

HABITAT GOAL
IMPLEMENTATION TEAM
NOVEMBER 29, 2023

CHARTING A COURSE TO 2025

WHAT IS IT?

- At the 2022 Executive Council meeting, a charge was issued on how to best address and integrate new science and restoration strategies leading up to 2025, as well as provide a snapshot of outcome attainability.

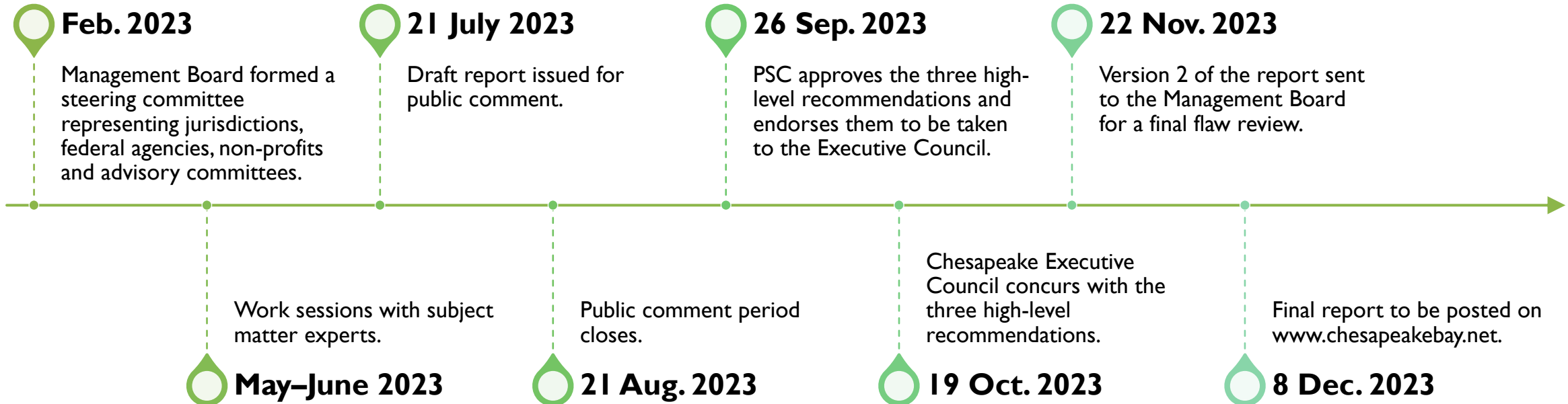


Chesapeake Bay Program Partnership
Executive Council Charge to the Principals' Staff Committee: Charting a Course to 2025 and Beyond
Adopted October 11, 2022

As the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) partnership nears the 2025 date that the partnership set for several of the goals and outcomes under the *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement* (*Watershed Agreement*), there are many successes to celebrate. At the same time, emerging issues and changing conditions (e.g., climate change, growth, new scientific data) have impacted the levels of effort needed to meet our collective restoration priorities. We, as a partnership, remain committed to using the best available science in restoring the Chesapeake Bay as we accelerate toward the deadline and anticipate continued progress post-2025.

Thus, this Executive Council charges the Principals' Staff Committee (PSC) in recommending a critical path forward that prioritizes and outlines the next steps for meeting the goals and outcomes of the *Watershed Agreement* leading up to and beyond 2025. The PSC is to report back to the Executive Council at our 2023 annual meeting with recommendations on how to best address and integrate new science and restoration strategies leading up to 2025. At our 2024 annual meeting, the PSC is to prepare recommendations that continue to address new advances in science and restoration, along with a focus on our partnership for going beyond 2025.

