



## Scientific, Technical Assessment and Reporting (STAR) Team Meeting

September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

[Visit the meeting webpage for meeting materials and additional information.](#)

**Purpose:** This is the September 2025 meeting of the Scientific, Technical Assessment and Reporting Team (STAR). The group heard a presentation from Sadie Drescher (Chesapeake Bay Trust) on the Chesapeake Pooled Monitoring Program, their recent research and what's next. Then, STAR leaders facilitated an open discussion on the Revised Agreement and upcoming Management Board Retreat. Lastly, STAR leaders introduced early thoughts on STAR's structure under the new Goal and Outcome structure.

### Minutes

#### I. Welcome, Introductions & Announcements

*Lead: **Ken Hyer** (U.S. Geological Survey, USGS) STAR Chair, **Breck Sullivan** (USGS) STAR Coordinator, and **Peter Tango** (USGS) CBP Monitoring Coordinator.*

##### Upcoming Conferences, Meetings, Workshops and Webinars

- [Chesapeake Watershed Forum](#) – November 7-9, 2025, Shepherdstown, West Virginia.
- [Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation \(CERF\) Conference](#) – November 9-13, 2025, Richmond, Virginia.

##### Announcements

- [UM-SEAS Master's Project Proposals](#) due September 29, 2025.

#### II. Overview of the Chesapeake Pooled Monitoring Program, Latest Research, and What's Next

*Lead: **Sadie Drescher** (Chesapeake Bay Trust, CBT)*

Sadie's goal in her presentation is to re-introduce the research program to STAR, share the current projects and propose ideas on how attendees can get involved. Sadie shared the purpose and history of the Pooled Monitoring Initiative, along with [the link to their website](#). Next, FY25 research projects and funding details were presented. Sadie specifically highlighted the eDNA projects, as this was something the advisory committee was especially interested in that fiscal year. She also shared information on their Pooled Monitoring Forum. Sadie followed up with information about their website, how to request project proposals and where to find information on the current projects. Feel free to contact Sadie ([sdrescher@cbtrust.org](mailto:sdrescher@cbtrust.org)) with any questions.

##### **Actions:**

1. Participants of this meeting should share the Chesapeake Pooled Monitoring Program, its research projects and its upcoming request for proposals (November) with partners and contacts.

2. If you are interested in serving as a project proposal reviewer, please contact Sadie Drescher at [sdrescher@cbtrust.org](mailto:sdrescher@cbtrust.org). Peter Tango has served in the past.

### **Discussion Notes:**

**Q:** *Jeremy Hanson:* How often are the projects published in peer reviewed literature?

- **A:** *Sadie Drescher:* That is the goal and expectation. I think about 80% do get published.
- **A from chat:** *Sadie Drescher:* Also, the # of published awards is higher than I'd stated so closer to 95% (some earlier ones maybe did not get published but we write this as a requirement in contracts now and the research is robust).

**Comment:** *Kaylyn Gootman:* I have attended these events in the past and I love the unique format of bringing together researchers and practitioners. I really appreciate hearing from researchers, but I find it particularly valuable to hear from the practitioners. I love hearing how the research connects with the boots on the ground or in the water. I think this real-world connection is something we don't see very often but it is crucial.

**Q from chat:** *Kristin Saunders:* Are you seeing the results of the studies being implemented in terms of policy change or new approaches to implementation? How do you ensure the reports continue to have life after publishing?

- **A:** *Sadie Drescher:* It's very important for the results to be used. A couple years ago, we had Montgomery County, the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MD DNR) and another group share at the Forum how they are using research results in policy making and decisions. For example, Amy Stevens at Montgomery County shared that because of lessons learned in Salonge Peloso's research findings, particularly that stream restoration was more impactful in the headwater streams, they targeted stream restoration there. I am curious to know if you all have used the research. We have used it and put it in our requests for proposals (RFPs) to make sure our applicants and reviewers are familiar with the latest research.
- **A from chat:** *Sadie Drescher:* Kristen - Great question and part of why we are working to ensure the final reports have "legs" later is to first present the findings back to those who asked the Qs at the annual forum and our recent work with "Thriving Coasts" to develop summaries around topics (e.g., BMP effectiveness), of course, post all final reports/fact sheets and published reports (if ok) on the Pooled Monitoring website. We're also waiting on some cutting-edge research about bacterial source tracking (PI Hale and PI Schott) and PCB (PI Lombard and PI Kjellerup) results to come in to then hopefully be applied to make sampling easier. I think there is more to do with some of the findings about sample design and optimizing monitoring to reduce uncertainty and maximize scientific value ahead of doing the monitoring to see if the experimental design will "tell us" what we're asking (PI Liang, PI Lyubchich, & PIs Goodfellow/Thompson). There's more to do here and thanks for this question.

**Q:** *Peter Tango:* I am happy to have been a reviewer in the past and would be happy to do that again. What is the timing and process for the next round of applications?

