keeling@deq.virginia.gov)), Eric Hughes ([hughes.eric@epa.gov](mailto:hughes.eric@epa.gov)), and Caroline Kleis ([Kleis.caroline@epa.gov](mailto:Kleis.caroline@epa.gov)) with any additional follow-up questions or comments pertaining to the proposed change from VA DEQ on the application of upland buffer credit for Phase 7.

**Action:** Bill Keeling, VA DEQ, will return to a subsequent Watershed Technical Workgroup meeting for a final vote on the proposed change in methodology for buffer upland credit in Phase 7.

**Action:** AgWG members with suggestions or improvements to the planning document, please reach out to Kathy Brasier ([kjb24@psu.edu](mailto:kjb24@psu.edu)), Caitlin Grady ([Caitlin.grady@gwu.edu](mailto:Caitlin.grady@gwu.edu)), Eric Hughes ([hughes.eric@epa.gov](mailto:hughes.eric@epa.gov)), and Caroline Kleis ([Kleis.caroline@epa.gov](mailto:Kleis.caroline@epa.gov)).

**Action:** AgWG staff will work to finalize the planning document, incorporating any remaining feedback, and will post the final document once it is available.

**Action:** AgWG members will be asked to look over the final planning document and vote on its approval in July.

### Intro & Announcements

10:00 **Welcome, roll call, review meeting minutes – 5 minutes**

*Kathy Brasier, AgWG Chair*

- Roll call of the governance body
- Roll call of the meeting participants - *Please enter name and affiliation under "Participants" or in "Chat" box*
- **Decision:** The AgWG approved the [minutes](#) from the May AgWG meeting.

### CBP Assignments

10:05 **Agroforestry EPEG: Update and Pulse Check – 40 minutes (presentation and discussion)** *Ruth Cassilly, CBPO Nonpoint Source Policy Analyst; Eric Hughes, AgWG Coordinator*

The Agroforestry Expert Panel Establishment Group (EPEG) first convened in August of 2024. Over the last 10 months, the EPEG has met with the purpose of evaluating NRCS Conservation Practice Standards (CPS) Silvopasture 381 and Alley Cropping 311 for their water quality benefits and

considering them for Chesapeake Bay Program BMP crediting. Ruth and Eric provided a brief update on the EPEG's preliminary findings ahead of the drafting of a final recommendation report. The EPEG was interested in knowing if the AgWG has comments to provide on the work done to this point or any questions about the recommendations that will likely advance. The AgWG will vote on the final recommendation report at a future meeting.

**Discussion:**

**Dave Montali:** I heard about this first at the Watershed Technical Workgroup, so I am just recently hearing about this. But, I'm hanging up on the idea that the NRCS practice in itself is not credible, and you have to add on another requirement on top of that practice in order for it to have a water quality benefit. It seems like it would be so much easier if information is provided. Do we get the NRCS practice was implemented in order for tracking and reporting? Did you guys try to make that work? The initial thing was to evaluate these practices and see if there should be a benefit. It seems like, as they stand, there is no benefit, because there's no recommendations on tree canopy or tree cover, but yet it still seems like they probably do have something and should have something in there to say we want trees, but not too many trees, so the grass still grows.

**Ruth Cassilly:** Dave, that's a good point. The main point being here that, for NRCS, for silvopasture, we do not want a credit by thinning. But, that practice is happening, and the reason for that is because the nuances in the model can't tell us whether the existing forest that they started with was a healthy forest or a forest that was in a deteriorated condition. So, the biggest change we made from the silvopasture is to only credit silvopasture by addition. The reason I am showing the data sheets here is that every NRCS data sheet really does have plenty of options for recording the nuances in the practice that the state would need in order to get crediting. For example, here you can check whether you've done prescribed grazing on this acreage. You can check your purpose for doing this. You also have to fill out whether or not you are establishing trees into existing pasture or establishing in a wooded area. So, the data sheet is already composed so that if the state communicates to the conservation district or whatever technical service professional is providing the assistance, the right information can be obtained that would allow us to provide crediting through the model. The alternative is to not credit it at all, especially if we don't provide some credit in now from this report, it won't go into Phase 7, which will just put it off. The states are putting funding into these practices and technical assistance, so I think the feeling was we have a system that's normally an annualized system for both acreage alley cropping and silvopasture, and what's happening with the way we want to credit this is that you're adding trees to that system. You are perennializing that system and getting all the benefits of adding trees into a production system, but you're not getting any credit for doing that. So, it's still being treated like an annual crop system, which has a much higher loading rate. So the thought was, this is happening, hopefully it will continue to happen in greater and greater numbers, because the way we want to move is to give more resiliency and co benefits and diversification and farming systems. So, giving some credit now for the way this is done. I will point out, alley cropping really wasn't changed. For having the minimum tree canopy, what we did base that on is if alley cropping is put in, if you have a warm season grasses, they only can stand 25% canopy cover before they start to decline in production. So, we're using that requirement for light. When someone puts the system in, they'll do it and if it fits our criteria, they will get credit. But, we're going to set the bar low enough that pretty much it's going to fit that system, and that's going to be inherent because their trees will not be too thick, so that their forages will not thrive. We're estimating, based on the

literature, that that's going to be somewhere between 25-35% canopy coverage. So, we'll probably err on the conservative side, maybe providing a 20% or 25% canopy coverage for both of these practices. It's not huge, but it's something.

