

Protected Lands Workgroup

December 11, 2024


2:30 pm - 4:30 pm

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Agenda:  [PLWG Agenda December 2024.pdf](#)

Protected Lands Outcome: By 2025, protect an additional two million acres of lands throughout the watershed—currently identified as high conservation priorities at the federal, state or local level—including 225,000 acres of wetlands and 695,000 acres of forest land of highest value for maintaining water quality.

Attendees:

Aurelia Gracia (NPS), Wendy O’Sullivan (NPS), Britt Slattery (NPS), Becky Gwynn (VA DWF), Cheryl Wise (MD DNR), Sara Coleman (MD DNR), Kerri Batrowny (DE State Parks), Ashley Rebert (PA DCNR), Michelle Campbell (DC), Sophie Waterman (USGS), Coral Howe (USGS), John Wolf (USGS), Peter Claggett (USGS), Katie Brownson (NFWF), Ben Alexandro (CCP), Chase Douglas (CCP), Meredith Lemke (CBP), Daniel Koval (Protected Lands Staffer)

2:30 PM **Welcome/ Introductions**

2:40 PM **Review of CCP Annual Meeting (Ben)**

- Major themes and presentations
- Identified actions and upcoming opportunities

Ben Alexandro:

CCP Meeting Recap:

- 88 people attended! This meeting was focused on strategies that can be implemented across the watershed. Day One featured keynote speakers from Indigenous voices (Dominique Daye Hunter, Program Manager at Indigenous East; and Kesha Braunskill, Lenape Indian Tribe of Delaware, Native Roots Farm Foundation)
- Key takeaways were how important it is to build meaningful and lasting relationships with the intent to do so from the beginning of working with Indigenous communities.
- Great conversations arose around cultural easements as another option to conservation easements, which emphasize the importance of having Indigenous communities in the land and stewarding the land.

- A panel from three state leaders in conservation (Secretary Cindy Dunn (PA), Secretary Josh Kurtz (MD), and Director Matt Wells (VA)) to talk about what projects are happening in each state. Some friendly competition was created along with new ideas that each state could implement after hearing them from each other.
 - For example, PA has lots more state parks than VA, and VA wants to expand their number, looking at PA as a guide.
 - MD likes how VA and PA are able to do really big landscape conservation projects that cross boundaries
- Smaller Breakout Groups allowed for more in-depth conversation on 4 topics:
 - Habitat: Good conversations on the data and state wildlife action plans. Discussions on how to better do communications?
 - Solar: lots of interest in CCP playing a more active role as a convener in the future to find more solutions and common ground. Lots of folks saw that data centers were driving this large energy demand. Could we make model policies and create tools to help states address this?
 - Data around conservation: How do we track our protected lands progress? This session laid out what is needed in future data calls to better track, analyze, and communicate conservation progress.
 - Aurelia Gracia: There will be a datacall soon using 2024 data, which will come out in 2025. Steve Storck helped lead the GIS Community in Practice and shared a case study with PA where they updated the Date of Establishment within the parcels in the data. This made their reporting much more accurate and able to be used in various 'calls to action'
 - Problem is funding and capacity for states to go back in their data records and find the date of establishment. NFWF said they would be interested in being a funding source.
 - Urban Conservation: focus on the unique policy challenges that they face. How can they make sure that urban conservation doesn't fall through the cracks as many policies focus on big landscapes?
- Day 2 featured many lightning talks ranging from the Evergreen cemetery to progress on a potential new National Wildlife Refuge in southern Maryland.
 - One thing that was highlighted was that many who work in urban communities often don't see themselves in the large acre conservation goals and policies. What is something that can better capture those urban components?
 - This led to a few signing up for some Action teams to get started.
- Ended with a discussion on Chesapeake Bay Program's future updates with the Outcome Assessments by Wendy O'Sullivan.
- And lastly, a brief overview of what was mentioned in the Strategic Playbook process by CCP. Members were asked what areas they would like to focus on in different groups to get progress done.

3:00 PM Chesapeake Bay Program: Agreement Revision Process & Timeline (Wendy & Daniel)

- Review of current status and upcoming meetings

- Outcome Assessment - 2 pager request
- Review of GIT5 Office Hour sessions & feedback from [CBP Agreement Assessment](#)

Wendy O’Sullivan:

The Chesapeake Executive council met yesterday, Dec 10th where they made a commitment to continue the goals in the Watershed Agreement and did a Charge to begin the process to revise the outcomes by the end of 2025 to refresh the Watershed Agreement as many of the outcomes have targets aimed to end in 2025.