- *A: Sadie Drescher:* We are forming the research questions now with our Advisory Committee. I could possibly use this group's help to be a scientific reviewer. The applications will come in January. It would also be helpful if this group could be aware of the research and use it as it comes out on our website. The RFP will be out in early November. It will be open for about three months. Please let your friends and neighbors know about it. As I said, we didn't get any climate change applications last year and I know there are researchers working on climate change.

**Comment:** *Breck Sullivan:* After Sadie came to STAR last time, she was kind enough to add me to the Advisory Board. I get to review the proposals that come through and see how they can support the Chesapeake Bay Program. I also help guide the research questions. Please come to me if you have any thoughts. As Sadie mentioned, we are currently deciding what the research questions will be. I'd be happy to relay thoughts to other members on the board. I am taking notes to make sure that in the future we can help with the scientific review part and advertising when the proposals can be submitted.

**Q from chat:** Kristin Saunders: Breck, are we shopping the science database items for pooled monitoring questions?

- *A: Breck Sullivan:* Yes, I have been using the science needs database to help with this. In this round, it's hard because we are deciding on our new outcomes and targets, but in previous years, yes.

### III. Revised Agreement Open Discussion

*Lead: Breck Sullivan (USGS)*

Prior to this meeting, the final outcomes for Management Board (MB) approval were released. This was an open discussion to hear from outcome leads and others on topics of conversation for the upcoming [MB retreat](#). This was not a decisional item, only a conversation to initiate thoughts and ideas amongst participants before the retreat. Some guiding questions posed, the following question was discussed during the meeting. There was also conversation that related to this topic but didn't relate to the guiding questions listed on the agenda.

- Do outcomes prefer the 2035 or 2040 horizon? Why?

Summary Discussion Results: The group was widely split on whether the horizon should be 2035 or 2040. The WQGIT argued strongly for a 2040 outcome because of their longer implementation timeline with the development of the Phase 7 model. Those in favor of the 2035 deadline mentioned that a 15-year-old management plan may no longer be relevant as a lot can change in that timeframe. However, others mentioned that a 10-year timeframe leaves little time for implementation and results because of the time it will take to implement new management strategies and the amount of time that will be spent preparing for a new Agreement Revision. Lastly, a mid-point assessment was proposed, and participants shared many ways that this could be implemented.

#### Discussion Notes:

Question 1: Do outcomes prefer the 2035 or 2040 horizon? Why?

**Comment:** *Chris Guy:* This time we did 11 years in between the last revisions. I think it matters less how long we have in-between the revisions but instead spend more time on reviewing the

process. We should be focusing on “What does that process look like in 10/15 years?” For those who were working with the MB, Principal Staffs’ Committee (PSC) and in the Goal Implementation Teams (GITs) with the outcomes, it feels like the first year of Beyond 2025 was wasted in thinking about the process. There were a lot of groups before 2025 that most of us probably don’t remember anymore. The review process of getting to where we will be in December 2025 took about four years and a lot of that effort was wasted. We didn’t use anything from the Up to 2025 Report. We need to focus on the process.

The way it’s being implemented with the outcomes conflicts with how Breck described it as being “when is the next revision going to take place?” I think the MB missed the mark of what we received in the public feedback. We weren’t given an initial timeframe so now the MB is asking us to create new goal numbers and people are having a problem with this. Wetlands was easy because we could just use the number we had for ten years and multiply it by 1.5 for 15 years. It became a finite period of which we would have an outcome. It’s contradicted with what the outcomes would want, especially the biological outcomes. For example, for riparian buffers, it takes 50 years to grow a tree so how much can be tracked in a 10-year timeline. We need a point in time to go back and look at the Agreement to make sure it is still relevant. I think that is what the public feedback needs to do. We have four or five years to do the process I spoke of. As the Governance and Accountability Team (GAT) and MB wrap up, hopefully we will transition smoothly to how do we evaluate the Agreement in x years.

- **Comment from chat:** Keith Bollt: Agreed, there's some funny math going on.

**Comment:** Jeremy Hanson: In terms of what Water Quality GIT (WQGIT) leadership has talked about, we prefer the 2040 timeline over 2035. This is mostly because of the timing of the Phase 7 model development, exploring the possibility of tiered targets, developing new Watershed Implementation Plans (WIPs), and more. There isn’t much time between when that shakes out and 2035. 2040 is a lot more reasonable. Our target language is independent of the timeline year.

- **Comment from chat:** Kaylyn Gootman: Seconding what Jeremy is saying on the 2040 preference from a big picture perspective. We are going through a modeling suite Phase change which is an enormous undertaking. Then, we have to work out Planning Targets and what watershed implementation plans look like. And adding in the new twist of Tiered Implementation for consideration of living resources and water quality to meet our goals.

