Agricultural Lands Target

August Protected Lands Workgroup Meeting

8/4/2026

Laying Foundations

Slide adapted from Protect Local Waterways

Farmers are inextricably linked to the land.

They rely on the land, nurture the soil, and closely watch environmental conditions. Farmers in the watershed use management practices on their farms to protect natural resources and safeguard water quality in local streams, rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay. This legacy of environmental stewardship stretches back almost 100 years.

Agriculture provides many benefits to communities around the Chesapeake, including locally-produced food, agrarian character, jobs, taxes, and more.

Agriculture By The Numbers

According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture:

There are over

168,000 farms

in the Chesapeake Bay watershed states, covering

28 million acres.

Over 20% of the watershed is used for agriculture.

The agriculture industry accounts for

184,000+ jobs

in the Bay watershed states.

The value of agricultural products sold in the Bay watershed states totals

$21.8 billion.

In the watershed states, there are:

1.6 million pigs

5.2 million cows

1.1 billion chickens **x100**

630,000 acres of wheat

1.7 million acres of soybeans

3.5 million acres of corn

Only **35%** of food spending in the region goes to local businesses.

Slide from Protect Local Waterways

Agriculture By The Numbers

Agriculture is responsible for about 40% of the nitrogen, 45% of the phosphorus, and 62% of the sediment entering the Chesapeake Bay annually.

Because agriculture plays such a big role in water quality, there is also a lot of potential and opportunities for farmers to make a difference in the quality of your local waterways. By and large, farmers have many incentives to make their farms more environmentally friendly, including:

- optimizing the health of their land, herd, and/or crops.
- preserving their land for future generations.
- $ local, state, and federal regulations and incentives.

Case study: Swoope, VA

Bobby Whitescarver enrolled in Virginia's cost-share program to fence his cows out of his stream. He chose to install fences in order to distribute water sources throughout his property, exclude cows from calving risk areas like steep banks, improve herd health, to make his operation more efficient, and to reduce local water pollution.

Read his guest column in Virginia Mercury for more.

Slide from Protect Local Waterways

Community Benefits

From food security to job creation, agriculture has many benefits to your community.

Slide from Protect Local Waterways

Food Production

There are over **18 million** people in the Chesapeake Bay watershed – they spend about **$57.3 billion** on food annually.

A community subsisting on locally-grown food sees numerous economic benefits, from keeping money in your community to creating jobs (more than 3 times as many jobs are created by farms with some direct marketing versus wholesale farms) to increased tax revenue. In addition, consumers across income levels are willing to pay more for local food – a benefit to your agricultural allies.