**Dave Montali:** That's my point. Again, I don't know where West Virginia is going to come out on this. I don't think the state is initiating anything. But, if the idea is when the practice is going to go in, it's going to have 20 to 35% tree canopy, wouldn't it be better to say that practice counts if all the information you have is that the practice was applied. That's the other thing. It's difficult for West Virginia to dig into all these details associated with the Federal Cost Share. At best, we can get some information that there were this many acres of this practice. So, for what it's worth, why do you need to specify that if you're anticipating that the practice would go on under NRCS standards would meet what you're going to prescribe?

**Ruth Cassilly:** I don't disagree with you theoretically. It's just that there's no mandate for how many trees you have to put in at this point. So, what we wanted to avoid is for someone who was just going to put a tree every 50 feet and then say I have an alley cropping system. Since NRCS doesn't credit their practices, they design them, but they're not being credited, they don't have a minimum requirement. We were going to provide guidance with this and say this is about how many trees you would need. That's something we were going to discuss with the EPEG in our meeting on Monday. But, again, I'm showing you the alley cropping data sheet right here. Normally, what you would do with this practice is record how many rows and the spacing within rows. So, you can get from that information do you have the required number of trees per acre to just meet that minimum requirement? If so, you can report this to the Bay Program for credit. That might happen every single time, but we just wanted to give some validity to the fact that these practices have enough trees on them that they should be getting some water quality reduction benefits. I don't disagree with your point, and maybe that can be part of our discussion as well on Monday, because it hasn't been raised before, and I appreciate it.

**Bill Keeling:** I'm going to kind of mirror Dave. It's more from the Technical Workgroup perspective. You are showing these data sheets, but none of that information is what we get when we get NRCS data provided to us or USDA data. We're getting aggregated data, so I am having a hard time understanding how a separately reported prescribed grazing will or will not automatically be credited to these acres if we report them or if it is inherently included in the estimated loadings. Again, there's nothing in the current USDA data that allows us to associate an acreage of prescribed grazing with any other BMP.

**Ruth Cassilly:** I get what you are saying. The way that we would verify that at the Bay Program is just to ensure that they can check whether or not prescribed grazing has happened. The way that I understand it is that if NRCS functions in a county level office, they can determine whether prescribed grazing happened on that acreage and, when this particular BMP gets passed on, the prescribed grazing BMP will also be applied. So, what we would check for at the Bay Program is that the number of acres you submit for silvopasture has to be matched by the number of acres submitted for prescribed grazing. So, those acres have to be equal, much the way that the supplemental acres, cannot exceed the core acres. They have to at least be the same or more core than supplemental. It would be the same thing. You have to either have the same number of acres for these two BMPs or you could have a lot more prescribed grazing acreage than you have silvopasture. But, you at least have to have as much as you have silvopasture, if that makes sense. That's the way that we would look to say, yes, prescribed grazing is happening as silvopasture is happening. Now, keep in mind, that's going to become part of the definition as I said, within the

next year or so. If that's the case, they may want to revisit this. This recommendation we are making is only for the next 8-10 years, because we know that a lot is going to change with the land use. A lot is going to change with these practices as they are being implemented more and more and the definition from NRCS is changing in the next year. So, this is what we are recommending for now. I'm assuming that, at the state level, if MDA were to get information from the county, they would at least be able to tell them, yes, both of these practices were implemented. We know that because it's filled in on the data sheet, and then it would be MDA's responsibility.

**Bill Keeling:** MDA is one state and one agency. That is not applicable universally, what they can or can't see or do, or the data they get. So, I'm, right now, a little more leery on your silvopasture BMP. The alley cropping seems a little more straight forward, particularly if you can define stems per acre or some density. I also have concerns that what will be actually reported is acres of forests that have been fenced that allow livestock to go into and graze and exist in, and not actually what you are describing.

**Ruth Cassilly:** Yeah, that's always the danger that a state will report something that shouldn't be credited that actually is getting credited. I think that's a danger with every BMP, but the standards we're setting for silvopasture is that it's by addition. So, it's the responsibility of the technical service provider who is verifying that. If you look right here, it says established trees into existing pasture. That's what needs to be checked, and if that's not the case, then it would not be credited. It would not be eligible to be submitted, because it's a silvopasture by moving animals into the woods, rather than silvopasture by adding trees. But, there is a space to indicate which you've done on the existing data sheet.

**Bill Keeling:** Again, the data is provided to Virginia and then Virginia is supposed to be submitting in a verified way. I don't see that we're going to get this linkage, and most conservation plans and practices require things like nutrient management to also be included. But, again, we simulate those differently and separately. I'm just not seeing how they marry so well here. I'm assuming that we're not going to get the information that's in these data sheets, at least what will be submitted to me, which will be aggregated according to their rules. So, if there's very little of this, all I could end up with is somewhere in Virginia, there were so many acres of silvopasture, and that would be a lot less than the total acres of prescribed grazing. But, I can't be assured that any of those acres are prescribed grazing, other than it was in the standard, we're tied to it, and how that actually gets simulated that way.

**Eric Hughes:** Ruth, I am going to jump in there. I think that's a good point. I'm wondering if that's something that maybe we can take back and discuss further with the EPEG and we can put our heads together on that.

**Emily Dekar:** I would suggest, instead of having them be stacking practices, that silvopasture is a standalone practice and then you're not reporting silvopasture and prescribed grazing, but when you're reporting silvopasture, that includes the prescribed grazing in it. So, when you are reporting that to the model, it's all one practice then the credit would reflect that. As far as the ease of reporting, that seems the easiest to me versus trying to decide whether or not you also have prescribed grazing on the same acreage that you are reporting silvopasture on. If the standard is going to require prescribed grazing for silvopasture anyways, then it's all the same practice. So, you're going to have a certain amount of acres of silvopasture that already includes prescribed grazing. Just make it one practice. That's my suggestion.

