

Protected Lands Outcome

Protected Lands:

Development and land conversion are among the top stressors facing the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem. Permanently protecting lands from development is one way to combat the loss of forests, wetlands and other valuable wildlife habitat.

Outcome: Permanently protect critical landscapes within the Chesapeake Bay watershed to protect water quality, enhance biodiversity, support sustainable livelihoods, bolster local economies, honor cultural heritage and protect the mission and resilience of military installations.

- By 2040, permanently protect at least an additional 2 million acres of land above the 2025 baseline of 9.3 million acres. The 2 million acres will include specific targets for: riparian forests; wetlands (including migration corridors); natural areas supporting healthy streams; agricultural lands; tribal homelands; and urban and community greenspace.

Definitions

Urban and Community Greenspaces: Publicly accessible lands in census-designated places and urban areas that provide opportunities for both passive and active recreation while offering exposure to nature. These public spaces deliver human health, community, and environmental benefits and include, but are not limited to, parks, trails, gardens, sports fields, waterfronts, outdoor gathering areas, and natural landscapes like forests or grasslands.

Agriculture: Lands associated with the production of crops (e.g., grains, legumes, vegetables, fruits, nuts), used for grazing livestock (e.g., cattle, goats, sheep), or for producing fodder (e.g., hay and alfalfa).

Forest: Tree canopy with an unmanaged understory that is part of a large patch. Large patches are at least 1-acre in area with a minimum patch diameter of 36-meters (~120 feet). Forest also includes small patches of contiguous tree canopy that do not meet forest area and/or width requirements, such as agricultural windbreaks and small woodlots, where the understory is assumed to be undergoing natural or managed succession.

Riparian Forest: Forests within a 30-meter (100-foot) riparian buffer zone.

Wetlands:

Tribal Homelands:

Natural Areas Supporting Healthy Streams:

Baseline and Current Condition

In 2025, there were 9.3 million acres of protected lands within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. Of that number, 7.1 million acres were protected forest, 811,000 acres were protected riparian forest buffers, 1.3 million acres of protected agricultural lands, and 1.3 million acres were in protected wetlands.

Note: These numbers do not add up to 9.3 million; this is because lands could be counted twice, for example, a protected forest parcel in a buffer would also show up in both protected forest and protected riparian forest buffers. For information about protected forests, please refer to the Healthy Forests & Trees outcome.

Riparian Forests

Based on the 2025 PLI and the USGS 30M Riparian Forest Buffer zone data, there are 811,000 acres of protected riparian forests.

Wetlands (including migration corridors)

Natural Areas Supporting Healthy Streams

The Stream Health Workgroup is in the midst of defining what a “healthy stream” is. Once that is determined, the Protected Lands Workgroup will analyze the watersheds of those healthy streams to identify natural areas and their protection status to get a baseline number.

Natural Areas Supporting Healthy Streams target will be in place by the end of 2027

Agricultural Lands

Based on the 2025 PLI and the USGS Chesapeake Bay Land Use/Land Cover (LULC) Database 2024 Edition, there are 1.3 million acres of protected lands that are used for agriculture.

Tribal Homelands

The Indigenous Conservation Council (ICC) is currently in the process of identifying tribal land tenure on protected lands within Virginia. The Protected Lands Workgroup will work with ICC to scale up tracking land tenure to the whole watershed. Once the workgroup has a baseline understanding of current lands with tribal land tenure, this document will be updated.

A Tribal Homeland target will be in place by the end of 2027.

Urban and Community Greenspace

Based on the 2020 census-designated places and urban areas, and the PLI, there are 510,269 acres of protected lands within populous areas in the watershed.

Monitoring Progress and Indicators

Protected Lands Indicator [hyperlinked to Chesapeake Progress](#)

The Protected Lands Indicator (PLI) records the number of acres of permanently protected lands in the Chesapeake Bay watershed and tracks progress towards the Protected Lands Outcome. The PLI dataset was created through a data call effort by the Protected Lands Workgroup and relevant practitioners who provided geospatial data directly to CBP/USGS.

Data for the indicator is collected every other year, with the next data call in 2027. All of the following targets will be accessed on the same timeline and reported out to the partnership.

Monitoring: Riparian Forests

Utilizing the USGS Chesapeake Bay Watershed 30M Riparian Forest Buffer zone data, the USGS [Chesapeake Bay Land Use/Land Cover \(LULC\) Database 2024 Edition](#), and the protected lands indicator data to identify the acreage of protected riparian forest buffers.