PROCESS



REPORT STRUCTURE

Executive Summary

High-Level Recommendations



Deeper Focus Sections

- Bay TMDL/Phase III WIPs
- Emerging Science/Monitoring
- DEIJ/Climate Change
- Forest Buffers/Wetlands

Outcome Attainability Templates

HIGH-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Accelerate investments.**
 - Thanks to the American Rescue Plan Act, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and increased state investments, the Chesapeake Bay Program will accelerate restoration activities over the next 18 months with a particular emphasis on addressing lagging outcomes.
- **Integrate emerging science and monitoring.**
 - Recent scientific reports and findings have provided further understanding of how the Chesapeake Bay and its surrounding watershed are responding to the implementation of best management practices (BMPs), impacts from climate change and a rise in environmental stewardship, to name a few. The Chesapeake Bay Program is already investigating as to how the findings in such recent reports as the *A Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response*, *Rising Watershed and Bay Water Temperatures*, *Enhancing Chesapeake Bay Partnership Activities by Integrating Social Science* and *Enhancing the Chesapeake Bay Program Monitoring Networks* (note: this is not an exhaustive list) can be integrated into the partnership's work. These are significant scientific findings that recommend an increased focus on geographic targeting, social science, robust monitoring networks, the environmentally and economically important shallow waters of the Bay and addressing rising water temperature implications, and as such will take time and careful planning to be fully represented in the next phase of Bay restoration. Where appropriate and possible, the partnership will integrate this emerging science now.
- **Fast-track action plans.**
 - Over the past few years and in recent months, several action plans have been put into place across the partnership. The Chesapeake Bay Program will lean harder into the implementation of these plans moving toward 2025. These include, but are not limited to, the jurisdictions' Phase III WIPs, *Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ) Strategy*, *Implementation Plan*, state riparian buffer action strategies, *Wetlands Action Plan* and *Climate Change Directive—Workplan*.

 OUTLOOK ON COURSE	 OUTLOOK OFF COURSE
Blue Crab Abundance Outcome	Wetlands Outcome
<i>Blue Crab Management Outcome (Complete)</i>	Black Duck Outcome
Oysters Outcome	Brook Trout Outcome
Forage Fish Outcome	Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Outcome
Fish Habitat Outcome	Forest Buffers Outcome
Stream Health Outcome	Tree Canopy Outcome
<i>2017 Watershed Implementation Plans (WIPs) Outcome (Complete)</i>	2025 Watershed Implementation Plans (WIPs) Outcome
Fish Passage Outcome	Diversity Outcome
Water Quality Standards Attainment and Monitoring Outcome	Toxic Contaminants Policy and Prevention Outcome
Toxic Contaminants Research Outcome	Student Outcome
Local Leadership Outcome	Climate Adaptation Outcome
Protected Lands Outcome	
Land Use Methods and Metrics Development Outcome	
Land Use Options and Evaluations Outcome	
Public Access Outcome	
Sustainable Schools Outcome	
Environmental Literacy Planning Outcome	
Climate Monitoring and Assessment Outcome	

Outlook Uncertain:

The outlook of the Healthy Watersheds Outcome and the Stewardship Outcome are considered uncertain pending additional analysis.

OUTCOME ATTAINABILITY

- While both quantitative and qualitative outcomes can be effective, successful qualitative outcomes require concrete milestones and measures of progress to evaluate their effectiveness.
- Successful quantifiable outcomes have clear geographic and numerical targets, measures of success, accounting systems and monitoring protocols in place.
- Jurisdictional and federal commitments, costs, roles and responsibilities must be clear. The success of many quantitative outcomes is driven by federal champion and/or coordinator looking across the watershed, in coordination with one or more state or non-governmental champions or coordinators for regional relevance and legitimacy.
- Ambitious outcomes are inspiring and can help drive change, but they must be established with a reasonable understanding of the costs, commitments, responsibilities and their importance for restoring local waterways and the Chesapeake Bay.

OUTCOME ATTAINABILITY FINDINGS

- Outcome efforts must operate at the appropriate scale in order to make progress. For broader outcomes, such as climate change or diversity, establishing or modifying to focus on manageable pieces of these challenges, while maintaining a sense of their place in the larger context, could generate meaningful progress.
- Working with local communities, governments and non-profit organizations is essential to identify high-priority geographies and align outcomes with local partner needs and priorities. Identifying priority geographies to implement measures to achieve outcomes and matching those with local partners would accelerate progress.
- While several federal and state agencies provide staffing and funding for Chesapeake Bay restoration, it is the EPA that has regulatory oversight, dedicated staff and funding to work across the entire partnership. However, their annual funding is modest compared to the total annual investment in the region and is highly constrained. A mechanism to match Chesapeake Bay Program needs with staff support and funding from across the partnership could be instituted to support its growth and effectiveness.