**Ruth Cassilly:** I have a meeting with Jess and Olivia to talk about how this would work in CAST as well. So, we can definitely talk about options for that approach.

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**Marel King (in chat):** I think I heard Ruth say that there are very few acres of these practices under NRCS, and that most of the acres are through other programs. So, to what extent will the limits on NRCS data sharing be a factor if other programs are the driver? Do those other programs base their practice in the NRCS standard?

**Eric Hughes:** Good point, Emily. Marel, do you want to come off mute and verbalize your comment?

**Marel King:** Sure. I think I heard Ruth say in the presentation that there are a very small number of acres enrolled in NRCS programs for this practice and that other programs are the drivers- state programs or extension programs. So, do we really expect a lot of these acres to come out of NRCS, or are we expecting other partners to be reporting this data? I guess, to what extent are these NRCS limitations a factor? They are a factor, and I'm totally hearing and understanding what folks are saying. But, in the grand scheme of things, how much of a factor are they going to be in the scale of the practice itself?

**Ruth Cassilly:** Thank you for asking that. That's a great point. So, the reason I put these tracking sheets on is to show that states wouldn't have to kind of reinvent the wheel with the information that's already on these sheets that could be used at the state level. But, you are absolutely right. A lot of this is already happening at the state level. So, in Maryland, the MACS cost share now includes these practices. The healthy soils grant includes these practices. Then, in Pennsylvania, we have Trees for Grazers in Lancaster County who have implemented 45 different silvopasture projects in the last few years. So, reporting, I would hope that they could work with local conservation district offices at the county level and track these practices. So, that's a great point. Not a lot would just be happening at the federal level. I think that, in my mind, that's why I am thinking, yes, the counties would have access to what happens, what is getting collected, and they would be able to verify, yes, this was implemented according to standards. I know that, in Virginia, they have not, at the federal level, implemented these as widespread. But, through the university, they are working to increase these through Appalachian Sustainable Development. So, a lot of what is happening is happening privately. Same in New York, Cornell Extension, Brett Chedzoy in New York has given a lot of trainings on silvopasture, but that's all happening outside of NRCS. So, that's a great point to make. I'm just making the point here with these data sheets that we don't have to reinvent the wheel in terms of the data that we need to come up with in the sheets, the collection sheets. We can use what exists and modify it as needed. The communication burden would be on the state, obviously, to communicate with counties and non-profits that this is creditable, here's what you need to do that. Here's the data that needs to be collected.

**Eric Hughes:** Thank you all for the input here. Seems like we are naturally coming to a close right on time. If there are further questions put them in the chat, and I think Ruth is going to stick on, so maybe we can have some back and forth there. So, Ruth, thank you so much for that. This will come back to the group after we consult with the EPEG next week and there is more information to share.

**Ruth Cassilly (in chat):** Thanks Marel, In terms of whether the NRCS standards are adhered to by those other entities- it depends. The state programs use the NRCS standards as a basis, and may add additional guidance. In terms of other technical assistance entities, they may only refer to those standards if they are receiving some type of state or federal funding.

**Emily Dekar (in chat):** In NY we would not be expecting to use any of the NRCS reported data that we receive that is aggregated to report acres of silvopasture.

**Anne Coates (in chat):** Question - is there an assumption that other organizations implementing Silvopasture using NRCS standards?

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**Ruth Cassilly (in chat):** Hi Anne- thanks for that question, I think the answer to that depends on who is implementing, if its the state, they are using the NRCS standards, if its private or nonprofit not necessarily- it would depend partially on where they are getting any grant funding from

**Amanda Barber (in chat):** Is there still credit for tree planting if prescribed grazing criteria is not met?

**Ruth Cassilly (in chat):** Currently the CBP credits tree planting, but only on land that is retired out of ag production. The EPEG is recommending that silvopasture is not credited in CAST unless rotational grazing occurs

**Scott Heidel (in chat):** Seems like a neat BMP but I have concern that it will create more work that the jurisdictions will need to do and that it seems very top down rather than coming from the local level up, meaning there would be significant effort to get this adopted, implemented, verified and reported, and that would fall on the jurisdictions when we are already stretched.

**Ruth Cassilly (in chat):** Thanks Scott- We have several representatives on the EPEG that are directly implementing these practices and are also farmers. While I appreciate your comments, approving these practices for credit does not mandate that states report them, it just gives them the option to do so.

**Action:** AgWG members with additional comments, questions, or concerns on the Agroforestry recommendations and path forward, please contact Eric Hughes ([hughes.eric@epa.gov](mailto:hughes.eric@epa.gov)), Katie Brownson ([Katherine.brownson@usda.gov](mailto:Katherine.brownson@usda.gov)), Ruth Cassilly ([rcassilly@chesapeakebay.net](mailto:rcassilly@chesapeakebay.net)), and Caroline Kleis ([kleis.caroline@epa.gov](mailto:kleis.caroline@epa.gov)). The AgWG will be asked to vote on the recommendations at a future meeting.

## Data & Modeling

10:45 **Application of Buffer Upland Credit for Phase 7 – 40 minutes (presentation and discussion)** *Bill Keeling, VA DEQ*

Bill returned to the AgWG to continue discussion on a proposed change to the methodology for buffer upland credit application for the Phase 7 watershed model. Bill presented this proposal to the Watershed Technical Workgroup (WTWG) in April and to the AgWG in May. The proposal was shared with the AgWG for our awareness and to give our group the opportunity to provide any comments or concerns before the WTWG votes on this proposal at a subsequent meeting.

