Revised Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement w/ Edits Accepted
September 23, 2025

VISION

We envision a region where clean water flows freely, wildlife thrives and farms, forests and fisheries stay healthy and productive. It is a place where people from all walks of life feel connected to the land, to the Bay and local waterways, to their communities and to the rich cultural heritage that makes this watershed unique. Together, we are building a future that is environmentally and economically sustainable, resilient and full of possibility — where everyone can conserve and enjoy the natural beauty of the Bay and the lands and waters that surround it, today and for generations to come.

PREAMBLE

The Chesapeake Bay watershed is one of the most extraordinary places in the United States of America, spanning six states and the District of Columbia. As the nation's largest and one of the most productive estuaries in the world, the Chesapeake Bay and its vast network of more than 180,000 miles of streams, creeks and rivers holds tremendous ecological, cultural, economic, historic and recreational value for the more than 18 million people who live, work, learn and play in the region.

To restore, conserve and protect this national treasure, the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership was formed in 1983 when the governors of Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, the mayor of the District of Columbia, the chair of the Chesapeake Bay Commission and the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency signed the first Chesapeake Bay Agreement. That initial Bay Agreement recognized the "historical decline of living resources" in the Chesapeake Bay and committed to a cooperative approach to "fully address the extent, complexity and sources of pollutants entering the Bay." For more than 40 years, this regional partnership has been recognized as one of the nation's premier estuarine restoration, conservation and protection efforts, implementing policies, engaging in scientific investigation and coordinating actions among the states, the District of Columbia and the federal government.

The Chesapeake Bay Program partners have made much progress in that time, and there is still more to do—especially in the face of continued challenges such as changes in population, loss of farm and forest lands, declining fish and wildlife resources, threats to biodiversity, emerging contaminants and changing environmental conditions. Through the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement, the partnership remains committed to restoring, protecting and conserving the Bay and its watershed through effort based in and guided by science and responsive to the lessons learned from our past and shared experiences.

One of the most important lessons the partners have learned from the past four decades is that although watershed-wide partnerships can help to coordinate and catalyze progress, implementation is locally inspired and driven. Local governments, tribes, communities, farmers, businesses, watershed groups and other nongovernmental organizations are key partners in our

work. Working together to engage, empower and facilitate these partner networks will leverage resources and ensure better outcomes for all watershed communities.

The partnership's experience with watershed restoration, conservation and protection efforts has shown that measurable progress, coupled with clear accountability, yield the most effective results. The partnership continues to embrace new ideas, technologies and policies that will help meet our goals. We are committed to improving accountability, transparency and outreach to strengthen and increase public confidence in our work.

The 1983 *Chesapeake Bay Agreement* laid the foundation for a cooperative program that included four jurisdictions along with the Chesapeake Bay Commission and the federal government. This initial one-page document was followed by two more comprehensive voluntary agreements in 1987 and 2000. In 2010, at the request of the Bay jurisdictions, the Environmental Protection Agency established the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (Bay TMDL), which calculated the nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment reductions needed at that time to restore water quality in the Bay, fulfilled consent decree commitments in Virginia and the District of Columbia from the late 1990s and was a keystone commitment of a federal strategy to meet Executive Order 13508 to restore and protect the Bay. The Chesapeake Bay Program partnership has been implementing the Bay TMDL for the past 15 years and will continue to do so. Since 2014, the *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement* has included all seven jurisdictions in the watershed, with New York, West Virginia and Delaware joining the original signatories as full partners in the Chesapeake Bay Program and the Chesapeake Executive Council. Numerous federal agencies also continue their longstanding commitment to restoring, conserving and protecting the Chesapeake Bay.

This *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement* acknowledges that the partnership cannot address every issue at once and that progress must be made in a strategic manner, focusing on efforts that will achieve the most meaningful and cost-effective results. Watershed restoration, conservation and protection are integral drivers of the region's economy, health and culture. To that end, the partnership is committed to achieving success while maximizing the community and economic benefits across the watershed. The signatories to this voluntary agreement commit to achieving the restoration, conservation and protection of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, its water, habitats, fisheries and wildlife for the benefit of all people living in and visiting this nationally treasured watershed.