Monitoring: Wetlands (including migration [corridors](#))

Utilizing the USFWS National Wetlands Inventory and the protected lands indicator to identify the acreage of protected non-tidal wetlands.

Monitoring: Natural Areas Supporting Healthy Streams

TBD. Will update once information is available.

Monitoring: Agricultural Lands

Utilizing the USGS Chesapeake Bay Land Use/Land Cover (LULC) Database 2024 Edition and the PLI to identify protected agricultural lands.

Monitoring: Tribal Homelands

TBD. Will update once information is available.

Monitoring: Urban and Community Greenspace

Utilizing 2020 census-designated places and urban areas, and the PLI to identify protected lands that are within populous areas in the watershed.

[Outcome Name] Situation Analysis

The following table identifies challenges that will impact progress towards attaining this outcome and its targets. This analysis considers scientific, environmental, fiscal or policy-related developments that have already or may influence work during the upcoming six-year Management Strategy cycle. Consideration is given to which challenges are within and outside of CBP's ability to influence. Challenges associated with Changing Environmental Conditions are denoted with an asterisk (*). Challenges listed in bold font

have been identified by the Goal Team and its Workgroups as being priorities for the Workgroup to seek to address or make progress against through the development and implementation of Management Approaches. [\[Add or remove rows from the following table as needed to document challenges to Outcome and/or Target attainment. Place an “X” in the corresponding box to classify each challenge as being “within CBP’s ability to influence” or “outside of CBP’s ability to influence”\]](#)

Challenges	Within CBPs ability to influence	Outside of CBP's ability to influence
Data gaps in the Protected Lands Indicator Dataset- Attributes of the dataset are missing key amounts of data, limiting CBP's ability to understand conserved lands within the Chesapeake fully	X	
Building relationships and trust within the Protected Lands Network- Jurisdictions have deep networks of implementers; the Bay Program does not. There is a need for the Bay Program to better coordinate with those doing the on-the-ground work	X	
Politics- Politics across the watershed change bringing new challenges as well as solutions that the PLWG will need to navigate		
Land Use Change* - Land is changing throughout the watershed. The PLWG and the HLGT should be working with jurisdictions and local partners to inform them of tools and resources to help them with land change planning.		x
Population change- There are some areas of the watershed that are seeing increases in population, while others are losing population. This pressure can shape how protection is perceived		x
Funding- Partners are being asked to do more with less resources. There is a real need for funding for capacity and technical assistance.	x	

Snapshot of Signatory Programs [\[hyperlink text below to relevant programs\]](#)

Managing a large and difficult restoration and conservation program with “no assurance about the level of funds that may be available beyond the short term” (GAO, 2028) is a challenging undertaking that requires individual and collaborative action from signatory partners, as well as the many communities and individuals who live, work, play and learn in our region. This “Snapshot of Signatory Resources” seeks to better recognize the significant contribution that individual signatory partners and federal agencies make towards outcome attainment. The existing programs and funding spotlighted below are not

intended to represent the full range of resources available or required to support progress towards outcome attainment; only the “biggest ticket” programs are included for each outcome and signatory partner. It is important to note that funding is reported from a single point in time (fiscal year 2025) and is not representative of future investments. Identifying the most critical programs and resources that exist at a particular moment in time can help the partnership focus its collaborative efforts on activities that have the greatest impact, and which don’t duplicate the work of existing programs.

Maryland

Programs

Rural Legacy Program (\$15,329,028) provides funding to preserve large, contiguous tracts of land and to enhance natural resources, agricultural, forestry and environmental protection while supporting a sustainable land base for natural resource-based industries.

Program Open Space Stateside (Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2025) preserves natural areas for public recreation and watershed and wildlife protection across Maryland through the acquisition of fee simple land and conservation easements.

Program Open Space Local (Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2025) provides financial and technical assistance to local subdivisions for the planning, acquisition, and/or development of recreation land or open space areas.

Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2025) purchases agricultural preservation easements that forever restrict development on prime farmland and woodland and has permanently preserved land in each of Maryland's 23 counties.

Maryland Environmental Trust (Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2025) works with landowners, local communities, and land trusts to protect Maryland's most treasured landscapes and natural resources as a legacy for future generations. MET accomplishes this work by providing direct assistance, information and innovative tools to ensure the ongoing stewardship and public concern for the natural, historic, and scenic resources of the state.

