



**Chesapeake Bay Program**  
*Science. Restoration. Partnership.*

March 7, 2024

Mr. Charles Herrick  
Chairperson, Stakeholder Advisory Committee  
4504 Warren Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20016

Re: Management Board Response to the Stakeholders' Advisory Committee Recommendations

Dear Chairperson Herrick:

On behalf of the Chesapeake Bay Program's Executive Council and as Chair of the Management Board, I want to thank you and the Stakeholders' Advisory Committee (Stakeholders' Committee) for your recommendations (dated October 3, 2023) to the Executive Council at its October 19, 2023, annual meeting. These recommendations reflect the critical role of the Stakeholders' Committee in supporting the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership and advancing its goals and outcomes toward greater Chesapeake Bay watershed restoration. We very much appreciate the opportunity to respond to these recommendations and stand ready to assist the Stakeholders' Committee in fulfilling its annual priorities.

The Chesapeake Bay Program partnership is committed to carrying out the Executive Council's 2020 statement in support of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice. Ensuring all people have the opportunity to be equitably engaged across the partnership is essential to success. We appreciate the dedicated work that a small group of Chesapeake Bay Program partners, including members of the Stakeholders' Committee, has invested over the past year to develop an honorarium program for the Stakeholders' Committee that supports and addresses a barrier to equitable and inclusive access by some members. The Management Board is interested in moving forward with establishing a need-based honorarium to further support members of the committee and will strive over the next year to identify appropriate funding sources for this initiative.

Please find as follows the Management Board's responses to each of the Stakeholders' Committee recommendations, as well as an enclosure which reflects activities and dialogues to date on these important issues:

**Recommendation 1:** Relying on the work already completed by the Forest Buffer and Wetlands Actions Plans, charge the PSC to approve within six months the specific actionable items for each jurisdiction to accelerate the implementation and close the progress gaps for water quality restoration. This should

include identifying champions in each jurisdiction responsible for leading the effort, outlining the short and longer-term funding needs, establishing ambitious yet reasonable expectations of progress by 2025, and incorporating stakeholder feedback.

**Response:** The Management Board recognizes the significant work that went into the 2022 action plans developed by the Wetlands and Forestry workgroups. Both action plans advocated for more leadership at both the Management Board and Principals' Staff Committee to help shore up resources and programs identified in the state specific action strategies included in the action plans. The Chesapeake Bay Program partnership is committed to focusing on wetlands and riparian forest buffer restoration as top priorities for the program. Over the next six months, the Management Board will identify members of the Principals' Staff Committee who will serve as partnership champions for wetlands, riparian forest buffers, and tree canopy.

For wetlands, the Wetlands Workgroup has identified representation from each jurisdiction since finalization of the 2022 action plan. As presented to the Management Board at the December 2022 living resources quarterly progress meeting, all jurisdictions have been actively participating in workgroup efforts over the past year. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service continues to fill an important leadership role in coordinating the workgroup and working with all jurisdictions to implement their respective strategies. The U.S. Forest Service has been coordinating the Forestry Workgroup since its inception in 1989 with active involvement from all jurisdictions in the watershed. As prioritized in the 2022 state Riparian Forest Buffer Action Strategies, multiple jurisdictions are working to develop or expand flexible riparian forest buffer programs to accelerate buffer planting in the watershed. Additional, dedicated sources of funding could further accelerate implementation through these programs.

In 2023, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Forest Service provided several grants funded by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act to advance efforts to restore wetlands, forest buffers, and urban tree canopy. In 2023, the U.S. Forest Service funded \$70.5 million in grants in the Chesapeake Bay watershed through their 2023 Urban and Community Forestry program. The EPA funded \$1 million in grants to Chesapeake Bay jurisdictions for projects that restore wetlands, forest buffers, and urban tree canopy. The EPA also provided a 2023 grant to the Chesapeake Bay Trust for a wetlands capacity building project to address recommendations identified in the 2022 Wetlands Action Plan. Objectives under the grant include strategic planning, sustainable funding, and landowner engagement. The grant will also include funding for a tidal wetlands design project that will take into effect lessons learned from addressing the other project objectives. Finally, in 2022 the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Chesapeake small watershed grant and innovative nutrient and sediment reduction grant programs funded \$11.4 million in projects to restore wetlands, riparian forest buffers, or both.

**Recommendation 2:** We strongly recommend the continued and sustained funding for the high-resolution land-use and land-change data and analysis, so local governments can rely on complete assessments of existing and trending losses of tree canopy and wetlands for land-use decision-making.

**Response:** The Management Board intends to continue to work and support development of future high-resolution land use/land cover data sets. Over the past six years, the EPA has funded \$5.8 million to support high-resolution land use/land cover data sets. The agency aims to continue its support, depending on availability of funding.

**Recommendation 3:** We encourage the Executive Council to work with the Chesapeake Watershed Congressional Delegation to ensure the next Farm Bill adequately supports Chesapeake Bay restoration and conservation Goals outlined in the 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement. Additionally, we encourage the Governors and DC Mayor to commit to preserving forests and wetlands by enhancing their conservation programs and identifying matching funds for potential Farm Bill conservation provisions.