In 20XX, the partnership will come together to formally assess our progress and amend this agreement to ensure work reflects our shared vision.

PRINCIPLES

The Chesapeake Bay Program commits to operate under the following principles, which reflect the partners' collective, core values. The principles guide the work of the partnership as we develop policy and take action to achieve the *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement's* Goals and Outcomes. The partnership will:

Science

- Use place-based approaches, where appropriate, to target specific geographic areas and produce recognizable benefits to local communities while contributing to larger ecosystem goals.

- Maintain and enhance a coordinated watershed-wide monitoring, modeling and research program to support decision-making, track progress and assess the effectiveness of management actions.

- Integrate social science holistically throughout the partnership to support adaptive management, more effectively engage with communities and incentivize individual and collective behaviors that support partnership goals.

- Use science-based decision-making, consider Indigenous and local knowledge and seek out innovative technologies and approaches to support sound management decisions in a changing system.

Restoration and Conservation

- Achieve Goals and Outcomes in a measurable and timely way with the most economic benefit and at the least possible cost to the public.

- Acknowledge, support and engage local governments and other local entities in watershed restoration, conservation and protection activities.

- Anticipate and respond to changing conditions, including long-term trends in sea level, temperature, precipitation, land use and other variables.

Partnership

- Collaborate to achieve the Goals and Outcomes of this *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*.

- Represent the interests of all communities throughout the watershed fairly and effectively.

- Operate with transparency in program decisions, policies, actions and reporting on progress to strengthen public trust and confidence in our efforts.

- Adaptively manage at all levels of the partnership to foster continuous improvement informed by the best available science and strong working relationships.

- Seek consensus across the partnership when making decisions.

- Meaningfully engage the public to foster collaboration and grow the partnership to support and carry out the restoration, conservation and protection activities necessary to achieve the Goals and Outcomes of this *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*.

- Integrate tribal nations into the partnership in a manner that appropriately considers their unique status as independent sovereign nations and as original stewards of the land.

- Facilitate outreach to and welcome participation by all communities regarding the partnership's activities, decisions and implementation.

GOALS, OUTCOMES AND TARGETS

The Goals and Outcomes contained in this section are collective commitments made by the signatories to advance restoration, conservation and protection of the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem and its watershed. The Goals articulate the desired high-level aspects of the partners' Vision. The Outcomes lay out benefits and results that directly contribute to the achievement of each Goal in the form of specific, measurable and time-bound Targets, which are reflected as a bulleted list under each Outcome.

Details that articulate the actions necessary to achieve the Goals, Outcomes and Targets are laid out in Management Strategies, further described in the last section of this *Watershed Agreement*. This work will require efforts from many, including all levels of government, academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, watershed groups, businesses and individuals. Local governments will continue to play a unique and critical role in helping the partnership realize this shared Vision for the Chesapeake Bay.

While the Goals and Outcomes are described by separate topic areas, the signatories recognize that they are interrelated. Improvements in habitat and water quality lead to healthier habitats, wildlife and fisheries. Environmentally literate people are more engaged stewards of the Chesapeake Bay's healthy watersheds. Better water quality means swimmable, fishable waters for Bay residents and visitors. Increased public access to the Bay and its tributaries inspires people to care for critical landscapes and honor the region's heritage and culture. Healthy fish and shellfish populations support a vibrant economy for a spectrum of marine-related industries. The signatories recognize that all aspects of the ecosystem are connected and that these Goals and Outcomes support the health and the protection of the entire Bay watershed.

As the signatories identify new opportunities and concerns, Goals, Outcomes or Targets may be adopted or modified. Any changes or additions to Goals will be approved by the Chesapeake Executive Council. The Principals' Staff Committee will approve changes or additions to Outcomes and Targets, although significant changes or additions will be raised to the Chesapeake Executive Council for approval. Proposed changes to Goals, Outcomes and Targets, or the addition of new ones, will be open for public input before being finalized. Final changes or additions, and progress toward meeting Outcomes and their Targets, will be made publicly available.

