



**Data, Tools and Monitoring: Using partnership-approved monitoring data, assessments, and tools, characterize and track watershed health at various scales to inform and increase implementation. (Recommendation 1)**

While watershed physiographic conditions establish a baseline set of expectations for stream health, combinations of human activities, land use, and land use histories affect both stream conditions and potential across multiple dimensions (e.g., temperature, conductivity, pH, flow, nutrients, sediment, bacteria, and toxics). Integrating information on these dimensions is needed to strategically plan and implement actions to achieve biological uplift and quantify ecosystem services. The connection with ecosystem services will help bridge the gap between community interests, needs and CBP outcomes that is necessary to achieve a people-centric approach to restoration and conservation and supports the more holistic, outcomes-focused accountability framework called for in the Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response (CESR) report. A local watershed approach improves the likelihood of success for improving water quality and stream health, maintaining it into the future in the face of changes in climate and land use.

**Impact to how we work:**

- Reframes our assessment and monitoring of watershed health to the local watershed (subwatershed or catchment scale) as well as the entire basin.
- Includes landscape integrity metrics from land use and land cover data along with other water quality data to fully characterize local watershed health.
- Enhances the utility of data investments and cooperation across departments and organizations. Incentivizes implementers of BMPs, land use planners, and land conservationists to cooperate to improve and maintain ecosystem services.
- Coordinate with non-traditional partners (e.g., public health agencies, planning commissions, municipalities, floodplain managers, drinking water utilities, local interest groups) focused on improving local waterways.

**Impact on Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement:**

- Modifications to the watershed health, stream health, protected lands, and land use options evaluation outcomes may be required to achieve greater integration and efficiency.

**General Level of Effort:** High/Moderate

- Commitment of jurisdiction and other staff time to develop these new processes, resources and feedback mechanisms to communities, implementers, and science partners.

**How to Strategies (Phase 2 Actions):**

- Develop an integrated, coordinated, collaborative approach to current GIT and workgroup structure of the CBP at the intersection of the Stream Health Workgroup, Healthy Watersheds GIT, Water Quality GIT, and STAR with enhanced use of the Strategic Engagement Team.
- Explore use of the Chesapeake Healthy Watersheds Assessments and other tools to characterize subwatershed health for local communities.
- Expand the list of credited actions and BMPs that contribute to watershed health (See R4).
- Create regular feedback mechanisms linked to planning, community engagement and actions (See R2, R3, R4).





### **Planning: Support strategic green infrastructure planning for watershed health at multiple scales. (Recommendation 2)**

Strategic action at the local watershed scale is needed to achieve CBP protection and restoration goals and local land use planning is a critical tool. However, local plans are often not integrated across watershed and/or jurisdictional boundaries, leading to a fragmented approach for land/water protection and restoration. The CBP Partners should help communities create strategic spatial plans for land conservation and restoration that incorporate green infrastructure elements (e.g., key habitats, working lands, watershed protection and recovery, climate resilience, green stormwater) and consideration of underserved communities including overlapping jurisdiction priorities for wildlife, forests, outdoor recreation, public access, agriculture, and water supply. In addition, the Bay program itself should develop a 5 year comprehensive strategic plan that synthesizes goals, strategies and outcomes similar to other large estuary or landscape scale conservation initiatives.

#### **Impact to how we work:**

- The partnership must leverage tools, data, expertise, and funding for more intentional work and support for local/regional planning.
- Planning occurs on at least 2 levels: 1) Local watersheds, 2) Comprehensive Bay-wide
- Places more partnership emphasis on landscape integrity, green infrastructure concepts across local watersheds, not just implementation of individual BMPs.
- Will require partnership funds to work with local communities to incorporate watershed actions into local planning processes and facilitate cross-jurisdictional plan integration.
- Include funding incentives for local implementation of integrated watershed plans.

#### **Impact on Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement:**

- This recommendation is tactical. It encourages better planning for watershed health but is consistent with the current agreement.