OUTCOME ATTAINABILITY FINDINGS

The background of the slide is a dark, grayscale photograph of a forest with many trees. A horizontal green bar is positioned at the top, containing the title text. Above this bar, there are three thin horizontal lines in green, yellow-green, and gray.

FOREST BUFFERS/WETLANDS—CHALLENGES

- Implementation programs.
- Dedicated funding.
- Outreach and engagement.
- Capacity.
- Tracking and verification.
- Emerging threats.

FOREST BUFFERS/WETLANDS— OPPORTUNITIES

- Workshops and action plans.
- Reorganization of the Wetlands Workgroup.
- Help other GITs and workgroups fill their information needs and gaps.
- Expansion of existing flexible and effective buffer programs to complement current CREP funding.
- GIT funded projects.



RECOMMENDATIONS TO PROGRESS TO 2025

Establish	Establish clear geographic and numerical targets, measures of success, accounting systems and monitoring protocols for tidal wetland restoration.
Ensure	Ensure conservation of existing and new forest buffers and wetlands to protect the investments being made in restoring these critical habitats.
Utilize	Utilize federal, state and local investments and resources to conserve areas that have the hydrology and proximity to become wetlands.
Support	Support effective, flexible buffer and wetland programs to limit out-of-pocket costs for landowners, provide maintenance, fund practices on a rolling basis and limit eligibility requirements.
Build and retain	Build and retain professional staff capacity to scale-up implementation of both buffers and wetlands and offer high-quality technical and maintenance services.

Align new and existing funding mechanisms specifically for capacity building, to aid communities and organizations on the ground to help accelerate implementation efforts, prioritizing efforts to build a diverse workforce.

Cultivate partnerships to support sustained funding and to coordinate outreach and technical assistance efforts.

Develop more strategic approaches and increase capacity for outreach and engagement. These could include:

- Encourage time and effort to cultivate relationships with private landowners to understand their barriers to wetlands and forest buffers. Develop targeted communications materials for different audiences (e.g., landowners, policymakers, agricultural technical service providers) that emphasize the value and co-benefits of forest buffers and wetlands using case studies and success stories.
- Ensure messages are in easily understood terms, spread frequently and through a variety of communications mediums to ensure all audiences are being reached.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO PROGRESS TO 2025

RECOMMENDATIONS TO PROGRESS TO 2025

- Expand tracking and reporting to ensure all forest buffers and wetlands are appropriately accounted for and verified. In particular, develop a strategy to conduct outreach to nonprofits, state agencies, local governments and other entities to ensure they know how to report their work to the new wetlands tracking tool that will be available in fall 2023. Additionally, review current tracking systems to make sure everything is working normally and being reported accurately. Consider use of the high-resolution land use and land cover data to track gains and losses in forest buffers.
- Explore additional funding options to enhance data collection and ensure the wetlands tracker remains upgraded.
- Watershed jurisdictions should require that a portion of any type of on-the-ground grant funding go toward the maintenance of forest buffers and wetlands for at least three years. It is noted that wetland restoration efforts often require federal permits, which already require mandatory maintenance and inspection requirements.
- Increase champions to contribute and advocate for catalyzing funding, staff and resources to increase the rate of forest buffer and wetlands implementation.
- Management Board representatives should meet formally with all agencies within their jurisdiction once a year to discuss progress and ensure barriers are removed and remain out of the way to increase the potential of meeting the Wetlands outcome. Evaluate the benefits of creating jurisdiction-based Wetlands Workgroups that are responsible for engaging agencies, organizations and landowners in a collective effort to advance Wetland Action Plans.

NEXT STEPS

Charting a Course to 2025

*A Report and Recommendations for the Chesapeake
Executive Council on How to Best Address and Integrate New Science
and Restoration Strategies Leading up to 2025*

Posted on November 22, 2023



- Version 2 of the report was sent to the Management Board for their fatal flaw review on November 22.
- The final report is expected to be posted following the December Management Board meeting on December 8.
- Findings and recommendations from this report will also be provided to the Beyond 2025 steering committee.

QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?

Contact:

Rachel Felver

Chesapeake Bay Program Communications
Director

Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay

rfelver@chesapeakebay.net