The Charge sets out the intent of the revisions with a list of priorities:

- A renewed and greater emphasis on engaging all communities
- Addressing water quality and living resources throughout the Bay and watershed;
- Elevating conservation as a key pillar of the Chesapeake Bay Program, alongside science, restoration, and partnership
- Grounding in the most recent scientific understandings and issues
- Ensuring goals and outcomes are measurable and time bound (SMART)
- Acknowledging that our scientific understanding is continuously evolving and that adaptability is key
- Understanding that while we share a common goal, we approach this goal from different perspectives, challenges, and opportunities

The First step in revising is the Outcome Assessment. This asks the question of whether the outcomes should be consolidated with another outcome, reduced in the metric, updated to have a new metric, removed, replaced, or kept with an addition of new outcomes alongside it.

Current Protected Lands Outcome: By 2025, protect an additional two million acres of lands throughout the watershed—currently identified as high conservation priorities at the federal, state or local level—including 225,000 acres of wetlands and 695,000 acres of forest land of highest value for maintaining water quality.

We are engaging our workgroups to get feedback on what members recommend for their Outcome. [CBP Agreement Assessment - Rapid Input - GIT 5 Outcomes](#)

This form asks:

- What is the public benefit and/or support for the outcome you’ve selected?
- What are the challenges and opportunities achieving the outcome?
- Consider the timescale for completing the outcome (5, 10, 15 years) & should the outcome be

Becky Gwynn: There is an opportunity to collaborate on work done for the wetlands outcome (the 225,000 acres). DWR has a broad role in land conservation, but a lead role in VA related to wetlands. We take an approach for restoration and protection which spans both sets of outcomes. Sometimes it’s hard to separate and refine those. There may be some synergy to be gained by a consolidation or something like that. In the time I’ve protected in this workgroup, I’ve had no idea there were those subgoals.

Wendy O'Sullivan: Understood. And this as a long run on sentence as an outcome raises questions about the challenges of completing the outcome. It could also relate to the risk of removing the outcome (unintended consequence of creating a run on sentence as an outcome). The broad focus on 2 million can lose focus on the smaller focuses on wetlands / forests

Britt Slattery from chat: Totally agree, Becky. I have sporadically spoken with Wetlands outcome folks. Theirs is written as only RESTORATION. We need to revise something to include protection.

Sara Coleman: First thought is to update the outcome. In terms of urban land conservation, that could be another category we want to have under the 2 million. Ex: of that 2 million, we want to have conservation here, here and here. A purposeful sub categorization.

Wendy O'Sullivan:

Updates on the 2025 timeline for revising the agreement:

- The form is open until January 3rd. All feedback is anonymous. You will identify which workgroup (if any) you are a part of and then you pick one outcome to answer the rest of the questions specifically for that outcome. If you would like to also provide feedback for another outcome, you can submit another time for another outcome!
- Feedback will be shared with Workgroup/GIT staff and leadership. Future meetings will be scheduled to develop a recommendation

Big dates:

- December 12th, 9am-1pm: Management Board Meeting to confirm which outcomes will be discussed during each of the three Outcome Review Meetings

Outcome Review Meetings (when each outcome will be discussed by the Management Board to determine the recommendations. Language is not needed yet, just the recommendation.

- February 13th
- February 27th
- March 13th
 - Protected Lands Outcome is scheduled for March 13th. All materials need to be submitted to the Management Board two weeks prior, making Protected Lands materials due on February 27th.

After we get the green light from the Management Board about our recommendation, we will then need to write the language for the new outcome, depending on the recommended changes. We want the workgroup to be really engaged in this process.

Aurelia Gracia: We are hoping that once the form closes, we will grab the responses and sort them. We will use that to create a draft for the two pager template, and will give that draft to the workgroup to react to and provide input and edits. This will lead to a final version for Wendy, as chair of GIT 5, to submit to the Bay Program.

- **Becky Gwynn:** Hybrid option would work. People can do initial editing through email / remotely, but I would value a meeting where people can ask questions and host a live conversation.
 - Michelle Campbell, from chat: agree with the hybrid approach

Wendy O'Sullivan: For the state representatives, the states might be going through a similar process internally , though I'm not sure.

Ben Alexandro: If we put together an action team around strategizing beyond 2025, are there folks on this call who would like to work with the CCP Steering Committee to join that?