**Comment:** Ken Hyer: I haven’t landed on a strong preference. 2040 makes a lot of sense in having more time to get implementation done and see a measurable response. I think folks are viewing it in an accountability lens with the 2035 deadline. For those in the workgroups, we understand that much of 2026 will be spent implementing the new agreement and developing management strategies. Someone cited that this could take 18 months. We know that about two years before we reach 2035, we will start doing these assessments and get organized. You only have about seven years of focused implementation. I love hearing everyone’s perspectives. This is what I am thinking.

**Comment from chat:** Katie Brownson: The Forestry Workgroup prefers 2035 to have a nearer-term checkpoint (as Ken is saying) but doesn't have strong feelings and could adapt to 2040.

**Comment:** Kristen Saunders: The perspectives of this conversation change based on who is in the room and I’ve observed a few things. Some members of the MB and PSC are probably thinking

about this in terms of political calculations. For example: How does it look to the public? What year is going to give us the most opportunity to show success and not look like we are behind again? Also being responsive to people who are asking for a closer year so progress can be tracked in a more accelerated fashion. There is this wrestling between setting numbers with political and scientific considerations. When we were negotiating the 2014 timelines, many of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) members who wanted us to embrace adaptive management kept reminding us that we should think about the timelines in when we could expect to see changes in the system from the efforts we are taking. That should be considered over a value that considers other factors. That's the wrestling that I feel is happening right now. I don't know if anyone who is working on this with the MB and PSC have considered putting together a pros and cons list, but it might be helpful. It may be better to lay it out for people to consider and make an informed decision rather than relying on the conversation, because important voices may not be in the room and that could sway the decision making. I sense it will be the PSC and ultimately the EC who will make this decision. A list could help the MB portray the tension around these things. Another thing I remember from conversations with STAC is that the further away the timeline is, the further away the opportunity to change course if something isn't working. That makes the case for either a closer timeline or having an assessment mid-point. I think that is something they may want to talk and think about. I haven't heard it come up in the context of this conversation yet. I don't know if we will still have the Strategy Review System (SRS) to do those checks. This kind of speaks to the Outcome Attainability Assessment that was done, which was helping in understanding where we were, how far we need to go, and what we need to change course on. I don't have an answer for which year we choose but there are compelling arguments for both.

**Comment from chat:** *Kaylyn Gootman:* Could mid-point check ins be built in by outcome preference? After all trees and oysters grow at different rates, right? And water quality responds to implementation at different rates.

- **Comment from chat:** *Ken Hyer:* I wonder if 2040 with another "mid-point check" would work?
- **Response from chat:** *Peter Tango:* You read my mind - we will likely need some mid-point evaluation somehow, somewhere. Does it have to be in the Agreement? I.e., if we do a 2033 or 2035 assessment, does it have to be written into the agreement? I don't think the 2017 Midpoint Assessment was written into any document for example, but it was a CBP programmatic target of evaluation
- **Response from chat:** *Kaylyn Gootman:* The Midpoint Assessment (2017) was mandated. Perhaps the solution is a more organic/outcome specific checkpoint set?
- **Response from chat:** *Keith Bollt:* Theoretically, we have indicators and adaptive management to check in every few years with decisionmakers, and the agreement can be updated according to the current governance document, so that seems more effective than one big midpoint check, with the caveat that this approach wasn't super effective over the past 11 years.
- **Response from chat:** *Kaylyn Gootman:* I see opportunity to re-think indicators as a support for these checkpoints. Right now, there are too many things to track. Suggest capital "I" indicators that link to outcome tracking. Keeping other indicators with lowercase "i" could be a framework here.

- **Response: Breck Sullivan:** We do the Bay Barometer release every year, which showcases the status of every outcome every year. Maybe we need to highlight and communicate that as our yearly assessment.
- **Response from chat: Rachel Felter:** Not every year. But we plan to this year. Well, I mean we have a Barometer every year but sometimes we only share those outcomes that have been updated in the past year. This year, we plan to discuss all 31 outcomes.
- **Response from chat: Marisa Baldine:** Bay Barometer is released every year but we don't always include information about every single outcome. It often only includes the outcomes that were updated in that calendar year.
- **Response: Breck Sullivan:** Even if it's every few years, we can still communicate that without having to revise the agreement.

**Comment: Sophie Waterman:** At the MB meeting, Peter Tango had a great comment in the chat in defense of the 2040 deadline. He mentioned how things take a long time to plan for and work through. This management strategy approach may take a while too, which is another good argument for 2040.

We added a stretch goal to our target because it was clear that what we had didn't feel like enough to the public. Are other outcomes doing that? Is this something people are thinking about in reference to the 2035 vs 2040 argument? We can try to convey to the public that this date isn't the end; it's just another point to work towards.