Greenspace Equity Program (Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2025) provide grants to eligible applicants for enhancing the public health and livability of overburdened and underserved communities by implementing projects to preserve, create, and improve public greenspace in overburdened and underserved communities

Whole Watershed Program a five-year pilot program, targeting five watersheds with the goal of improving watershed health through a diverse selection of environmental actions.

Legislation

The Maryland the Beautiful Act established ambitious land conservation goals: conserve 30% of the state by 2030 (30 by 30) and conserve 40% of the state by 2040 (40 by 40). Through the combined efforts of state agencies, local governments, the federal government, and nonprofit land trusts.

Virginia

Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2025) funds the protection of farmlands, forests, lands of historic or cultural significance, natural areas, open spaces, and parklands.

Land Preservation Tax Credit (\$75 million) allows landowners who permanently donate qualified conservation easements or land to receive a state income tax credit equal to 40% of the donated property's fair market value.

Delaware

Agricultural Lands Preservation Program allows landowners to voluntarily preserve their farms through a two-phase process. The first phase, which does not include any payment to the landowner, is known as an Agricultural Preservation District. In phase two, the landowner is paid to sell their farm's development rights, known as an Agricultural Conservation Easement.

Forestland Preservation Program Delaware's Forestland Preservation Program protects forestlands through perpetual conservation easements.

Open Space Program coordinates the acquisition of Parks, open space, natural areas, forests, wildlife habitat, greenways, and waterways.

Park, Greenways, and Trails Grants a matching grant program assisting with public park land acquisition and outdoor recreation facility development in Delaware.

Pennsylvania

Farmland Preservation Program was developed to strengthen Pennsylvania's agricultural economy and protect prime farmland.

Pennsylvania Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund a critical dedicated funding source for recreation and conservation projects, libraries, and historical preservation initiatives.

Environmental Stewardship Fund is used for environmental restoration and conservation and community revitalization projects. Receives revenues from an increase in the fee charged for dumping trash at landfills and has received funds from the 2005 Growing Greener bond initiative.

Oil and Gas Lease Fund In 1955, the Pennsylvania General Assembly created the Oil and Gas Lease Fund. Money received from oil and gas leases on state lands (except for Game Lands) are directed to be placed in the Oil and Gas Lease Fund, to be used a broad range of conservation infrastructure, including land acquisition.

New York

Environmental Protection Fund: A source of funding for capital projects that protect the environment and enhance communities. Capital projects are usually large projects that purchase land or construct facilities.

Legislation

30x30: Conserving 30% of New York's Lands and Waters by 2030. This legislation will promote biodiversity and preserve New York's wildlife, forests, and clean water sources, which are all essential to New York's health and economy.

Washington, D.C

West Virginia

Federal

Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Fund USFW

- **Chesapeake Small Watershed Grants USFW (\$23 million)**
- **Chesapeake WILD USFW (\$6.9 million)**

Forest Legacy Program USFS a conservation program administered by the Forest Service in partnership with State agencies to encourage the protection of privately owned forest lands through conservation easements or land purchases.

Community Forest Program USFS a grant program that provides financial assistance to tribal entities, local governments, and qualified conservation non-profit organizations to acquire and establish community forests that provide community benefits.

Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program DoD

Land and Water Conservation Fund DOI

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program USDA

Conservation Stewardship Program USDA

Recreational Trails Program US DOT Funded by gas taxes paid by off-road vehicles, the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is dedicated to the construction, restoration and maintenance of nonmotorized and motorized recreational trails (paved and unpaved) and trail-related facilities.

American Battlefield Protection Program NPS supports community-driven stewardship of historic resources. NPS ABPP administers four grant opportunities: Preservation Planning, Battlefield Land Acquisition, Battlefield Restoration, and Battlefield Interpretation grants.

Management Approaches for Outcome [#]: [Outcome Name]

[Management Approaches will outline the general approach needed to fill existing gaps and identify the partnership's role in that approach. These are the actions that the program will undertake to address the challenges to goal and outcome attainment that are described in the Situation Analysis. The Management Approach section should include how local governments and other stakeholders will be kept informed and involved.

- Each Management Approach should seek to address one or more stated challenge(s).
- Management Approaches should be specific enough to guide partnership efforts over the coming six years and to enable the partnership to determine if work related to the Management Approach has progressed at an appropriate pace. Example: a

Management Approach would not be “communications and outreach,” but rather “Assess Blue Crab Stock Status and Communicate the Results to Managers and the Public.” Management Approaches should be specific enough to be meaningful and provide transparency about the work that partners will collaboratively undertake.