THRIVING HABITAT, FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE GOAL

The fisheries and wildlife of the Chesapeake Bay watershed are the backbone of the region's ecology, economy and heritage. However, impaired water quality, invasive species and habitat loss place pressure on fish and wildlife populations across the region. Meanwhile, our increasing use of land and resources can fragment and degrade the habitats they depend on. Maintaining sustainable fisheries and restoring habitat for native and migratory species, while adapting to the challenges of changing environmental conditions, will support a strong economy, recreation and a resilient ecosystem.

Goal

Protect, restore and sustain fisheries and wildlife, as well as the network of land and water habitats they depend on, to promote a balanced and resilient ecosystem and support local economies and recreational opportunities.

Blue Crab Outcome

Achieve a sustainable Bay-wide blue crab fishery through cross-jurisdictional coordination that supports healthy blue crab populations and thriving fish communities.

- Maintain blue crab abundance and harvest rate targets as determined by the most recent benchmark status assessment.

- Achieve cross-jurisdictional coordination by annually evaluating and communicating blue crab population status to resource managers and the public through the Blue Crab Advisory Report.

Brook Trout Outcome

Protect and enhance brook trout within the Chesapeake Bay watershed by increasing occupancy, abundance and resilience to changing environmental conditions.

- By 2040, increase brook trout occupancy by 1.5% or 233 miles in watersheds supporting healthy populations while achieving no net loss in other watersheds. (Increase by 1% or 155 miles by 2035.)

- By 2035/40, increase abundance at 10 long-term monitoring sites.

- By 2040, reduce identified threats by 15% to increase brook trout resilience in watersheds supporting healthy populations. (Reduce by 10% by 2035.)

Fish Habitat Outcome

Achieve and maintain suitable shallow water fish habitat in tidal and nontidal areas for key species through focused water quality conservation and restoration improvements informed by an assessment of habitat and fisheries information

- Improve the quantity and quality of tidal shallow water fish habitat above baseline conditions continually as determined by a Bay-wide assessment of fish habitat conditions completed in 2026.

- Increase the consideration of forage species in fishery management decision-making for key predators by developing annual reports of prey status as good, uncertain or poor.

- Establish a baseline and assess the overall condition and suitability of fish habitat in the watershed to support healthy communities and inform effective restoration, conservation and management actions.

- Increase available habitat continually to support fish populations by improving 180 stream miles of waters impaired by acid mine drainage by 2035 (270 stream miles by 2040).

- Develop comprehensive freshwater mussel conservation plans for 10 tributaries and implement key recommendations from five of these plans by 2035 (same target for 2040).

Fish Passage Outcome

Improve habitat and water quality, while creating more resilient and sustainable populations of fish and other aquatic organisms by removing barriers throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed's coastal and freshwater rivers and streams.

- Restore passage and connectivity to least 150 miles of aquatic habitat every two years.

Oysters Outcome

Increase ecosystem benefits from oysters through reef habitat restoration, sustainable harvest and aquaculture.

- By 2035, restore or conserve at least 1,800 additional acres of oyster reef habitat concentrated primarily in restoration focus areas to provide ecosystem service benefits.

- Maintain sustainable oyster abundance through oyster fisheries and aquaculture practices.

- Maintain reefs established under the 2014 *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement* to achieve restoration success metrics.

Stream Health Outcome

Improve and protect local stream health and function, including their living resources and ecosystem services throughout the watershed using the best available science to inform land management, planning and conservation.

- Improve health and the ecological integrity of at least3%, or 4,340 nontidal stream miles every six years.

Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) Outcome

Sustain and increase the habitat and ecosystem benefits of SAV in the Chesapeake Bay. Achieve and sustain the outcome of 196,635 acres of SAV Bay-wide necessary for a restored Bay.

