

## Ensuring Accountability in Riparian Forest Buffer Implementation:

### Potential Roles for the PSC

**Background:** The recent 2022 RFB Leadership Workshop highlighted many examples of tremendous progress being made towards developing and implementing effective buffer programs. However, given the gap between our current progress and the ambitious goals established in the 2014 Watershed Agreement, the state WIPs and the Conowingo WIPs, it is clear that the Partnership's current efforts are not sufficient. A new, all-hands-on-deck approach is needed. To kick-start these efforts, states have been asked to develop and finalize RFB Action Strategies by June 27<sup>th</sup>. The Strategies should outline how each state intends to accelerate RFB implementation over the next 5-10 years, including how to meet buffer goals established in Watershed Implementation Plans (WIPs).

**What role can the PSC play?** Once the Action Strategies are in place, high-level leadership attention from the PSC would help ensure accountability for plan implementation. On an ongoing basis, the PSC could help identify sources of funding that could be dedicated specifically to buffers and members could share how they are supporting the effort.

To help maintain focus on accountability for plan implementation, two options are proposed, but the PSC themselves may have other ideas.

- 1) *Separate, standalone process:* State RFB Action Strategy Leads report to the PSC on an annual basis, tracking specific accomplishments and progress towards achieving performance indicators identified in state Action Strategies. As it was with the workshop, these Action Strategy leads would be a MB member or their delegate, i.e., someone who has the capacity to make changes to existing programs or develop new programs as needed. FWG members can continue to play a support role as subject matter experts.
- 2) *Utilize the milestone process-* The PSC could request that states incorporate the performance indicators from their RFB Action Strategies into annual programmatic milestone reporting to EPA. EPA would review and evaluate progress on these milestones. States could then report back to the PSC following the EPA review to summarize their accomplishments and progress on performance indicators.
- 3) *Other options?*

No matter what approach is determined, the PSC could help identify specific actions to be taken at the State or Partnership level to improve progress and incorporate these actions into a revised Action Strategy, especially if states are not making sufficient progress.