- **Q: Breck Sullivan:** Didn't Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) also do something like that? Their overarching statement was how many acres they needed to achieve water quality standards, but their target breakdown was to a 2035/2040 timeline.
- **A: Chris Guy:** It was a little bit more complicated than that. It wasn't based on water quality. They had an overall goal of what the Bay area could sustain for SAV. Having SAV grow everywhere that it could grow and be healthy was the overarching goal with no timeline. Then, there was a trend line that was hindcasted and tied to the water quality. We took that regression line and plotted it out to come up with the rate of increase on average. Then we picked our dates, which were originally 2030 and 2035, but it is now 2035 and 2040. It's the same slope and doesn't account for other variable factors other than the hindcasting. Then they used the salinity zones and made healthy goals for each of them. There were three distinct targets within each one. I think it's a great example of being scientifically based but not too variable based on the new agreement date. As Kristin mentioned, I think we need to have an accountability and political date, even for ourselves. Those of us who have been doing this for a very long time know strategic plans have a shelf life of about five years and this is a plan that takes a long time to revitalize. In 15 years, a lot will have changed which makes you wonder if that strategic plan is still relevant. That 10-year horizon is a happy medium of implementing for a while and seeing where things have changed politically and environmentally to tweak your plan. However, this is different from the scientific target.
- **Response: Kaylyn Gootman:** It's not just the science. It's the mechanism of how the big picture is quantified. It's the Bay Program math. Undergoing a phase change right now is bigger than I am aware. The ability to quantify change on the water quality piece, one of the biggest drivers, is not going to be operationalized. It will take longer to get to the plans. Then we'll have to write those plans and connect them to the funding piece. The challenge is we need that political win. We need to figure out where the updates come in and how they are communicated because we have a lot of public support. There are a lot of important outcomes

and it's not as easy as one size fits all. The last mid-point assessment was easier because it was mandated by EPA. I don't know if each outcome gets to build in checkpoints. 2035 is way too short for water quality and modeling. It's almost like we are starting over.

- **Response:** *Chris Guy:* Right, I feel like those are two different things. There is the agreement checkpoint where we say, "Are we still doing the things we want to do and how?" Then, there is an outcome checkpoint that isn't related. That's where I think the MB is missing the mark. I liked what you said because it's very easy for SAV. It's a linear regression based on 40 years of data. Water quality is a non-parabolic regression line. You're not going to have much going on in the beginning but as that takes hold there will be a lot more action. That's very technical in nature and can't be fit to a 2035 or 2040 timeline.
- **Response:** *Kaylyn Gootman:* Right. How do you separate them because they are perceived as connected? Where does it work for both parts?
- **Response:** *Chris Guy:* That's the point. Why do we need to back the outcomes into a 2035 or 2040 target? Maybe water quality needs a 2050 target with checkpoints in 2035 or 2040. The checkpoints don't even need numbers associated with them. They could just function to say "Is the Agreement still functioning the way it should?" These two different questions have been conflated in the conversation and will create the problems we already saw in 2025.

**Comment from chat:** *Keith Bollt:* November 2040 is a presidential election, so a December 2040 recommitment may be dicey depending on signatory calculations, how successful we are, and what recommitment looks like. But generally, I support 2040 because of the longer time horizon.

**Comment:** *Breck Sullivan:* Thank you all. I think we have gotten really good feedback today. One thing we are hearing is that there needs to be a mid-term checkpoint. Also, some outcomes need more time for implementation. We can share that during the MB retreat and I'm sure each outcome will share their own thoughts. Like Kristin was saying, maybe someone in the MB retreat planning could consider creating a pros and cons list and we can share these notes with them.

#### Conversation on questions not listed above.

**Comment:** *Breck Sullivan:* We still have time to share other thoughts about things the MB will discuss at the retreat. One item we have is that we'd like to add commas to the title of the Water Quality Standards Attainment and Monitoring (WQSAM) outcome. This would be to help showcase how our outcome tackles three big topics. 1. The goal of clean water and achieving water quality. 2. Attaining water quality standards. We think the commas will help show these three interconnected topics. 3. Making sure monitoring is funded and the core networks are functioning.

**Comment:** *Peter Tango:* We are bigger than water quality standards attainment, which is just a small slice of a big pie of all the things we analyze, report, summarize, and synthesize. It seems important to be intentional about updating that. We wanted to be more intentional and explicit about what the outcome was getting at.

**Q:** *Sophie Waterman:* Has there been any conversation or detail related to management strategies that has come out? Do we have guidance of what that would look like?

- **A:** *Ken Hyer:* It was a topic at the last MB meeting. They were trying to get jurisdictions to sign on early to participate in developing management strategies. There were a few folks at

the MB that were uncomfortable with that. There was intent to kick that off, but it wasn't received the way folks had hoped. I think that set it back a little bit.

- **A: Breck Sullivan:** We tried to explain what we have at the moment as a workplan and management strategy. I don't know if that will change.

**Q: Kaylyn Gootman:** How many goals and outcomes do we have now?

- **A from chat: Rachel Felver:** 4 goals, 21 outcomes
- **Q: Kaylyn Gootman:** Nobody anticipates those numbers changing, right?
- **A: Peter Tango:** I am wondering if they might ask people to combine. I've heard from some people that they have been getting their jurisdictional representatives acquainted but I haven't heard any feedback yet on what they are thinking.
- **Comment: Breck Sullivan:** When we had to agree about whether or not it could go to public feedback, some jurisdictions were comfortable with it going to public feedback, but that didn't necessarily mean they were fully ok with the outcomes or language.