### **Discussion:**

**Emily Dekar (in chat):** Could you explain the huge changes in other land uses when making the pasture upland credit 0%. For example Ag open Space going from 50.22% in PA to 2.23%? There are other examples as well, but that is the biggest jump.

**Bill Keeling:** In my mind, we should not be using ag open space as a place to apply buffers, because that is the land use we use to represent the buffer. But, having said that, you could have an established grass buffer that you later plant to forest. In which case, it would go to a forested buffer. But, again, these are all grass and forested combined, and there is some mechanism by which that ag open space provides some percentage. But, I can't speak to why Pennsylvania's



numbers change from 50.22 here to 2.23. We have a much more proportional distribution. So, instead of 29% on hay, you're only getting 12% of your upland from hay and, instead of roughly 71% from cropland, you're only getting 24% of your upland benefit from cropland and the rest have been distributed based on the current methodology between pasture and ag open space. So, when we do a much more proportional distribution, that means that more of what was applied to hay is being provided. In other words, if we're applying 29% of the acres to hay in this situation, a much higher percentage of the upland benefit is coming from hay and cropland and, therefore, much less would be derived from your ag open space. So, I hope that sort of explained why that number would shift. But, basically, we are making it more proportional to the land use the BMP is applied to, instead of a different proportion that includes land uses the BMP was not applied to. Does that make sense?

**Emily Dekar:** Yeah, I think that makes a little more sense. My question was more like how the proportional distribution was done. I was just using Pennsylvania as an example since that was a huge difference that was kind of a glaring huge change from 50% to 2%. You could look at the cropland and say, ok, it went from 25% to 74% as well. So, it just seemed odd when the pasture wasn't really that large of a percent and then, all of a sudden, all the other land uses changed pretty drastically as well. So, I was just curious as to how those changes were made.

**Bill Keeling:** Again, this is a percent of the total acres applied. So, I could have shown acres, but it got so busy. I thought providing the percent application provided the point better.

**Jess Rigelman:** I'm very happy to look into the numbers, Emily, but we're looking at this at a state scale, and this could just be the result of it at the county scale. The change just made a big change in a few counties, based on a few data, but it's basically the redistribution which took it off there, and it's really going to depend, in general, how much pasture there was versus the non-pasture and then where those records are. So, a couple of records here and there could make a big difference. If you want me to actually dig into the numbers, I am happy to do so.

**Emily Dekar:** That's fine. That makes sense. Thank you.

**Dave Montali:** I think this is a principles thing, and the ask is first from Virginia that we don't apply non exclusion buffer upland credit to pasture and, if you think that the upland buffer credit is most associated with the land use that you apply it to for the second part, that all makes sense to me. It looks like we should be doing the same thing for both non exclusion and exclusion. So, on the exclusion buffers, we say you put the credit on pasture. On the non-exclusion, we go through some process to put it on all ag, and those are very different things. The first part, though, you can't have a non-exclusion buffer applied to pasture. So, my question is, when you get into CAST, and I apologize because we don't do a lot of cover strips or non-exclusion buffers in West Virginia, but I assume you have an option to say that non exclusion buffer was a crop or it was on ag or some combination of things. I don't know how you can report it.

**Bill Keeling:** Yes, Dave. We can report land uses associated with a BMP.

**Dave Montali:** Ok. So, any individual land use or even some default ag, right?

**Bill Keeling:** If you don't report, it defaults to the current methodology, which would have the exclusion on pasture and the non-exclusion spread over things toward the upland benefit.

**Dave Montali:** Ok, but my understanding was that no matter what you put the practice on, that non-exclusion upland credit goes to everything. Am I wrong on that?

**Bill Keeling:** It comes from everything.

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**Dave Montali:** Ok. Can the upland credit practically be applied to the land use to which it was reported? In other words, you put it on crop, you apply the upland benefit to crop. If you put it on hay, you apply the benefit to hay. Can that practically be done?

**Jess Rigelman:** That can only practically be done if we have separate BMPs for each. Well, sure, that can be done. But, I think what you're going to end up doing is getting a lot of cut off. Meaning, if you submitted on hay, therefore that record will get proportioned to the hay land uses and the hay land uses only. Then, we could say the upland benefit only goes to those two. If it was 50% other hay, 50% leguminous hay, so 10 acres each, then we could say those 10 acres the upland benefit goes to 40 acres of other hay and 40 acres of leguminous hay. But, the reason we don't do that, and the reason we aggregate it up to what Bill is proposing, crop hay, is because you are doing a land use change. So, you are taking acres away. So, you don't necessarily have hay in the upland of where it is. It could be cropland. It could be something else. I get what you're saying and that it likely would be hay, and it is hay because you reported it on hay. But, whether you have four times the acres upland or not, we don't really know, because we're in a land river segment. So, I guess what I'm saying is we can do that, but you're going to end up getting a lot more cutoff. That is, eventually, what's going to be the result.

**Dave Montali:** So, it'd be more practical to apply it only to crop and hay, but that opens up the ag open space issue as well, I guess.

**Jess Rigelman:** We can exclude ag open space if that's a recommendation that the Watershed Technical Workgroup wants to take up. But, again, you're taking away a land use that could get cutoff. Putting those in the mix as far as when you're multiplying it by 4, just helps you out. But, that certainly is something that could be addressed.

