

## **Guiding Principles: The Mid-Point Assessment and Phase III Watershed Implementation Plans**

**Purpose:** Leading up to 2017, EPA, with its partners, committed to conduct a mid-point assessment to review our progress toward meeting the nutrient and sediment pollutant load reductions identified in the 2010 TMDL and Phase I and Phase II Watershed Implementation Plans (WIPs). This was designed as a mid-course check on our progress to allow necessary adjustments in strategies to ensure that the Bay Partnership could achieve its 2017 and 2025 goals for putting the necessary practices in place to restore the Bay.

In the 2010 TMDL, EPA recognized “that neither the world at large nor the Bay watershed is static. In a dynamic environment like the Bay watershed, during the next 15 years change is inevitable”. Therefore, as part of this mid-point assessment, EPA and its partners, will take stock of the latest science and data, the range of available tools and controls, how any updates inform Phase III WIPs and our collective strategies to attain applicable water quality standards.

In 2017, EPA expects the seven watershed jurisdictions to provide updates to their current WIPs for Phase III that will address any needed modifications to implementation actions resulting informed by the mid-point assessment as well as state implementation experience to date. The Phase III WIPs will ensure that all practices are in place by 2025 to ensure attainment of applicable WQS in the Bay and its tidal tributaries.

**Schedule:** To meet the 2017 deadline for Phase III WIPs, EPA and its partners will continue to monitor progress towards meeting the TMDL load reductions through the development and annual assessment of 2-year milestones. With respect to providing technical and information support to the assessment, the Partnership will set priorities through 2013, and conduct analyses and make refinements in tools, as appropriate, through 2016. Phase III WIPs are expected to be developed by the Bay jurisdictions in 2017.

The following **principles** will guide the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) partners through the midpoint assessment and Phase III WIP process:

### **PRINCIPLE 1: KEEPING THE FOCUS ON IMPLEMENTATION**

The #1 water quality priority of Chesapeake Bay Program partners is the focused implementation of the Chesapeake Bay TMDL, the jurisdictions’ WIPs, and 2-year milestones. The shared objective is to put all the management practices on the ground by 2025 that are necessary to meet applicable WQS in the Bay and its tidal tributaries and, by 2017, to have practices in place that will achieve 60% of the necessary pollution reductions compared to the 2009 TMDL baseline.

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### **PRINCIPLE 2: MAINTAINING A STABLE ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK TO MEASURE PROGRESS MOVING FORWARD**

Stability of the accountability framework is a priority and progress will be measured against the Phase II WIP Planning Targets set in August 2011, Phase II WIPs and 2-year milestones. To

foster stability in the accounting framework, modifications to the accountability framework for Chesapeake Bay water quality restoration will be carefully considered taking into account scientific, technical and other implementation factors. Changes in decision-support tools will be reviewed by the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership and inform any modifications that EPA will consider to the existing accountability framework.

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### **PRINCIPLE 3: EXPANDING THE TOOLS AVAILABLE FOR RESTORATION**

The Bay technical community can be a great assist to the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership by helping to expand the available tools to aid in the implementation of water quality restoration actions. The Chesapeake Bay Program partnership will also aim to improve and expand the use of monitoring data in assessing load reduction and water quality restoration progress and in evaluating local and regional effectiveness of management actions.

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### **PRINCIPLE 4: IMPROVING THE ACCURACY OF PRACTICES REPORTED TO THROUGH VERIFICATION**

The Chesapeake Bay Program partnership will work towards developing, adopting and implementing verification protocols for accurately crediting practices resulting in actual nutrient and sediment load reductions. Credit for practices that will not improve water quality, including crediting of practices that are not properly designed, installed, and/or maintained or that are no longer are in place cannot be assumed.

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### **PRINCIPLE 5: ADDRESSING EMERGING ISSUES IDENTIFIED IN THE 2010 TMDL OR THAT IMPACT CURRENT STRATEGIES**

The Chesapeake Bay Program partnership will work to address other complex issues, previously recognized by the partners, which can affect actions necessary to restore Chesapeake Bay water quality. Examples include: accounting for the consequences of continuing climate change, factoring in new understanding of the Susquehanna River dams' influence on nutrient and sediment pollutant loads, and taking full advantage of living resources as natural filters. This is part and parcel of the adaptive management commitment of the Bay Partnership to consider new knowledge and updates in information which can best inform our watershed restoration strategies.