**Comment: Keith Bollt:** Changing Environmental Conditions is moving away from the outcome and there is that working team. I know there has been conversations about it and we don't have the bandwidth to hire a new person to coordinate that team. I know that even though it's not an outcome, the MB has marked it as still important. I am hearing a signatory commitment to staffing that off. I think it needs a management strategy and signatory capacity commitment from existing staff. If we can't hire new people, then it needs to come from existing staff. I think it's important to talk about that because for the last several months, it hasn't been top of mind.

- **Response: Ken Hyer:** I've had one meeting with Lee. I left that meeting with the understanding that there is still support going forward, but we stopped that meeting well short of figuring out staffing. We wrote a one-pager and wanted to give Lee a sense of what we are thinking about and how it might operate. I haven't talked to Lee in a couple of weeks. I think I would have heard if there was a negative perception to it, but it seems like it was accepted as something the partnership needs to work on. It's probably something we have to loop back to once things quiet down.

**Q: Jessica Blackburn:** I wanted to loop back to the management strategy discussion. When I shared the red-lined version with the stakeholders committee, I got a question about wanting to understand the proposal about having management strategy reporting every three to four years. I wanted to see if the group had any feedback that I could share with that member as well as understanding if this reporting on progress will be pulled from the modeling information or be based on monitoring.

- **A: Breck Sullivan:** To answer your first question, I think some people were suggesting that management strategies don't go through a full review for three to four years because now those are more broadly managing the outcome. A lot of it doesn't change too much throughout the work of the outcome unless we realize something isn't working and then we need to make changes. It's very forward thinking of long-term how do we achieve this outcome. Workplans have served as a one-to-two-year plan of individual activities and tasks that we need to do to achieve progress towards our outcome. The management strategy and workplan are two different documents. They could become one if the MB decides, but if not, we will still see the management strategy as a broad outlook that doesn't need to be updated as often.



- **Comment:** *Peter Tango:* The workplan is often tied to grant awards with deliverable schedules. They usually provide regular updates and reporting. I think that's where a lot of things adapt and change while the bigger picture moves slower. In those regular updates, we'd include monitoring information and tie in modeling insights to provide strategic updates. The two-year SRS process had us working at a pace where once we had made an accounting of everything within the two years, we were in the middle of the next one and had to start preparing information. The three-to-four-year timeline will allow us more time to build the storyline and understanding.
- **Comment:** *Chris Guy:* Right now, we have the workplans and management strategy as two documents and it's a lump or split argument. If we put them together, the management strategy will just be the first section or the introduction and then you will have the workplans, but the content will be the same. For the Brook Trout target, we wanted to reduce the threats by 10%. In the management strategy, we are focused on stressors, like acid mine drainage, gravel roads, and riparian buffers. In the workplan, we will have ideas of what you can do on a shorter-term basis. Whether you create one document or two, you will still have the stressors and actions listed. The stressors aren't going to change from year-to-year but the actions will.
- **Response:** *Jessica Blackburn:* There may be a question about whether the distinction between the management strategy and workplan is clear.
- **Response:** *Breck Sullivan:* I fully agree on that.
- **Response from chat:** *Jeremy Hanson:* Workplans for "doing" and management strategies for "thinking and learning"

**Q:** *Katie Brownson:* I have been having a hard time reviewing the management strategy section in the Agreement and disentangling it from questions around governance and structure. The management strategy and workplan are such integral components of our adaptive management framework. The timeline and process for doing that is foundational, but we don't have clarity on how we will be doing adaptive management, who will be responsible, and if there is going to be a broader strategic planning effort at a higher level, like the PSC or MB. I don't know if the governance and accountability team have grappled with that at all. I reviewed the recommendations for the MB, but it seemed like you guys were staying at a higher level. It seems like there are some important things that we need to talk about, like how we are going to adaptively manage our outcome work and how that interfaces with broader strategic priorities that could be reflected in the Agreement. It seems like we haven't had those conversations yet. We haven't had that bigger conversation of doing adaptive management better, how that process should be, and how that will interface with higher level priorities of the Program. If anything, it seems like that section has gotten vaguer. Now, management strategies will be reviewed by the MB, and I don't know what that means. Does anyone from the GAT have insight that could help me wrap my head around this?

- **A:** *Ken Hyer:* The accountability or adaptive management piece was one of the six fundamental challenges we identified, but we haven't unpacked it yet. You are right. We are probably out of sequence. We haven't been able to talk about the issues and solutions yet, but it is on our list. I had some similar notes when I went through the red-line version. I thought there were some areas where we needed to add some clarity of that management section to define what we are talking about timelines.