**Bill Keeling:** The other consideration here is you're going to get more benefit from the upland that's applied to cropland and hay than you will on a per acre basis from ag open, because ag open has such a low load to begin with. So, that's why the loads went down for nitrogen and sediment. We also have to remember that phosphorous did go up, but we currently decouple sediment and phosphorous, if I remember correctly. So, that 70% of phosphorus that's sediment bound is not really being factored here. That's why, often we see in Phase 6, phosphorous goes up when sediment goes down or vice versa, since they're no longer coupled.

**Emily Dekar (in chat):** I do want to add that I agree that removing the pasture upland credit from non-exclusion buffers makes total sense to me.

**Scott Heidel (in chat):** Can this be done through GIS to collect everything upslope of the buffers and then apply the benefit to those entire areas throughout the watershed?

**Eric Hughes:** Thank you, Bill. I want to mention briefly here Emily's comment in the chat, because I think it brings us back. I think that's really, from our standpoint, the input that would be valuable to provide to the Watershed Technical Workgroup. Some of these weedier discussions, that can be a Watershed Technical conversation. Certainly good to have everybody on the same page, but I think it would take quite a while, maybe I am just speaking for myself, to fully wrap our heads around the minutiae and the changes in the numbers in this chart, for example. So, Emily, I appreciate the comment. Ken, is there something that you wanted to add?

**Ken Staver:** Just a quick comment about how buffers get done. On the Delmarva, it's mostly CREP, and it's a time and it's a place. To start the buffer, it has to be in production. But, what happens upland in the buffer is not specified. So, crops change, so a 15 year contract, it could be pasture for a while, it could be hay, it could be corn, it could be soybeans. When corn prices went way up, there were pastures that got plowed and planted with corn. So, it's 10-15 year contracts, so what



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happens upland, you can't really specify it when you install the buffer and say it's going to be this specifically for the next 15 years, and that's not a requirement.

**Amanda Barber (in chat):** Someone could argue that exclusion upland credit shouldn't be limited to pasture.

**Bill Keeling:** Well, for fencing, whether it's USDA or Virginia ag cost share, you're signing up for 10 years. You're saying I'm going to keep that fence intact and maintain it for 10 years. You're doing that because it is pasture and livestock is there.

**Ken Staver:** I'm not talking about exclusion buffers.

**Bill Keeling:** Well, again, you don't really have exclusion in mostly cropland areas. My experience is if the soils are productive enough to make a certain threshold of corn and grain, then land is too valuable to not be doing a rotation, 3 crops, 2 years, your standard corn, small grain, double crop, bean. The less productive is generally in grass. I permitted farms for biosolids and other things back in the 90's, and I have looked at aerial imagery from last year, and they're still pastures and grass today, now going on 40 years later. I haven't seen that big switch. Maybe the coastal plain that are pastures that are high enough productivity that you could change them around. But, if you have exclusion fence you've signed up for, then you're excluding pasture.

**Ken Staver:** We aren't proposing any change for the exclusion buffers, are we?

**Bill Keeling:** No. We are just saying that upland credit currently being derived from pasture for non-exclusion should stop. It should come proportionately from the hay and cropland that it is being applied to.

**Ken Staver:** I don't have any big argument. The discussion can be can we look exactly what's upland from these buffers? I don't think anybody wants to be trying to change every year what is upland of the buffers, right?

**Bill Keeling:** With upland, there's probably more likelihood that forest is also upland, not just ag, but we've excluded forest from providing upland benefit. Maybe we shouldn't.

**Ken Staver:** Well, there are certainly fields where the drainage from upland forested areas does go through buffer. So, I guess it's very variable, but there's not a big change here. Generally, what's happening here is you're trying to apply the reduction credit to higher loading land uses to get a little more reduction. I don't really have a big problem with that.

**Bill Keeling:** No. I am saying that it should be proportional to how we apply them, instead of disproportional. I mean, if we are in fact applying 26% to hay and 74% on cropland, why wouldn't the proportion of upland be similar? Why should it be so drastically less?

**Ken Staver:** I guess I am talking about the bottom line. The bottom line is you're eliminating a lower loading land use from having the reduction applied to it. So, that's the bottom line.

**Scott Heidel (in chat):** This seems like a great case to include new code into Phase 7 to evolve the model into a more automated and interactive GIS based model instead of tracking BMP records.

**Bill Keeling:** We're saying that is exclusively for pasture, and that's currently the only way in Phase 6 the pasture exclusion BMPs can produce a reduction. There was a suggestion last time we met for everything to go the old way, and that can't happen in Phase 6 based on how exclusion is being done now. So, it's either we leave things the way they are, or we accept this proposal and move it forward. But, it's A or B.

**Ken Staver:** Alright. But, to be clear, there's been no change proposed for the exclusion buffers, right? Nothing's happening there.

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**Bill Keeling:** Correct. It's just how we deal with this upland portion and what land uses are going to give credit or where it's derived from. So, really, it's just making exclusion exclusive to pasture, and that's it.

**Jess Rigelman:** I want to make sure I am correct on something Bill said, and I probably misinterpreted it. This is a change you're proposing for Phase 7, correct? This isn't something that you want for Phase 6? That would violate rules.

**Bill Keeling:** Yes. For Phase 7, I'm saying let's make this change, and if the assumption is that we're going to assume that the upland area mirrors the area that a BMP is applied, we should be giving the Modeling Team explicit instructions on how to do this and not just leave it as up to their own devices. I think they would much rather have a clear set of directives than being left to trying to figure it out on their own. So, yes, for Phase 7, this is what I am recommending. Not anything between now and then.