#### **General Level of Effort:** Moderate

- This recommendation overlaps with R1 on characterizing watershed health and R3 on community engagement. It will require effort to organize and prepare materials to provide technical and funding assistance in planning and ongoing support to local communities.

#### **How to Strategies (Phase 2 Actions):**

- Gap analysis on current efforts toward planning for watershed health.
- Gauge resources and support needed to reach communities across the Bay.
- Develop playbook or guidance for planning and use of local government engagement tools.
- Leverage new CBPO Outreach and Engagement investments.
- Leverage existing federal planning assistance programs, such as the USACE Planning Assistance to States Program.
- Work with LGAC, SAC and other partners such as APA chapters.
- Utilize other jurisdictional plans for wildlife, forests, recreation, nonpoint source management, water supply protection, etc.





### **Local Engagement: Increase the reach and effectiveness of Local Community and Partner Engagement through capacity building. (Recommendation #3)**

Local engagement is key to helping communities and other partners understand federal and state programs while also helping them plan, secure funds and take local watershed action. The Bay program jurisdictions and other partners engage in many different forms of outreach and engagement but often for specialized purposes. Supporting these coordination and technical assistance programs promises to be a more comprehensive and holistic mechanism that can be expanded to intersect with more communities in the watershed. These local coordinator programs go by different names but often have similar functions including facilitation, communication, planning, funding/finance, project management, implementing watershed actions and tracking results. They also help build awareness of nonpoint source pollution prevention and reduction efforts and incorporate living resources conservation, climate resilience and working with underserved communities.

#### **Impact to how we work:**

- More intentional use of existing programs that communicate from the community/local level up through the jurisdictional and federal level.
- This aligns with the Clean Water group's Recommendation #5

#### **Impact on Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement:**

- This recommendation would not need any changes to the Watershed Agreement.
- Modifications to consolidate or interconnect existing goals and outcomes may be considered for improved understanding and efficiency.

#### **General Level of Effort: Moderate**

- Evaluate the current structure in the Chesapeake Bay Program's partnership to identify what's working, what needs improvement, and what needs change.
- Evaluate jurisdictional structures and means of community involvement to identify best practices and share among the partners.

#### **How to Strategies (Phase 2 Actions):**

- Coordinate better facilitation and enactment of recommendations from LGAC and SAC.
- Enhance programs that already exist within the jurisdictions as expressed in [LGAC's Recommendations to the Executive Council \(2023\)](#).
- Create a "network of networks" to provide a forum for coordination of existing efforts, share best practices, and identify gaps.
- Create space in existing goal team and workgroup meeting to facilitate better two-way communication between people working at the local level and the Bay Program.
- Develop tools and resources with a bottom-up approach with the guidance of Bay Program data and expertise.
- Train individuals for providing multi-disciplinary technical assistance to engage local communities and partners to assist them in planning and implementing their local priorities.
- Modify use of partnership resources to support the capacity for this community engagement.





### **Watershed Actions: Integrate land conservation and stewardship more explicitly into the goals of the Bay Program (Recommendation 4)**

A more holistic approach to watershed health requires more explicit recognition of the critical role that land conservation and stewardship play in maintaining watershed health. Land conservation and stewardship provide ecosystem services, ensure the durability of water quality investments, promote the long-term resiliency of critical habitats to climate change, and directly benefit underserved communities. Protection and planning are much cheaper than restoration on a per acre basis and can help address critical nonpoint source pollution challenges and local needs for flood control, sourcewater protection, and public recreation, among other benefits.

**Impact to how we work:** Broadening the scope of the partnership's work to integrate conservation and stewardship as key strategies for improving watershed health would be a fundamental shift that would ultimately include reconsidering how resources are allocated.

