

## **Guiding Principles for the Mid-Point Assessment**

**Purpose:** Leading up to 2017, the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership (the Partnership) committed to conduct a mid-point assessment to review our progress toward meeting the nutrient and sediment pollutant load reductions identified in the 2010 TMDL and Phase I and Phase II Watershed Implementation Plans (WIPs). This was designed as a mid-course check on our progress to allow necessary adjustments in strategies to ensure that the Partnership could achieve its 2025 goals for putting the necessary practices in place to restore the Bay.

Recognizing that change is inevitable over the next 15 years in a dynamic environment like the Bay, the Partnership intends to take stock of the latest science and data, the range of available tools and controls, and how any updates inform Phase III WIPs and our collective strategies to attain applicable water quality standards as part of the mid-point assessment.

The seven watershed jurisdictions agreed to provide updates to their current WIPs for Phase III in 2017 that will address any needed modifications to implementation actions informed by the mid-point assessment, as well as state implementation experience to date. The Phase III WIPs will ensure that all practices are in place by 2025 to ensure attainment of applicable Water Quality Standards in the Bay and its tidal tributaries.

**Schedule:** The Partnership will continue to monitor progress towards meeting the TMDL load reductions utilizing the existing accountability framework. This accountability framework, described within the Chesapeake Bay TMDL and endorsed by the Partnership, includes WIPs, two-year milestones, annual progress reporting and tracking, and possible federal actions. To inform the mid-point assessment, the Partnership will develop a detailed critical path schedule. This critical path schedule will consider the following:

- Partnership input for the mid-point assessment
- Use of draft versions of Guiding Principles to scope extent of the mid-point assessment
- PSC approval of the Guiding Principles (Winter 2013)
- BMP expert panel and workgroup findings and recommendations
- As appropriate, refinements to decision support tools
- Partnership testing of these refinements and, as appropriate, tool modifications in response to this testing
- Development of Phase III Planning Targets, as necessary
- Development of draft and final Phase III WIPs, upon receipt of Phase III WIP planning targets
- EPA revisions, as appropriate, to the Bay TMDL.

The critical path schedule will include time frames for dependent tasks.

The following **principles** will guide the Partnership through the midpoint assessment and Phase III WIP process:

## **PRINCIPLE 1: KEEP THE FOCUS ON IMPLEMENTATION AND MAINTAIN STABLE TRACKING AND REPORTING**

The #1 water quality priority of the Partnership is the focused implementation of the Chesapeake Bay TMDL, the jurisdictions' WIPs, and 2-year milestones and the Federal Agencies actions under Executive Order 13508. The mid-point assessment should not interfere with maintaining the shared goal of having practices in place by 2017 that will achieve 60% of the necessary pollution reductions compared to the 2009 TMDL baseline. The tracking and reporting process of the accountability framework, which is informed by decision support tools, including models, and monitoring data, will remain stable up through the mid-point assessment. Progress will be measured against the Phase II WIP Planning Targets set in August 2011, the Phase I and Phase II WIPs and the 2-year milestones.

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## **PRINCIPLE 2: ENHANCE DECISION SUPPORT AND ASSESSMENT TOOLS TO ENABLE SUCCESSFUL ENGAGEMENT OF LOCAL PARTNERS**

Because the acceleration of implementation efforts at the local level is critical to successfully achieving the 2025 Bay TMDL implementation goals, it is essential that the tools that inform accountability framework be enhanced to foster the sustained engagement of local partners in the Bay restoration process. The Partnership has an opportunity to encourage and strengthen the commitments of these partners to accelerated implementation by incorporating improved local area data and information into the accountability framework in a manner that safeguards the stability enunciated in Principle 1. The Partnership will aim to improve and expand the use of monitoring data in assessing load reduction and water quality restoration progress and in evaluating local and regional effectiveness of management actions. The Partnership will work towards aligning local information, monitoring data and other indicators with the existing modeling, planning and accountability tools that support the accountability framework.

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## **PRINCIPLE 3: INCORPORATE VERIFICATION OF PRACTICES INTO EXISTING ACCOUNTABILITY TOOLS AND REPORTING PROTOCOLS**

The Partnership will work towards developing, adopting and implementing verification protocols for accurately crediting practices resulting in actual nutrient and sediment load reductions. Through verification, the goal is to provide credit for practices that result in additional water quality benefits while eliminating credit for those practices that are not improving water quality because of inadequate design, installation or maintenance.

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## **PRINCIPLE 4: ADDRESS EMERGING ISSUES THAT MAY IMPACT CURRENT STRATEGIES AND FUTURE PLANS**

The Partnership will work to address other complex issues, including those previously recognized by the Partnership, which can affect actions necessary to restore Chesapeake Bay

water quality. Examples include: accounting for the potential consequences of population growth and continuing climate change, factoring in new understanding of the Susquehanna River dams' influence on nutrient and sediment pollutant loads, understanding and recognizing year-to-year variability of rainfall-driven nutrient and sediment loads and their impact on Bay water quality and taking full advantage of living resources as natural filters. This is part and parcel of the adaptive management commitment of the Partnership to consider new knowledge and updates in information which can best inform our watershed restoration strategies.

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**PRINCIPLE 5: PRIORITIZE MID-POINT ASSESSMENT ACTIONS AND ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT TO ENSURE PHASE III WIPs MEET WATER QUALITY GOALS**

The Partnership recognizes the need to adaptively manage the Chesapeake Bay restoration. The Partnership will review any changes in decision-support tools, such as the models and methods used to determine goals and assess progress, and weigh the effects of these proposed changes against the impacts to meeting the ultimate goal of having all of the management practices on the ground by 2025 to meet water quality standards. The Partnership will carefully considered scientific, technical, financial and other implementation factors during this review. The Partnership recognizes that this analysis will include defining the limitations in the decision support tools and working within any uncertainty to meet the 2025 goals.

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