**Eric Hughes:** Thanks for that clarification, and we are almost at time. I do see we have two hands. Just trying to gauge, does anybody have a big problem with this?

**Dave Montali:** I think the sense of this group is the group doesn't really have a problem with the very simple proposal to not give upland benefit to pasture from practices that don't go on pasture. That seems very simple to me. But, looking at these two slides, toggling between the current process and the proposed process, for West Virginia, I see it acting very much like Virginia in that the non-exclusion buffers half go on crop and hay, yet the upland benefit, 40% of it is applied to pasture. So, that just seems wrong, and I think that's what Bill is saying. Please correct me if I say something that is not what you are thinking, Bill. But when you go to the next slide, without getting into whether you apply the non exclusion to the practice that it was submitted or not, it has the effect of really putting that pasture and hay upland proportion real consistent with the practices it goes on. I think that's kind of important in that if you allowed it to go on all ag except pasture, then it's going to go on the proportional land uses that you have for ag in that area you are doing it. So, it almost just naturally gravitates without having any further constraints on excess. Just don't apply it to pasture, and everything will be alright.

**Bill Keeling:** I would argue that, regardless of what happened in terms of excess or back out or the loads, this is more logical and more representative of what the BMPs are really doing. So, to me, it makes more sense.

**Eric Hughes:** Dave, I think you started your point there with where we wanted to end it, which is great. We certainly want to give the group the opportunity to say otherwise, but it sounds like there's really no serious issue with what is being proposed here. So, again, it's not final. It's not like the AgWG said this is approved now. It's just that we didn't identify any bleeding neck issues. It goes back to the Watershed Technical Workgroup, and they take it from there. I don't know if more discussion is going to be had or if it's just going right to a vote, but that's for them to decide. Unless there's anybody who wants to jump in and say hold on a second, there are some serious issues here, then I think we can feel good about moving this on.

**Scott Heidel (in chat):** looks good, and thank you Bill.

**Action:** Please reach out to Bill Keeling ([William.keeling@deq.virginia.gov](mailto:William.keeling@deq.virginia.gov)), Eric Hughes ([hughes.eric@epa.gov](mailto:hughes.eric@epa.gov)), and Caroline Kleis ([Kleis.caroline@epa.gov](mailto:Kleis.caroline@epa.gov)) with any additional follow-up questions or comments pertaining to the proposed change from VA DEQ on the application of upland buffer credit for Phase 7.

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**Action:** Bill Keeling, VA DEQ, will return to a subsequent Watershed Technical Workgroup meeting for a final vote on the proposed change in methodology for buffer upland credit in Phase 7.

## **AgWG Planning**

### **11:25 AgWG Planning Document Review – 20 minutes (presentation and discussion)**

*Eric Hughes, AgWG Coordinator*

Eric reviewed the latest draft of the planning document presented at the April and May AgWG meetings, highlighting the changes that have been made since the May meeting and updates to the list of action items under each objective. Particularly important to this conversation were discussions on next steps, including how to take the document from a draft to final version, and how it can be used to build future AgWG agendas.

#### **Discussion:**

**Kathy Brasier (in chat):** This is also an invitation - if you have or know of projects in your networks that speak to these topics, please let us know

**Amanda Barber (in chat):** Should we be reviewing documentation to assist with more clean-up/clarification and changes like we discussed today for the buffers?

**Kathy Brasier:** I see Amanda's comments about reviewing this, and, yes, there will be a chance to review the final version in the next few weeks. But, I want to open it up, and if there are any comments or questions or suggestions about specific projects, work that could be done, or if you have heartburn about moving this towards finalization in the coming weeks.

**Ken Staver:** Should we state explicitly somewhere that we're dealing with emerging issues on an as-needed basis? I don't know if it's in there anywhere. It just seems like, here we are, and stuff happens, and it seems like we should have flexibility to say we're not going to stick to the agenda if something happens that we have to deal with. We're going to comment. I feel like we've kind of been put in a little box on some issues. I was just thinking about the lead article in the Bay Journal, Karl Blankenship's article about nitrogen. It feels like it's an issue that's right in our wheelhouse. It's the big thing we're dealing with on meeting our TMDLs and why we haven't done very well. I don't know. It seems like it's the main thing. Do we have a way to have that in the document? It's hard to keep up, playing too far ahead. It just feels like we should explicitly be a group that says we are going to deal with emerging issues.

**Kathy Brasier:** We went round and round on this as well when we were trying to draft up the document. We can take a hard look at it and see if there is that language to invite action on emerging issues. I think we were trying to make sure that if we are to tackle emerging issues, they are still in our wheelhouse, as you said, so that we're not chasing extra things. On the other side, we will always have in our charge, Bay Program assignments always as part of our tasks. So, we're walking this fine line between what we need to do because of where we sit structurally in the program, what we want to focus on and feel is in our wheelhouse, and how we can then be open to new things as they come up, but still in our wheelhouse. So, that is the language. Please take a look at the language. If you have suggestions for how to make it better, let Eric, Caroline, me and Caitlin know. We'll happily take those edits.

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**Ken Staver:** Sometimes it's good to say things that somebody would say it goes without saying. Sometimes saying them is good.

**Amanda Barber (in chat):** I'm proposing we be more proactive than simply reactive to issues brought to us.

**Kathy Brasier:** I appreciate that, Ken. I want to jump to Amanda's comment about being more proactive. That's exactly what we are trying to be in developing this guiding language. We do get a lot of stuff that comes to us, which is appropriate for us to deal with. But, this is our chance to take on some things and maybe lead a bit more than I think we have in the past. So, by highlighting those top five or so topics that come up, that gives the planning team the chance to say we want to start these conversations around these topics because we know this is of maximum interest to the group. So, that's the whole impetus behind doing this.