- Measure progress toward this Outcome against interim targets of 90,000 acres by 2030,95,000 acres by 2035 and 100,000 acres by 2040

- Measure progress against the following targets for each salinity zone:
    - Tidal Fresh: 21,719 acres
    - Low Salinity: 13,094 acres
    - Medium Salinity: 126,032 acres
    - High Salinity: 35,790 acres

Wetlands Outcome

Restore, create, enhance and protect wetlands to support people and living resources, including waterbirds and fish, provide water quality, flood and erosion protection, recreation and other valuable benefits to people.

- Restore or create 1,000 acres and enhance 15,000 acres of tidal wetlands by 2035.

- Restore or create 2,000 acres and enhance 15,000 acres of nontidal wetlands by 2035.

- Develop priorities for specific waterbird species over the next 12 to 18 months.

CLEAN WATER GOAL

Clean water is the foundation of healthy fisheries, habitats and communities across the watershed. However, excess nitrogen, phosphorus, sediment and toxic contaminants can degrade our waterways, harm wildlife and pose risks to human health, all of which are exacerbated by changes in the landscape and environmental conditions. Chesapeake Bay Program partners use a variety of tools to reduce excess nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment, address toxic contaminants and monitor progress toward achieving water quality standards.

Goal

Reduce pollutants entering the Bay and its rivers to achieve the water quality necessary to support aquatic wildlife and protect human health.

Reducing Excess Nitrogen, Phosphorus and Sediment Outcome

Implement and maintain practices and controls, as described in the Bay TMDL, to achieve reductions of nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment necessary to meet applicable water quality standards that support living resources and protect human health.

- Through 2030, continue to rapidly progress toward achieving all interim planning targets by implementing as determined by the Principals' Staff Committee. Partners may meet this target by implementing their Phase III Watershed Implementation Plans, two-year milestone commitments and other innovative strategies.

- By December 2030, revise the planning targets approved by the Principals' Staff Committee for nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment using the latest watershed modeling, science and data, and set timelines and develop new or amended Watershed Implementation Plans to meet the updated targets.

- Demonstrate reductions in nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment through modeling and monitoring data (in coordination with the Water Quality Standards Attainment and Monitoring Outcome).

Water Quality Standards Attainment and Monitoring Outcome

Measure changing water quality conditions by maintaining monitoring networks and tracking our collective progress toward achieving clean water, throughout the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed.

- Maintain full core monitoring network operations (i.e., nontidal water quality, SAV, tidal water quality, benthic and community science) annually to support analysis and communication of water quality loads, trends and criteria attainment.

- Develop and expand partnership-approved approaches for assessing whether water quality criteria are being met for all designated uses. For dissolved oxygen criteria, establish an approved method by 2028 and apply the method for data analysis and reporting by the end of 2030.

- Accelerate the long-term rate of improvement in the water quality standards attainment indicator relative to the 1985—2022 baseline.

- Analyzes and report status/loads, trends and factors affecting those trends for nontidal and tidal water quality.

Toxic Contaminants Outcome

Reduce the amount and effect of toxic contaminants, such as PCBs, plastics, mercury and PFAS, on the waters, lands, fisheries, wildlife and communities of the Chesapeake Bay watershed through an increased understanding of their impacts and mitigation options.

- Promote continuous information sharing between researchers, program managers and policymakers on the lessons learned, best practices and most up-to-date science, policy and communications around the toxic contaminants impacting the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

HEALTHY LANDSCAPES GOAL

The well-being of the Chesapeake Bay depends on the health of the lands that make up its watershed. As communities within the region continue to grow, the demand for land and resources can put our waters and habitats at risk. Sound land use management and conservation of areas with ecological, historic and cultural value can reduce or prevent pollution, maintain healthy ecosystems and ensure the health of forests, farms and open spaces, all while supporting growing economies. These cost-effective strategies will help communities adapt to changing environmental conditions and ensure clean water for future generations.