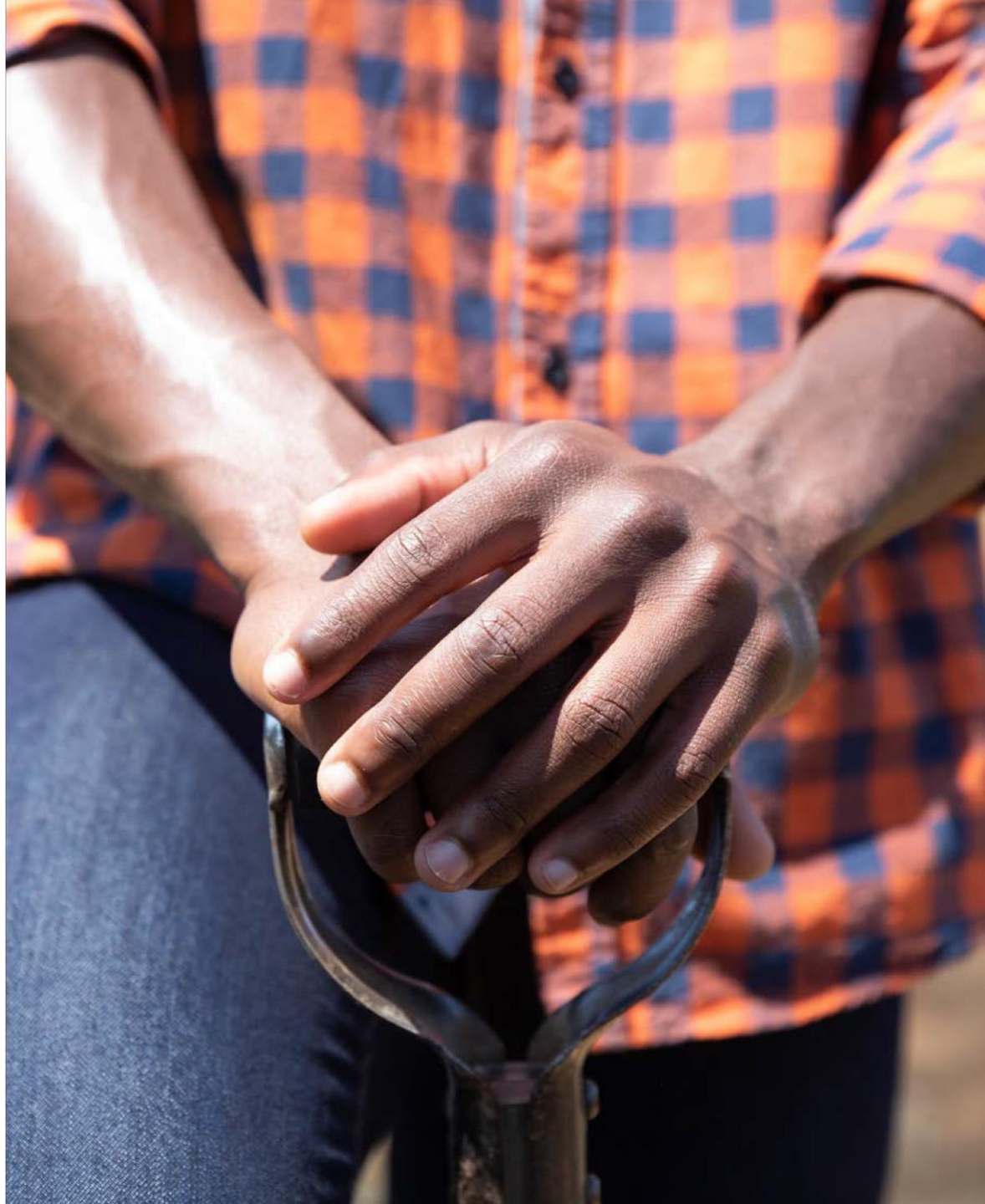
Case study: DC Central Kitchen (DCCK)

Food insecurity disproportionately affects populations that are minority, immigrant, rural, and economically vulnerable. DCCK in Washington, DC takes food that would have been thrown out, like produce that is misshapen or bruised, from regional farms and makes meals for homeless shelters, low-income schools, and others in need. DCCK also provides job training and fresh produce to corner stores in low-income communities.

Slide from Protect Local Waterways

Best Management Practices

Farmers are key allies in making your local waterways healthier.



Slide from Protect Local Waterways

Stewardship

Farmland offers many opportunities for stewardship:

Carbon sequestration – potentially, agricultural land in the US could store 5% of annual carbon dioxide emissions per year.