- Management Approaches at the Goal and/or Outcome-level should describe and seek to address “signatories, other state and federal agencies, local governments, Indigenous representatives, nonprofit and private partners are engaged; where actions, tools, financial support and technical assistance are needed to empower local governments and others to do their part; and what steps are necessary to facilitate greater participation in achieving the Outcome.”
- Outcome-level Management Approaches should speak to the strategies and actions that Chesapeake Bay Program Partners should undertake over the next six years to address challenges that impact specific Outcomes.
- For each Goal-level Management Approach, a statement should be included to describe which Outcome workplans will include related projects or actions.]

Management Approach 3.4.1: Maintain high-quality protected lands data to help the partnership understand the full scope of protected lands within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

The Protected Lands Outcome depends on accurate tracking of protected lands over time. Advancing conservation as a core pillar of the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) also requires a clear understanding of how recent conservation efforts contribute to multiple ecological and societal outcomes. High-quality data, including comprehensive attribution of establishment dates, public access status, and GAP status, is essential for accurately assessing conditions across protected lands and evaluating progress toward conservation goals. The Protected Lands Workgroup will coordinate with data managers to improve data completeness, consistency, and accessibility, ensuring that datasets are properly attributed and suitable for analysis.

Management Approach 3.4.2: Identify, assess, and leverage funding opportunities to strengthen protection initiatives, technical assistance, and capacity-building programs.

Jurisdictions and other partners have expressed that protection work is becoming more challenging due to limitations with funding, capacity, and technical assistance. Opportunities and access to funds exist, but they can be challenging to find. The Protected Lands Work will identify, assess, and help partners leverage funding to increase our protected lands footprint, capacity, and technical assistance. The Workgroup will also work with the Chesapeake Bay Program to identify

Management Approach 3.4.3: Actively engage with the Protected Lands Network within the Chesapeake to build trust and relationships with those who are implementing protection

Trust is the foundation within a network. The Protected Lands Workgroup will foster meaningful connections with land conservation practitioners, agencies, nonprofits, and

other stakeholders involved in land protection efforts. The Workgroup will build trust through regular engagement, collaboration, and knowledge sharing to better understand on-the-ground challenges, opportunities, and priorities. Strengthen relationships that support coordinated conservation strategies, advance shared goals, and enhance the long-term protection and stewardship of critical lands throughout the Chesapeake region.

Management Approach 3.4.4: **Develop and provide communication resources that help jurisdictions and local governments convey the benefits of land conservation and protection.** The Protected Lands Workgroup and Chesapeake Bay Program will create and share fact sheets, case studies, messaging tools, and other resources that communicate the environmental, economic, and community benefits of conservation at the local scale, helping build support for land protection initiatives and informed decision-making.

Management Approach 3.4.5: **Integrate Chesapeake Bay co-benefits into the priorities and activities of the Protected Lands Workgroup.** The Workgroup will promote conservation and protection strategies that support multiple outcomes, including Chesapeake Bay water quality, source water and groundwater protection, habitat conservation, climate resilience, and community well-being, ensuring that protected lands investments deliver broad and lasting benefits across the watershed.

Participating Partners

The following partners participated in the creation of this Management Strategy and expressed their intention to collaborate on Management Strategy implementation over the next six years. Per the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement, “participation in developing Management Strategies or in the achievement of Outcomes varies by signatory based on differing priorities across the watershed. This participation may include commitments such as sharing knowledge, data or information, educating the public, working on future legislation and developing or implementing programs or verified practices” (2025). Signatory partners may join implementation efforts at any time. Partners also recognize that Signatory participation is voluntary and may vary accordingly.

- **Signatory Partners**
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- **Other Partners**
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Appendix 1. Signatory Statutory Authorities Driving Outcome Attainment

The law and regulation of signatory partners may support, justify or motivate their participation in the collaborative work of the Chesapeake Bay Program related to the attainment of specific Outcomes and Targets of the Watershed Agreement.

The following documentation identifies core statutory authorities that provide part of the impetus for the attainment of Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement Outcomes and their related Targets. While Chesapeake Bay Program partners acknowledge that the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement is voluntary, subject to the availability of appropriated funds, and does not preempt, supersede or override any other law or regulation applicable to each signatory, they also acknowledge that the law or regulation of individual signatories can support each partner’s participation in outcome attainment. The table below is not an exhaustive list of all relevant laws and regulations. Rather, this appendix identifies the driving motivators that can bring about signatory partner engagement in efforts described in this Strategic Plan, associated Management Strategies, and Workplans.

Goal [#]: [Goal Name]

[illegible]