Goal

Conserve, protect, restore and enhance landscapes of ecological, economic, recreational and cultural value to improve water quality, provide habitat for wildlife and increase resilience.

Adapting to Changing Environmental Conditions Outcome

Increase the capacity for pursuing nature-based solutions to improve planning and responses to changing conditions while balancing long-term resiliency of watershed communities, economies and ecosystems.

- By 2035/40, at least seven sub-watershed areas have benefited from knowledge-sharing and technical assistance to identify adaptation options with nature-based solutions. These solutions include restoration and protection projects that will help address risks to people, infrastructure and habitats from changes in temperature, precipitation and landscapes.

- By 2035/40, workgroup activities will inform and lead to an increase in the implementation of the identified adaptation options that integrate nature-based solutions in the above sub-watershed areas.

Healthy Forests and Trees Outcome
Conserve, manage and restore forests and tree cover to maximize benefits for water quality, habitat and people throughout the watershed, with a particular focus on riparian areas and communities.

- Conserve and reduce the rate of loss of existing canopy, and plant and maintain 35,000 acres of trees within communities by 2035 (45,000 acres by 2040) to achieve a net gain in canopy over the long-term.

- Conserve and reduce the rate of loss of existing riparian forest buffers, and plant and maintain 7,500 acres of buffers annually to achieve no less than 71% riparian forest cover by 2035 (71.5% by 2040) and 75% riparian forest cover over the long-term.

- Achieve a net gain over the long-term by reducing the rate of loss of forest conversion to other land uses by 33%, permanently protecting a total of 8.6 million acres of forested land (nine million acres by 2040), and planting and maintaining 155,000 acres of new forests by 2035 (202,000 acres by 2040).

Land Use Decision Support Outcome
Develop and disseminate relevant and actionable land use information to organizations and communities involved in local and regional land use planning. This information will include past, present and future conditions, as well as the potential environmental and socioeconomic consequences of changing conditions.

- Increase the number, variety and/or geographic scope of use cases (e.g., watershed protection, aquatic connectivity, stormwater, tree canopy or redevelopment) continually to inform land use decisions and maintain the ecological integrity of watersheds supporting good stream health.

- Highlight at least two widely applicable land use cases annually to showcase best practices and share this information with local governments and partners through Story Maps and/or other communications products.

Protected Lands Outcome

Protect critical landscapes within the Chesapeake Bay watershed permanently to protect water quality, enhance biodiversity, support sustainable livelihoods, bolster local economies, ensure military readiness and national defenses, and honor cultural heritage.

- By 2040, permanently protect a total of 11.3 million acres of land throughout the watershed, building on a 2025 baseline of 9.3 million acres already protected to work

towards protecting at least 30% of all land in the watershed over the long-term. (a total of 10.8 million acres by 2035)

- By 2027, develop numeric targets for the protection of riparian forests, wetlands (including migration corridors) and adjacent areas that facilitate future wetland expansion, natural areas supporting healthy streams, agricultural lands, tribal homelands, and urban and community greenspace.

ENGAGED COMMUNITIES GOAL

The long-term success of the Chesapeake Bay restoration and conservation effort depends on individuals and communities throughout the watershed understanding their connection to the local environment and making choices that support its health in the face of changing environmental conditions. Stewardship begins with facilitating meaningful engagement, increasing access to outdoor recreation, providing learning opportunities to students, adults and job seekers, and empowering local decision-makers to support conservation actions.

Goal

Engage and grow a community of local stewards and leaders through education, recreation and professional opportunities.

Local Government Leadership Outcome

Increase the knowledge and capacity of local government leaders to empower them to make decisions and implement local actions that support the *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*.

- Engage directly (e.g., roundtable discussions) with at least 400 local government leaders annually.

- Engage indirectly (e.g., newsletters) with at least 4,000 local government leaders annually.

Public Access Outcome

Enhance new and existing public access sites to the Bay and its tributaries through a combination of actions aimed at improving recreational opportunities and accessibility while addressing barriers to access by increasing the number, quality and geographic distribution of sites.