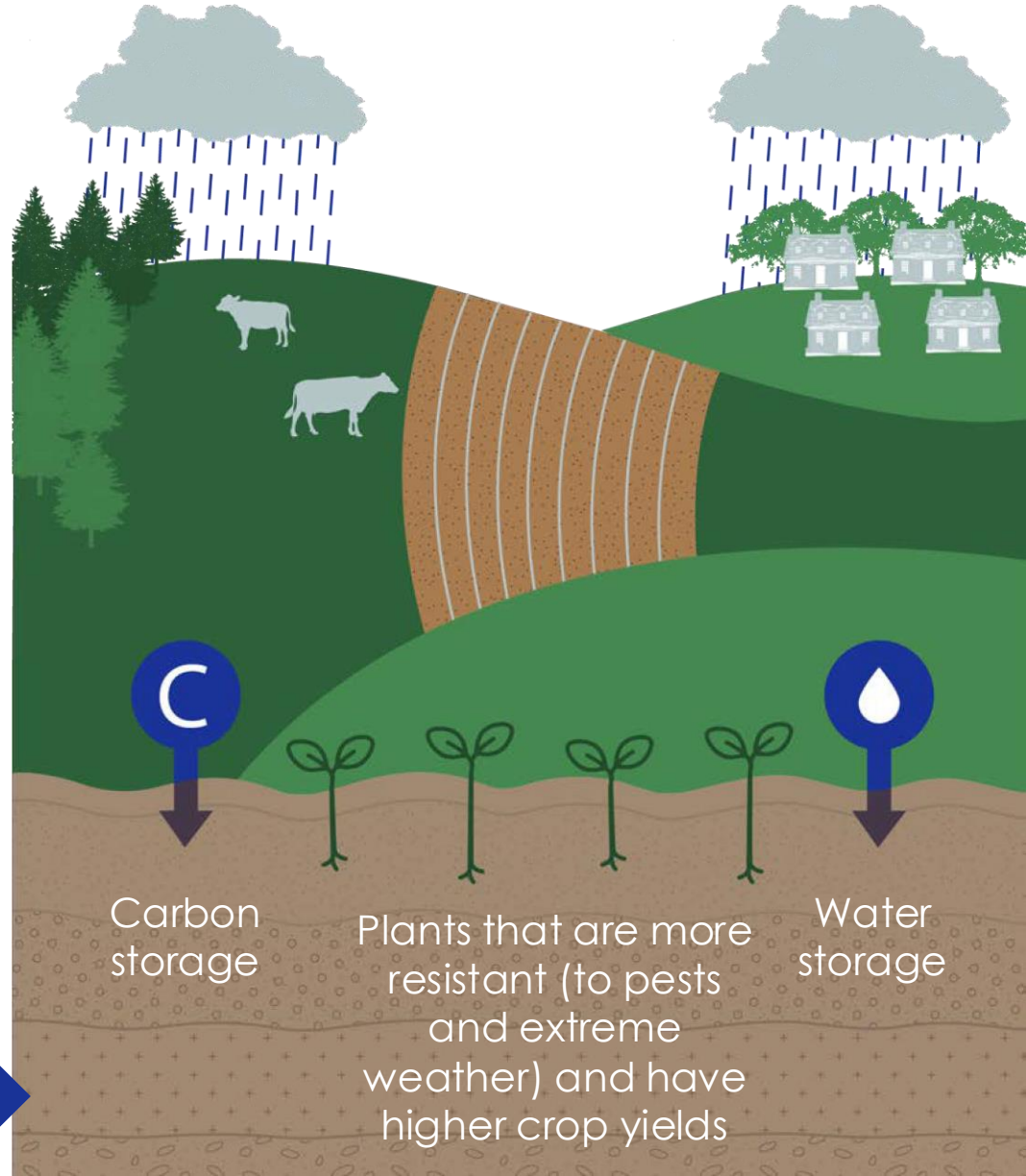
Healthy soil – a critical component to growing crops or feeding livestock, but also absorbs water and prevents erosion and polluted runoff.

Land preservation/wetland restoration – with farmland covering a fifth of the watershed, protecting that land from development could have a large impact.

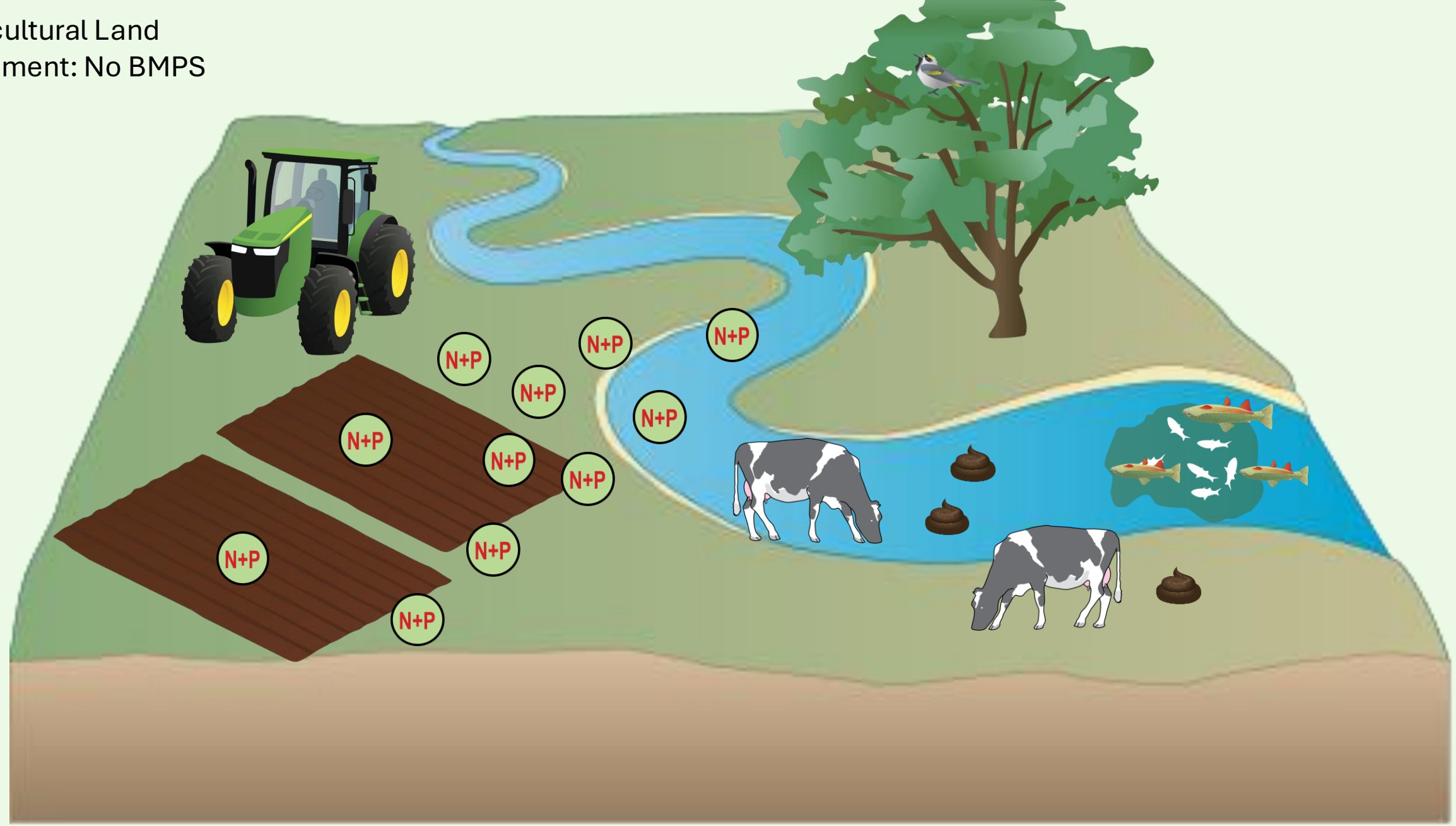
Increased biodiversity – leads to healthier pastures, increased pollinator activity and production, and promotes the spread of healthy environments across the local landscape.