- **Response from chat:** *Jessica Blackburn:* I agree, the shift from Management Strategy review from MB to "leadership" is unclear.

**Q:** *Larry Sanford:* I have been thinking about the issue of whether water quality is going to continue dominating the goals and outcome or whether it is going to be more balanced with living resources. I looked at the latest version of the Bay Program structure and saw that the Modeling WG is under the direction of STAR. Is that right?

- **A:** *Ken Hyer:* I wouldn't use the word "direction." It sits under the STAR umbrella, but I don't think we view it as us having direction. Yes, it's part of STAR.

**Q:** *Larry Sanford:* I ask because it seems like the Modeling WG is going to keep being focused on water quality. I think it makes sense that it doesn't just support the WQGIT, but also STAR and can be considered to be used to support living resources. I don't understand why it has been stuck with strictly having modeling applied to water quality. Can that change?

- **A:** *Peter Tango:* There have been discussions and efforts to be more integrated with living resources that might not have materialized as clearly as we hoped. It's not that it hasn't occurred, but there is momentum as you pointed out. They have worked on oyster integration and understanding filtering capacities and I think they may incorporate shoreline. There's certainly room for those questions about integration.
- **Response:** *Larry Sanford:* Living resource modeling has come a long way in ten years. There is something that can be done. Right now, we consider living resources as their impact on water quality, but not the success of recovery for their own sake. Right now, we have SAV and oysters as water quality influences. I won't be at the MB meeting. Bill Dennison will be there. Modeling can be used in a much broader sense to address living resources and report to STAR.
- **Response:** *Ken Hyer:* Great point. I agree with you. We have always worked to consider STAR's role of being science support for all outcomes. The intent is to keep that. I would advocate strongly for that, and I think others would too. I think we could call it a prioritization perspective. The modeling team has been focused on water quality and maybe we could ask to see if there is an opportunity to balance that more.
- **Response:** *Larry Sanford:* That's why I wanted to bring it up in a STAR meeting. I don't see it changing if modeling is effectively directed by the WQGIT. It makes more sense for modeling to be directed by STAR and have water quality as one aspect.
- **Response:** *Breck Sullivan:* Thank you. I will be touching on this in my next presentation.
- **Response from chat:** *Bruce Vogt:* Interesting thought Larry. All the modeling we have done with Fish GIT (blue crab, fish habitat and forage) has been supported with NOAA funding and with experts on our WGs not through the modeling WG.
- **Response from chat:** *Keith Bollt:* I asked Lew Linker that question once, he seemed to indicate it was theoretically possible, and that the team served at the pleasure of the partnership.
- **Response from chat:** *Peter Tango:* Thank you Larry. I think we could and will benefit from exploring the integrated work with Living Resources further. We are doing LR modeling as Bruce highlights furthered with Kaylyn's coordination efforts recently, but, it's not embedded into the Mod WG workplan, it's aimed at target questions. Habitat Suitability Index's (HSI) are different than population modeling, community modeling, invasives management questions, etc.

- **Response from chat:** *Kaylyn Gootman:* And this HSI work is part of Step 1 as we move towards a Tiered Implementation approach to planning targets and implementation plans.
- **Response from chat:** *Peter Tango:* Maybe we can formulate a "Phase 9" Integrated Modeling WG workplan that has more explicit living resource items embedded. Bill - maybe the question about the model and living resource can be a STAC Workshop too?
- **Response from chat:** *Meg Cole:* Hey Peter - Bill fell off but I am rolling up these comments for him ahead of the MB meeting next week. And the STAC FY26 Workshop RFP will be released on December 1st, this sounds entirely appropriate and timely for a prospective workshop.

#### IV. Looking Ahead – STAR Structure

*Lead: Breck Sullivan (USGS)*

With the improvement of the Chesapeake Bay Program structure during the Agreement revision, STAR leadership decided to improve the structure within STAR, especially in some key areas that have room for improvement, which Breck highlighted in her beginning slides. Then, Breck gave an overview of how STAR fits into the Program and the current workgroups, teams, and functions to provide a background. Breck laid out the current conversations happening within the Watershed Agreement revision re-structuring that influences the structure of STAR. Breck shared ideas on how to best evolve to fit these influences and suggestions from the MB. Using this information, Breck shows the draft ideas for the STAR structure, including a distinction between Teams that have a solidified scope and those that may need continued discussion.

##### **Discussion Notes:**

**Comment from chat:** *Peter Tango:* "Monitoring and Assessment outcome" was the Climate Monitoring and Assessment outcome, different from WQSAM world.

**Q from chat:** *Kaylyn Gootman:* Question for later: what is the difference between a CBP Team and CBP Workgroup? Does a Team have a start and end date?

- **A from chat:** *Keith Bollt:* "Team" is not defined in the governance document, "action team" is a temporary group, and "workgroup" is a group with an indefinite end date.
- **Comment from chat:** *Jeremy Hanson:* "team" is also used a lot for CBP internal office staff teams (GSAT, Modeling Team, the teams all listed on our Office Staff page...)