- Leverage knowledge of local, state, and federal programs to conserve 30% of the land by 2030, achieve longer-term goals, and build an interconnected network of conserved landscapes. Couple land protection with restoration to restore ecosystem function, promote species resiliency, and provide ecosystem services to communities.
- On a local scale, use a “network of networks” approach to build local capacity and support green infrastructure practices including: land protection, restoration, wildlife conservation and the maintenance of community tree canopy and other nature-based solutions.
- Prioritize and improve coordination of efforts to manage and steward protected and restored areas. The long-term stewardship needed to protect investments in restoration and conservation includes the management of public (federal, state and local) and private lands that provide critical wildlife habitat, public access, and watershed health benefits.
- Expand and enhance publicly accessible natural lands through the creation, stewardship and improvement of more parks and trail networks. This will enhance the livability and land values for local communities, particularly underserved communities.

**Impact on Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement:** Watershed Agreement goals and outcomes could be modified where appropriate to explicitly address the importance of conserving and stewarding all watersheds, expanding the focus beyond state-identified healthy watersheds. Conservation and stewardship could also be elevated as key guiding pillars for the Program (alongside science, restoration, and partnership).

**General Level of Effort:** Moderate/High. Moderate efforts would be required to implement the “How to” Strategies in Phase 2. However, significant additional investments of time and resources would be required to fully integrate conservation and stewardship into the Program.

### **How to Strategies (Phase 2 Actions):**

- Identify the Watershed Agreement outcomes that would benefit from revision to incorporate a more explicit focus on conservation and/or stewardship.
- Investigate local, state, and federal conservation and stewardship programs, mapping and data sources, and stakeholders that could be better engaged to facilitate the effective integration of conservation and stewardship into the partnership. Determine the appropriate pathways for engagement in the current (or improved) partnership structure.





## **Measure Watershed Outcomes: Shift to an outcomes-based approach to promote protecting, restoring, and maintaining watershed health. (Recommendation 5)**

The Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response (CESR) report for the Bay recommends incentivizing outcomes over counting practices. A revised approach to tracking and incentivizing watershed health outcomes would support actions to protect or improve local waterways and ecosystem services provisioning, including land conservation and stewardship as complementary insurance policies for restoration.

### **Impact to how we work:**

- Create a more robust, action-oriented and partner engaged Strategic Review System (SRS).
- Expand use of progress measures: Move beyond CAST to utilize "multiple lines of evidence" with tools such as the Chesapeake Healthy Watersheds Assessment (CHWA), and state data for a picture of watershed health.
- Improve the Bay Program's crediting framework to better incentivize practices that will improve watershed health and ecosystem services outcomes, including land conservation and stewardship.

### **Impact on Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement:**

- The agreement provides broad authority to create an accountability process. There is no need to modify the agreement to include a refreshed approach to measuring progress.
- A watershed health approach may consolidate goals and outcomes and reduce silos
- Track impactful outcomes, not just outputs. Reduce the number monitored for efficient tracking. Employ a multi-disciplinary approach to goal setting.

### **General Level of Effort:** Moderate

- Estimate a year to work out the revised approach as part of phase 2.
- Utilize existing accountability team, but also need to add capacity to engage jurisdictions and locals and get their input related to partnership (see R2 and R3).
- There will be a need for a commitment to maintaining a revised system.
- Intentional design to ensure we are not adding components halfway through.
- Changes may require the creation of new indicators.

### **How to Strategies (Phase 2 Actions):**

- Develop a Guiding Framework: Use a new Bay Program Comprehensive Plan to measure progress and ensure partner alignment (See R2).
- Evaluate local watersheds within their ecological and geographical contexts using the 'spectrum of health' concept (See R1).
- Highlight Local Efforts: Develop an approach to showcase diverse local community projects and their watershed health benefits.
- Incentivizing Actions: Identify actions that improve local health and provide ecosystem service benefits, then explore ways to quantify, monetize and incentivize such actions (e.g., use of FieldDoc data, eco-price ecosystem services calculations, project files, etc.)
- Establish a timeline for updating the approach/SRS for the next cycle.
- Accountability Clarification: Define accountability within the partnership, distinguishing it from TMDL and its Accountability Framework.
- Streamline reporting for jurisdictions, other grantees and other partners.