Slide from Protect Local Waterways

The Benefits of Healthy Soil



Agricultural Land
Easement: No BMPS



Agricultural Land Easement: BMPS

Agriculture in the CBP Land Use/ Land Cover Data

- **Cropland (CROP)**

Low vegetation, shrubland and barren lands used for the production of grains, legumes, vegetables, fruits and nuts, grapevines, or other agricultural crops.

- **Pasture and Hay (PAST)**

Low vegetation and barren lands used for grazing livestock (e.g., cattle, goats, sheep) or producing fodder (e.g., hay and alfalfa).

Baseline Numbers

- Total Agricultural Lands: 7.9 million acres
- Protected Agricultural Lands: 1.26 million acres
- 16% of Agricultural Lands are protected
- 14% of Protected Lands are in Agricultural Use

Target Options

A) Percent Protection

- 20% protection of ag lands
  - Target: Protect 1.57 million acres of agricultural land
  - Additional acres needed: 311,000 acres
- 30% protection of ag lands
  - Target: Protect 2.36 million acres of agricultural land
  - Additional acres needed: 1.10 million acres

B) No net loss

- By 2040, maintain the current agricultural lands base and prevent the net loss of working lands.

C) Priority Agricultural Lands Approach

- Prime agricultural soils
- Strategic agricultural areas
- Other priority components of the ag landscape

Something else?

Discussion Prompts

Prioritizing Agricultural Lands

- Should conservation efforts prioritize specific agricultural lands, such as:
  - Prime agricultural soils?
  - Highly productive working lands?
  - Lands with existing BMPs?

Integrating Conservation and Water Quality

- How should BMP implementation be incorporated into agricultural land conservation goals?
- Should the agricultural target consider both land protection and water quality outcomes?

Incentives and Implementation

- What can the Chesapeake Bay Program do to encourage BMP adoption on protected agricultural lands?
- What approaches are jurisdictions using to promote BMP implementation on protected farms?

Should an agricultural lands target focus on acres protected, acres retained, BMP adoption, or a combination of these outcomes?

Resources used

- Protect Local Waterways Module 9 Agriculture: https://www.protectlocalwaterways.org/files/modules/understanding-and-supporting-your-agricultural-allies/Module-9-Agriculture_2023-09-27-134714_eeyj.pdf
- Icon Credit
  - UMCES Media Library:

  https://ian.umces.edu/media-library/
- Photo Credit
  - Chesapeake Bay Program Flickr: https://www.flickr.com/photos/chesbayprogram/