**Comment from chat:** *Melissa Fagan:* As the STAR team considers structure, I'd be happy to help brainstorm around CRC Staffer support for a revised structure. With the Staffer team generally at capacity in terms of workload, availability of Staffer support to meet team needs as they consider future structural options will need to be part of the equation.

**Comment from chat:** *Kaylyn Gootman:* First reaction, need to think about connection between Teams and STAR leadership. 13 teams to one leadership team is many to one. Cross-collaborative team level with 2x per year meeting or quarterly? e.g., Nontidal Network and Integrated Trends and Analysis Team.

- **Comment:** *Kaylyn Gootman:* This is different than an action team which has a start and end date. I like moving things to the same level, but I am anxious about 13 teams under one leadership group. I wonder if there is an opportunity to add a level or two to encourage

collaboration and discussion. Maybe quarterly or three times a year they could meet. There could be ways to feed information to STAR leadership, so our leadership doesn't have to be everywhere at once.

**Q:** *Amanda Shaver:* It makes me sad to hear about this separation between science and policy. At VA DEQ, we try to make sure we are grounded in science when we are working towards forming policy or making regulatory decisions. Can anyone speak to why that separation has come up? I don't feel like it's a good move.

- **A:** *Breck Sullivan:* Some of it has to do with the decision-making process. Also, they want the scientists to be able to produce the most rigorous and validated science they can that will be shown to the policy makers, rather than have them combined. This way the policy makers can make decisions that are informed by science.
- **Q:** *Kaylyn Gootman:* Who is suggesting this?
- **A:** *Breck Sullivan:* Chesapeake Bay leadership is suggesting this. I haven't heard that it has to happen, but it's a strong recommendation.
- **Response:** *Ken Hyer:* The concept did not originate in STAR. We are not pushing for this. This is something EPA and Lee came back to. The idea behind creating some space between them was to be sure the science wasn't affected by the policy. That's actually the history of why the Modeling WG is in STAR. The WQGIT is working on the development and implementation of targets. The model is more science, so it lives in STAR, whereas WQGIT is more in policy. Lee was leaning into that idea by saying if CAP is more focused on developing and implementing policy, it should probably live in the WQGIT, where we have full representation from jurisdictions. The science and data analysis pieces can live in STAR. Not to decouple them, but to create some separation. I have heard that USGS is separate of EPA to separate the science from the policy and regulatory piece. We would have to chat more with Lee to unpack that.
- **Response:** *Amanda Shaver:* From my perspective working in the assessment world, we value the data and monitoring networks to do better assessments. If we end up moving this way, how would we make requests of STAR from a GIT workgroup? Is there a mechanism where the GITs can come to STAR with requests? I guess I would be attending some of the monitoring meetings as a CAP member to bring my perspective. I don't know how those working relationships would change.
- **Response:** *Ken Hyer:* Yeah, we'd have to work on strengthening that connection between the science and policy. I think it can be done through strong coordination. I don't think there have been any discussions as to what it would look like or how it would work.
- **Response:** *Amanda Shaver:* It may go to what Kaylyn was talking about with the interconnection between the workgroups, STAR leadership, and then the WQGIT. Like you said, STAR is supposed to support all of the outcomes, but it is water quality focused from my perspective in monitoring. I am curious as to how we can shift that.
- **Response:** *Ken Hyer:* It's a real mix because the Geospatial Science and Applications Team (GSAT) and Changing Environment Conditions Team are supporting all of the outcomes. Given the nature of the partnership, there is a strong emphasis on water quality. There is a dynamic tension that needs to be addressed.

- **Response: Kaylyn Gootman:** Would it be a helpful thought exercise if we take each team and put the outcomes they touch under them? For GSAT, it would be all of them. Then we could see where those groupings are.
- **Response: Breck Sullivan:** Yes, that is definitely something we could do. The teams are mostly water quality focused but if we look at the overall functions within STAR, science capacity, synthesis, and tracking the needs hits on all of the outcomes. We might want a team for that so it's not just myself and sometimes Ken and Peter. Indicators touch all the outcomes. The data center, Mike Mallonee and Emily Young, are taking in the data, working with data management, and producing it for all of the outcomes. Sometimes it can be the behind the scenes work and the foundational pieces.
- **Response: Ken Hyer:** Bill Dennison referred to STAR as the "kitchen utility junk drawer." There is a history of placing things within STAR when we're not sure where to put it but it's technical and science related. That's why there are 13 subgroups. It's part of our collective history. We're wrestling some of that. We thought it would make sense to bring this forward to understand how we could improve by restructuring and streamlining.
- **Response from chat: Jeremy Hanson:** Thanks for generating this discussion, Amanda! As WQGIT coordinator I had similar questions.
- **Response from chat: Jeremy Hanson:** Being the "kitchen junk drawer" is a badge of honor, that's one of the most used and critical drawers in the house! So, I think the analogy holds up given the historical success of the partnership in furthering the science of our shared work.

