Beyond 2025 Clean Water Team WQGIT Update

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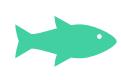
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Scope of the Clean Water Team – 5 Topic Areas

TMDL

Planning Targets

Accountability Framework

Modeling Updates

Progress Reporting and Milestones

Water Quality Assessment

Shallow Waters focus vs. Chesapeake Bay "deep channel" for Water Quality Standards Attainment

Nonpoint Source Management

Current and future restoration programs

Connecting local efforts with Chesapeake Bay goals and outcomes

Water Quality Monitoring

Local water quality monitoring inclusion in Chesapeake Bay watershed

Trends analysis at local and non-tidal/tidal scales

Maintaining and growing water quality monitoring and assessment data collection to continuously inform decision-making

Water Quality Standards

Evaluation of current Water Quality Standards

Toxics and emerging contaminants

Approach

- Clean Water Team met on November 8 to determine the 5 topic areas that would inform the scope of the recommendations.

- Based on the group discussion, Clean Water Team Co-Leads developed a set of "Framing Questions" for Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) to consider, as well as a list of documents to help inform the approach.

- Clean Water Team met with SMEs on November 30 to discuss their thoughts and ideas.
  - 15+ Subject Matter Experts were contacted. Most provided written responses and participated in the meeting, including those from USGS, EPA, and STAC CESR report authors

- Clean Water Team update was presented to the Water Quality Goal Implementation Team (WQGIT) on December 11, with feedback sought.

- Building on themes from the previous meetings, a preliminary discussion was held on January 3 regarding the recommendations, themes, priority initiatives, as well as follow up with SMEs for toxic contaminants (EPA) and living resources (UMCES).

- Clean Water Team update was presented to the WQGIT on January 22, with feedback sought.

Approach

- Clean Water Team met on January 25 to review and confirm four high-level recommendations. Two additional recommendations brought forth from the group were discussed as well.
  - Menti-Meter Polls were utilized to help gauge agreement amongst the group.
- Clean Water Co-Leads hosted a Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) Listening Session, with approximately 90 attendees, on February 3 to review the five high-level recommendations.
  - Menti-Meter Polls were utilized to help gauge agreement amongst the attendees.
- With feedback from the Listening Session and from the previous four Clean Water Team meetings, the five recommendations were revised by the Clean Water Co-leads, with potential options for implementation and key questions to consider.
- Clean Water Team met for the fifth time on February 15 to discuss the proposed revisions and identify the Vision, Value, Vanguard throughout the recommendations.
- Clean Water Team update was presented to the Stakeholders Advisory Committee on February 22.
- Clean Water Team update was presented to the WQGIT on February 26.

Chesapeake Bay TMDL – Accountability Framework

▶ **<u>Recommendation 1</u>**

Review and revise the accountability framework to improve our effectiveness, particularly in reducing nonpoint source pollution, and increase emphasis on measured outcomes and water quality data in our assessment of progress.

The Accountability Framework includes four key elements: 1) Jurisdictions' development of Watershed Implementation Plans, 2) Jurisdictions' development of two-year milestones to demonstrate progress, 3) EPA's commitment to tracking and assessing progress, and 4) EPA's commitment to taking appropriate federal actions if jurisdictions fail to develop and implement WIPs or fulfill milestones. The Chesapeake Bay Program can review and revise the first three of the four framework components. The goal is to create space for jurisdictions to pursue opportunities that may improve water quality and living resource response but are not currently being incentivized when determining progress through the use of the Chesapeake Assessment Scenario Tool (CAST). Another primary objective is to identify resources needed to abide by the Accountability Framework and to effectively manage nonpoint sources of pollution.

For progress assessment, we recommend maintaining the use of CAST, but also incorporating multiple lines of evidence and additional measures of progress. Specifically, we recommend increasing emphasis on measured outcomes and water quality data in our assessment of progress.

Chesapeake Bay TMDL – Tiered Approach

▶ **Recommendation 2**

Since the Chesapeake Bay TMDL was developed to achieve attainment of tidal water quality standards for 92 segments, identify a tiered implementation approach recognizing pollutant reductions are needed throughout the watershed and can be phased over time consistent with state/regional workplans and resources.   This approach will align with state and/or local water quality priorities, anticipated habitat, living resource, and watershed responses, cost effectiveness, and climate resiliency.

Water Quality Monitoring and Water Quality Assessments

- **Recommendation 3**

Establish and promote effective cross-program coordination for water quality monitoring to inform watershed health, and water quality restoration programs focusing on data-driven decision-making. Promote the use of state and local monitoring and assessment for incorporation into program goals, as appropriate, which may include learning, status and trends analyses, and evaluation of meeting water quality and living resource goals.

Nonpoint Source Management

- **<u>Recommendation 4</u>**

Provide opportunities to increase nonpoint source implementation and incentivize effective and innovative nonpoint source management across all sectors. Demonstrate measurable ecosystem responses, target and empower small-scale watershed restoration that addresses the needs of the community, and promote outcome-based efforts. Address known challenges associated with nutrient mass imbalances to include fertilizers and unknown sources.

Nonpoint Source Management

▶ **Recommendation 5**

Identify opportunities to expand on existing local liaisons programs that connect, empower, and inform the federal, state, and local partners to grow awareness, educate, provide administrative and technical assistance, and increase implementation efforts across the watershed.