- Becky Gwynn: I'm interested. VA has a meeting next week following the Management Board where we will get direction about how VA agencies will feed into this process. Our reps on the MB and the PSC will not want to be surprised by something their agencies might say. I will get back to you after the 17th.
- Katie Brownson from chat: This workgroup is relatively small already - do we need a separate action team?

Aurelia Gracia: If we come together as a workgroup for the draft 2-pager, maybe the CCP Action Team can join the hybrid meeting that we hold?

This workgroup is on a quarterly schedule, but with this coming up, we may have some more frequent meetings. We will host a hybrid meeting once the 2-pagers draft is out for January.

Katie Brownson: It seems the questions are pretty narrow, and that can be a concern about the process as it may silo the approach. We should be taking a step back to look at if the outcome is supporting its goal. Is there room in 2025 to see how the outcome could be improved to better meet the intent of the goal? IF we don't have some of those bigger questions early on, they will get lost in the process.

Aurelia Gracia: Agreed. The conservation workgroup chairs/coordinators are meeting and trying to coordinate. There are opportunities to put that language in there in regards to 'updating' the outcome.

Britt Slattery: The first step is looking at the outcome itself and the specific recommendations. After that is revising the language, based on the recommendation. Then after that, we will be asked about structure. It is hard to separate those pieces in the thought process, and are trying to keep it in that order so we don't get ahead of ourselves, but I do agree that what Katie said is important. We need to think about the broader language and meaning of the goals. The wetlands outcome for example is written only about restoration. I've asked before why we have it in ours and not a different group's, and the answer was that the wetlands workgroup focuses on protection, and ours focuses on restoration.... It is important to have a discussion about what makes sense (we have to work within the existing goal structure for now) but we can be thinking about possible future changes as we think about them now.

Ben Alexandro: If we are going to make conservation foundational within the bay program, we need to break the silos. Should we have a strategy to approach that? Some of us could go to other office hours that other GITs are holding, for example.

Peter Claggett: I want to reiterate all of that, and that's what all the GITs in the bay program should be doing (looking across outcomes). When it comes to protection, everything under habitats or healthy watersheds or land conservation can be related. If you look broadly enough, it is all the same thing. We want to conserve more land, but have different benefits / outcomes each group is focusing on. That splits us up across different goal teams/workgroups and doesn't make sense. The problem is we are siloed, and the management board/leadership is saying oh you should solve your silo problem within your silos. The PLWG has done a good job at reaching out to each other, specifically the HWGIT (Healthy Watershed Goal Implementation Team), and we should do that wherever there is overlap.

Open Discussion

4:00 PM Chesapeake Bay Program: Strategy Review System (Anthony & Aurelia)

- SRS process has been modified for the PLWG
- Are there any actions we want to continue working on?

Aurelia Gracia: Are there any actions from our action plan that we feel really passionate about and want to carry on with? Sara Coleman created a document for states to input their programs, and that is almost completed (just need VA and NY). Ben's team with CCP is hosting a webinar in January to complete another action from the action plan as well. Do we want to continue working on any others?

Britt Slattery: It's a bit of a weird year. You worked hard on the action plan, and just because the SRS process is not happening doesn't mean you should scrap the action plan. I would keep working on them, but for the moment in the earlier part of the year we will just have to focus additional attention on the Outcome Assessment task.

Aurelia Gracia: That's a good point. I don't want to drown the workgroup with work. There is great stuff in the action plan and we might just have to space this out until later in 2025.

Ben Alexandro: The CCP Webinar is February 26th for the Communications Toolkit Webinar. Secondly, our CCCC Member Kaelyn is gathering data on different programs that finance conservation throughout the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. I can have her share what she has so far.

Aurelia Gracia: Once the 2-pager for Beyond 2025 is settled, we can take more focus on the action plan.

Ben Alexandro: As we're thinking through the new outcomes, we may have to play defense on the development community, which may try to dilute the definition of conservation. We saw this a little in the previous draft coming out of the summer where the conservation definition was removed from the draft of the document. As we're saying conservation will be foundational, there may be an effort for some folks to say that everything counts as conservation which means nothing does, and makes it hard to track.

Action Items:

- Fill out the [when2meet](#) for convening as a group to go over edits/comments on the Outcome Assessment recommendations two-pager: [PLWG 2-pager Outcome Assessment Review - When2meet](#)
- Complete the [GIT 5 Outcome Assessment Feedback Form](#) by January 3rd