**Q from chat: Katie Brownson:** Wondering whether more autonomous/internal teams need to be "under" STAR or if they can just be CBPO teams (thinking about GSAT, Data Center, Indicators, maybe others). Then the groups under STAR could be more cross-sectional partnership teams?

- **Response from chat: Keith Bollt:** The handoff will be key to success.
- **A from chat: Peter Tango:** It's a good thought Katie. When a new group formed, and if it served multiple needs in the community (most recently Hypoxia Collaborative and BORG), the work needed a home, and home was STAR. Another model like you suggest seems plausible.

**Comment: Kristin Saunders:** These thoughts are coming from Kristin, the former cross-program coordinator, and not from a MD DNR perspective. We are still having internal conversations within the state of Maryland about structure and how to advise our leadership. This is purely from my experience in working with all of you over the last several years.

I love that you are having this conversation. I think it's important to generate these ideas from the people who have been doing this work so the MB and PSC can be informed by the people in the trenches when they talk about what the structure should look like. Some of them have only scratched the surface of all the great and wonderful work that goes on here. It's easy to think the Program should be smaller without understanding the implications of doing away with this stuff. I think there are multiple versions of what streamlining is to the partnership. Some people have the expectations that we will be a smaller organization with less teams, meetings, work and commitments. To other people, streamlining and efficiency means considering how we can work better together and eliminate silos. Given that there seem to be decision makers that believe it should be smaller, they might look at this and see nothing changing because you're not getting rid

of anything. I want to offer that as a point of view that I hear in different corners of the conversation. It's important to recognize that some people may think you're missing the mark by having so many teams.

To me, STAR and the Strategic Engagement Team (SET) are the two foundational groups in terms of implementation of science and communications that support all of the outcomes and goal teams in the program. I think we have an opportunity here to replace the role of cross-program coordination and place it within STAR and SET. They bring together multiple disciplines and can break down silos within thinking and conversations. Especially since the Eastern Research Group report suggested collaboration and coordination is important to maintain going forward. Leaning into that role for STAR is important.

I'm curious if anyone has explored conversations with the Science Branch and Partnership Branch about how to align STAR and SET with them, not to enmesh them or get rid of one and consolidate. The Science Branch has traditionally been very supportive of water quality needs. STAR became the "kitchen junk drawer" because it was the place to go when the science branch didn't have the capacity and non-water quality outcomes could be looked at. Also, the Partnership Branch used to work on communications and then SET came along and I think there is capacity building there that hasn't been operationalized. Right now, the MB is only really talking about the GITs, but there is also a structure at the Chesapeake Bay Program Office. There may be a way to find efficiency and streamline communications by having closer alignment of the two branches. I think it's worth looking into.

- **Response:** *Ken Hyer:* I absolutely agree with you. That is on our list in sequencing. We wanted to start here to generate some thoughts, but you are spot on. We need to do that.

**Comment from chat:** *Katie Brownson:* From a governance perspective it would be good to be clear on the difference between the "teams"- some of these are currently more official CBPO workgroups with jurisdictional reps, meetings open to the public etc. Others are really just internal working teams (and not sure there would be benefit in making them more workgroup-like)

## V. Adjourn

**Next Meeting:** Tuesday, November 25, 2025

### Attendees:

- Alex Fries, University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science (UMCES)
- Allison Welch, Chesapeake Research Consortium (CRC)
- Amanda Shaver, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (VA DEQ)
- Ann Foo, UMCES
- Ashley Hullinger, Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP)
- Bailey Robertory, Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MD DNR)
- Bill Dennison, UMCES
- Breck Sullivan, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)
- Bruce Vogt, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA)
- Carl Friedrichs, Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS)
- Carol Cain, MD DNR
- Chris Guy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
- Christina Garvey, CRC
- Cindy Johnson, VA DEQ
- Dede Lawal, CRC

- Douglas Austin, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- Gabriel Duran, CRC
- Jeremy Hanson, CRC
- Jessica Blackburn, Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay (ACB)
- John Wolf, USGS
- Julia Fucci, CRC
- Julie Reichert-Nguyen, NOAA
- Katie Brownson, U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
- Kaylyn Gootman, EPA
- Keith Bollt, EPA
- Ken Hyer, USGS
- Kristin Saunders, MD DNR
- Larry Sanford, UMCES
- Liz Chudoba, ACB

- Marisa Baldine, ACB
- Matthew Kierce, Izaak Walton League of America (IWLA)
- Melissa Fagan, CRC
- Meg Cole, CRC
- Megan Thyng, EPA
- Peter Tango, USGS
- Rebecca Murphy, UMCES
- Sadie Drescher, Chesapeake Bay Trust (CBT)
- Shelly Baird, MD DNR
- Sophie Waterman, USGS
- Tou Matthews, CRC
- Wendy O'Sullivan, National Park Service (NPS)
- Zafer Defne, USGS