**Amanda Barber (in chat):** Agreed!

**Ruth Cassilly:** I just wanted to make a comment regarding Ken's comment about fertilizer. I don't view it as an emerging issue. It's been an issue for a very long time. But, one point to make is that we have an AMT to deal with the intricacies of the mass balance part of the fertilizer issue. I think there may be policy issues related to fertilizer and fertilizer use, and those discussions may or may not happen at the AMT. So, I get his point about being able to bring issues, but I think the conversations should start somewhere about what specifically we are talking about related to ag inputs in general, fertilizer included. Where should those conversations be happening? Who is making that decision? I think that's a gap. Now we also have an Ag Advisory Committee. So, do we have that policy conversation regarding fertilizer at all three of those groups? Or do we say there's a lot of overlap, where should we be having that conversation? I think that's part of the problem and why it's important to keep the language general. But, I think for things that belong in the AMT, we should keep them there and keep the AgWG more policy related. So, just wanted to make that comment.

**Eric Hughes:** Thank you all for that input. Ken, you make a really important point, and that's to say, especially with all the changes that are happening across the partnership, I think we can expect that some things will be assigned to us that don't necessarily align with exactly what you all as members would want to advance. If it's assigned to us, the ball is in our court. So, we need to make sure that it's stated that there is some flexibility in there. The point about being proactive is so critical. That's it. That's the whole conversation. Let's go and figure out some way to get out ahead of it and tackle these. Not wanting to necessarily do a month-to-month build-out of the agenda based on what comes our way, is there some way that we can take your interests and try to move something forward in a more structured way? So, it really has to be both. Ruth, to your point about what kind of conversations happen at the AgWG policy versus hyper technical: the Ag Advisory Committee is going to meet quarterly. They are not a Bay Program decision making entity. They are an advisory group, which is something that we talked about frequently here earlier this year. That point has been made many times. The Ag Modeling team, highly technical and weedy discussions, they will sunset eventually. That is part of their charge. So, we will have all of those discussions. We need to be flexible. We need to be able to have both. I'm hoping that the way this document is finalized creates space for that.

**Kathy Brasier:** I would just add that I think what makes the AgWG a special place is that the members and participants in this group range from highly technical to policy, to education, to program development, to government, leadership. So, we are the space where we can hash through the multiple perspectives on these issues as they come to us. So, I think that is something

that we want to preserve and document in this planning process. Let me reiterate the invitation, and then I will turn it back to Eric for the wrap up. We are identifying these top 3, 4, 5 areas. They're not new areas. They're things that we know have been and I think will continue to be the bread and butter of this group. But, I do really want to invite everybody, if you have a project that speaks to one of these issues, that you just want feedback on or want to discuss, or if you know projects that are happening, please bring them to us. I think we want to make sure that the projects and presentations and the discussions in the workgroup can be on that sort of cutting edge, new, innovative, partially formed kind of projects so that we can get them early and have those conversations to then move to the next stage.

**Eric Hughes:** So, not necessarily an answer on whether we're just going to go ahead and incorporate this, put it on the website. I think, if that were to happen, we would want to make sure we sort of codify and make sure everybody's ok with that. So, maybe what we can do is just have a look at a 5-minute slot next month. We'll use this to start building things out immediately. But, just in terms of making this something that we more formally adopt, we will go ahead and post the final version sufficiently in advance. You can take a look at that. It won't be dramatically different and, if we need more time, we don't have to do anything with it. But, next time we will at least have the space on the agenda to see if it's something that we want to finalize/ formalize.

**Action:** AgWG members with suggestions or improvements to the planning document, please reach out to Kathy Brasier ([kjb24@psu.edu](mailto:kjb24@psu.edu)), Caitlin Grady ([Caitlin.grady@gwu.edu](mailto:Caitlin.grady@gwu.edu)), Eric Hughes ([hughes.eric@epa.gov](mailto:hughes.eric@epa.gov)), and Caroline Kleis ([Kleis.caroline@epa.gov](mailto:Kleis.caroline@epa.gov)).

**Action:** AgWG staff will work to finalize the planning document, incorporating any remaining feedback, and will post the final document once it is available.

**Action:** AgWG members will be asked to look over the final planning document and vote on its approval in July.

## **Wrap-up**

### **11:45 New Business, Announcements & Updates – 15 minutes**

- Agricultural Modeling Team (AMT) Updates
  - Tom Butler, AMT Coordinator, previewed the June AMT meeting (6/13) agenda.
    - The AMT will be discussing inorganic fertilizer, nitrogen fixation, and then a presentation from Bill on different BMPs and excess associated with those. If you are interested in attending, office hours will be at 8:00AM and the regular meeting will be from 9:00-11:00AM.
- Personnel Updates
  - Eric Hughes, AgWG Coordinator, provided the group with an update on personnel changes in EPA Region 3 and the CBPO.
    - EPA Region 3
      - Amy Van Blarcom-Lackey has been appointed as R3 Regional Administrator. Amy has a strong agricultural background, was raised on and operated a dairy farm in Pennsylvania, and she was Pennsylvania's first agricultural ombudsman.

□ CBPO

- Time was made to recognize individuals departing from the Bay Program and EPA Region 3 office. Eric acknowledged Kelly Shenk (Region 3 Ag Advisor), Gary Shenk (Hydrologist), Jeff Sweeney (Integrated Analysis Coordinator and AgWG Voting Member), Mark Dubin (Senior Agricultural Advisor), and Ruth Cassilly (Nonpoint Source Policy Analyst) for their contributions to the Bay Program and broader Chesapeake Bay restoration effort.