**Response:** The Farm Bill is a key source of federal support for the jurisdictions in meeting their Chesapeake Bay restoration and conservation goals. According to the jurisdictions' Watershed Implementation Plans, over eighty percent of remaining nitrogen load reductions are planned to come from the agriculture sector. From 2009 to 2019, USDA conservation programs contributed \$1.58 billion towards delivering cleaner water and healthier natural resources in the Chesapeake Bay through programs like the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, Conservation Reserve Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, and Environmental Quality Incentives Program, as well as technical assistance. As language for the next Farm Bill continues to be drafted and negotiated, the Chesapeake Bay Commission is working with the Chesapeake Watershed Congressional Delegation to ensure the crucial link between Farm Bill programs and our regional water quality and watershed restoration goals is well understood so that these programs can be further enhanced. In addition, over the next year the Management Board will work with its jurisdictional partners to discuss the possibility of enhancing both wetlands and forest conservations programs in 2024. Partners will be encouraged to share examples of effective state forest and wetlands restoration programs.

Thank you again for your commitment to both the partnership and restoring the Chesapeake Bay and its local waterways. The Management Board looks forward to working with you and the Stakeholders' Committee on implementing these recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Martha Shimkin", with a small blue checkmark above it.

Martha Shimkin

Director

Chesapeake Bay Program Office

**Enclosure: Documentation of Commitments, Actions, and Activities to Address the 2023 Stakeholders' Committee Recommendations to the Executive Council**

Stakeholders' Committee Recommendation(s)	Description of Commitments/Activities/Actions Taken or Planned to Address Recommendation(s)	Supporting Documentation (e.g., weblinks, dates, etc.)
1	The Department of Defense (DoD) Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) works to coordinate and report data for a suite of environmental metrics, including wetlands and forest restoration, summarized in its Annual Progress Report.	<a href="https://www.denix.osd.mil/chesapeake/dod-cbp-quarterly-journals/">https://www.denix.osd.mil/chesapeake/dod-cbp-quarterly-journals/</a>
1	The DoD CBP has been an active member of the Wetlands Workgroup, taking leadership positions in generating fact sheets called out in the Logic and Action Plan, and in serving as the technical lead and on the steering committees of several GIT-funded projects (marsh migration and characterization of wetland mowing).	<a href="https://www.chesapeakebay.net/who/group/wetland-evaluation-taskgroup">https://www.chesapeakebay.net/who/group/wetland-evaluation-taskgroup</a>
1	West Virginia does not have a significant progress gap as we are positioned to meet planning targets for nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment by 2025. Also note that the recommendation for "...PSC to approve within six months the specific actionable	N/A

	items for each jurisdiction to accelerate the implementation...." is not consistent with the long-established principle that jurisdictions have autonomy to plan the implementation necessary to achieve planning targets.	
1	Along with Maryland, Virginia will serve as "co-champion" of wetlands restoration efforts by reengaging in this space and is currently gathering stakeholders and evaluating how to best implement the Virginia Wetlands Action Plan, which can be found as an appendix in the Chesapeake Bay 2023 Wetlands Action Plan.	<a href="https://d18lev1ok5leia.cloudfront.net/chesapeakebay/documents/2023.01.17-2023-Wetlands-Action-Plan_FINAL.pdf">https://d18lev1ok5leia.cloudfront.net/chesapeakebay/documents/2023.01.17-2023-Wetlands-Action-Plan_FINAL.pdf</a>
1	In calendar year 2022, 97.7% of the timber harvest acres in Virginia within the Chesapeake Bay watershed were under BMPs. The Virginia Trees for Clean Water Program allocated over \$1 million to 63 projects, including establishing riparian forest buffers, school and park plantings, re-greening efforts to combat urban heat islands, and stormwater retrofits that incorporate the use of trees. The James River Buffer Program was	

	<p>established in December 2018 to specifically target the James River to meet Virginia's 2025 WIP III goals. The Buffer Program is designed to work in tandem with existing programs and seeks to target currently unengaged landowners that have not participated or who do not qualify for existing programs. Virginia Department of Forestry's Watershed Program implements several strategies to increase buffer establishment, including setting specific, numeric, and realistic goals for field staff, offering new buffer training opportunities, creating a buffer cost-share portal and internal flow-chart to better match landowners with a best-fit funding program, and exploring new funding opportunities to support buffer establishment and maintenance. Other efforts include riparian forest buffer tax credits, urban tree canopy program, and the Healthy Watershed/Forest TMDL project.</p>	
2	<p>West Virginia supports continued and sustained funding for the high-resolution land-use and land-change data.</p>	N/A

3	DoD designated Sentinel Landscapes provide opportunities to work with partners to protect and conserve agricultural lands. The DoD has designated two new Sentinel Landscapes (Tidewater and Potomac) in the Virginia Security Corridor. These are in addition to the existing Middle Chesapeake Sentinel Landscape (Maryland) and the proposed Kittatinny Ridge Sentinel Landscape (Pennsylvania).	<a href="https://sentinellandscapes.org/landscapes/virginia-security-corridor/">https://sentinellandscapes.org/landscapes/virginia-security-corridor/</a>
3	West Virginia supports coordination with congressional delegations to ensure that future Farm Bills adequately support Chesapeake Bay restoration and conservation goals. West Virginia developed forest and farmland conservation goals as a component of the WIP 3 with positive implementation progress.	N/A