- By 2040, add at least 100 new public access sites (at least 70 sites by 2035) with a strong emphasis on providing opportunities for recreation where feasible.

- By 2040, improve at least 40 of the existing public water access sites (at least 30 by 2035) by adding Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) accessible features.

- By 2040, expand access to urban lands and community green spaces identified in the Protected Lands data set with appropriate numeric targets to be set by 2026 following an initial baseline study.

- By 2040, improve at least 100 of the 1,451 existing public water access sites (at least 70 by 2035) by upgrading or maintaining site grounds and structures and expanding the range of active and passive recreation opportunities, such as paddling, boating, trails, courts, piers, wildlife viewing and picnic areas.

Stewardship Outcome

Increase the public's participation in stewardship actions that contribute positively to lands, waters, wildlife, fisheries and communities throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

- Through 2040, build the capacity of community leaders and environmental professionals with the social science data, technical assistance and support needed to develop, improve and carry out individual and community-level stewardship programs, including those that will help advance *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement* Goals and Outcomes.

K-12 Student Environmental Literacy Experiences Outcome

Increase the number of students who participate in inquiry-based environmental literacy instruction working towards at least one Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience, or MWEE, in each elementary, middle and high school.

- By 2040, state targets are reached that result in at least 75% of public school students being enrolled in a school district that offers a MWEE for all students. (Targets would remain the same for 2035)

School District Environmental Literacy Planning Outcome

Increase the number of school districts that have policies and practices in place that support environmental education and sustainable schools.

- By 2040, all jurisdictions reach their target for the number of public school districts that are well prepared to deliver a comprehensive and system-wide approach to environmental literacy. (Targets would remain the same for 2035.)

Workforce Outcome

Increase the ability of all job seekers in the watershed to understand, participate in and succeed in environmental career pathways.

- By 2035, inform and grow implementation of strategies that help students, educators and job seekers to become aware of and understand environmental careers and the in-demand skills and pathways to access these opportunities.

- By 2035, increase the number of post-secondary institutions and training providers offering industry recognized credentials that support *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement* Goals and Outcomes.

- By 2035, engage employers to support greater hiring and retention of workers trained in fields necessary to support *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement* Goals and Outcomes.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Within the revision of the *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*, the Chesapeake Bay Program will update or develop Management Strategies for the Outcomes and their Targets that support the Goals of this *Watershed Agreement*. These strategies shall outline the means for accomplishing each Outcome and their Targets as well as monitoring, assessing and reporting progress and coordinating actions among partners and stakeholders as necessary. Addressing and accounting for changing environmental conditions is critical to successfully managing to achieve Outcomes, and shall be an explicit consideration in preparing these strategies. Management Strategies shall also describe how 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.

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. Management Strategies, which are aimed at implementing actions to achieve Outcomes, shall identify participating signatories and other stakeholders, including local governments and nonprofit organizations, and will be implemented in X-year (previously "2-year") periods.

The signatories and other partners shall thereafter update and/or modify such commitments every X (previously "2") years. Specific Management Strategies will be updated in consultation with stakeholders, organizations and other agencies, and will include a period for public input and review prior to final adoption.

Management Strategies may address multiple Outcomes if deemed appropriate. The Chesapeake Bay Program will re-evaluate with X frequency (previously "biennially") and update strategies as necessary, with attention to changing environmental and economic conditions. Partners may identify policy changes to address these conditions and minimize obstacles to achieve the Outcomes.

Stakeholder input will be incorporated into the development and reevaluation of each of the strategies. The Chesapeake Bay Program will continue to make these strategies and reports on progress available to the public in a transparent manner on its websites and through publicly accessible partnership meetings.

Management Strategies will be submitted to the partnership's leadership for review. If the leadership determines that any strategy or plan developed prior to the revision of this *Watershed Agreement* meets the requirements of a Management Strategy as defined above, no new strategy needs to be developed.