- **Events**

- Eric Hughes, AgWG Coordinator, listed upcoming events that may be of interest to the group.
  - NFWF Chesapeake Agricultural Networking Forum (Fall of 2025)
  - Bay in the Balance Conference (December 8-10) in Gettysburg, PA.

- **Agricultural Advisory Committee (AAC) Update**

- The Agricultural Advisory Committee (AAC) will meet again on [Wednesday, June 25th, 6:00PM-7:30PM](#).

- **2024 Progress Scenario Released**

- The official 2024 Progress scenario is now available on CAST. This scenario reflects best management practices (BMPs) that were implemented and functioning during the reporting year July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024, as reported by jurisdictions to the Chesapeake Bay Program, and verified by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The 2024 Progress Scenario can be used to assess progress toward the EPA's Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) planning targets.
- See the full announcement, with additional useful information and links, on the CAST website [here](#).

- **American Society of Agronomy - Sustainable Agronomy Conference Free Webinar Series**

- The 2025 Sustainable Agronomy Conference is a virtual, four-week educational series tailored to agribusiness professionals and growers. Session topics include agronomic myth-busting, water and weed management, AI and digital agronomy, and regenerative agriculture. A full program schedule can be found [here](#), and additional information is available on the [conference homepage](#).
- [Registration](#) is open and free, and the four courses take place July 9, 16, 23, and 30th from 11-1 pm, Central time.

- **Chesapeake Bay Watershed Data Dashboard**

- The draft version of the updated and improved Chesapeake Bay Watershed Data Dashboard is now publicly available at [Chesapeake Bay Watershed Data Dashboard](#).
- The modules currently show 2023 Chesapeake Assessment Scenario Tool (CAST) Annual Progress data, United States Geological Survey (USGS) Nontidal Network monitoring data through water year 2023, and tidal water quality standards attainment data through 2022. The CAST modules will be updated with 2024 Annual Progress data when it becomes available.



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- The [“Targeting Restoration”](#) dashboard is particularly pertinent to the Ag sector and displays a breakdown of the nutrient inputs as well as the N,P,S loads and land uses from CAST at a county level. Users can also view BMP implementation levels for ag sector.
- The Dashboard team is asking Chesapeake Bay Program stakeholders to check out the updates and provide them with your feedback over the next month. Please send any questions, comments, or concerns to [datadashboard@chesapeakebay.net](mailto:datadashboard@chesapeakebay.net).
- **Other Announcements?**
  - Send to Caroline Kleis ([Kleis.Caroline@epa.gov](mailto:Kleis.Caroline@epa.gov)) for inclusion in “Recap” email.

12:00 **Adjourn**

**Next Meeting:** Thursday, July 17<sup>th</sup>, 10:00AM-12:00PM

### **Participants**

Kathy Brasier, PSU	Tyler Trostle, PA DEP
Caitlin Grady, GWU	Jeff Hill, York County Conservation District
Eric Hughes, EPA	Natasha Rathlev, Sustainable Chesapeake
Caroline Kleis, CRC	Tyler Groh, PSU
Emily Dekar, USC	Ashley Hullinger, PA DEP
Bill Keeling, VA DEQ	Hunter Landis, VA DCR
Anne Coates, TJSWCD	Nicholas Moody, VA DCR
Ruth Cassilly, UMD/CBPO	Lydia Brinkley, USC
Scott Heidel, PA DEP	Mchezaji Axum, UDC/AAC Member
Karl Blankenship, Bay Journal	Dave Montali, Tetra Tech
Arianna Johns, VA DEQ	Helen Golimowski, Devereux Consulting
Amanda Barber, NY Cortland County SWCD	Gregory Mitchell, AAC Member
Samuel Canfield, WV DEP	Ken Staver, UMD/Wye
Matt Carroll, TJSWCD	Amanda Cather, Plow & Stars Farm/ American
Tom Butler, EPA	Farmland Trust/ AAC Member
RO Britt, Smithfield Foods	Jess Rigelman, CBPO Contractor
Emily Heller, EPA	Marel King, CBC
Bailey Robertory, MD DNR	Grant Gulibon, PA Farm Bureau
Clint Gill, DDA	Nathan Radabaugh, PA DEP
Brady Seeley, PA DEP	Kate Bresaw, PA DEP
Jenna Schueler, CBF	

### **Acronym List**

AgWG- [Agriculture Workgroup](#)

AMT- [Agricultural Modeling Team](#) (Phase 7)

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BMP – Best Management Practice

CAST- [Chesapeake Assessment Scenario Tool](#) (user interface for the CBP Watershed Model)

CBP- [Chesapeake Bay Program](#)

CBPO- Chesapeake Bay Program Office

CBW- Chesapeake Bay Watershed

CTIC – Conservation Technology Information Center

CVN – Conservation Validation Network

EPA - [United States] Environmental Protection Agency

FSA – Farm Service Agency

MLRI – Modeled Load Reduction Indicator

NRCS – Natural Resources Conservation Service

NFWF – National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

ORISE – Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education

PADEP – Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection

PSC – [Principals' Advisory Committee](#) (CBP)

PSU- Penn State University

SWCD – Soil and Water Conservation Districts

WQGIT- [Water Quality Goal Implementation Team](#)

UMD - University of Maryland

USDA – United States Department of Agriculture

USGS – United States Geological Survey

USFS – United States Forestry Service