

Elevating Conservation in the Chesapeake Bay Program

Keith Bolit, US EPA Chesapeake Bay Program Office
LGAC Summer 2025 Meeting
Richmond VA, June 6, 2025



Key Points



The Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) Partners have made progress reducing pollution while accommodating population growth.

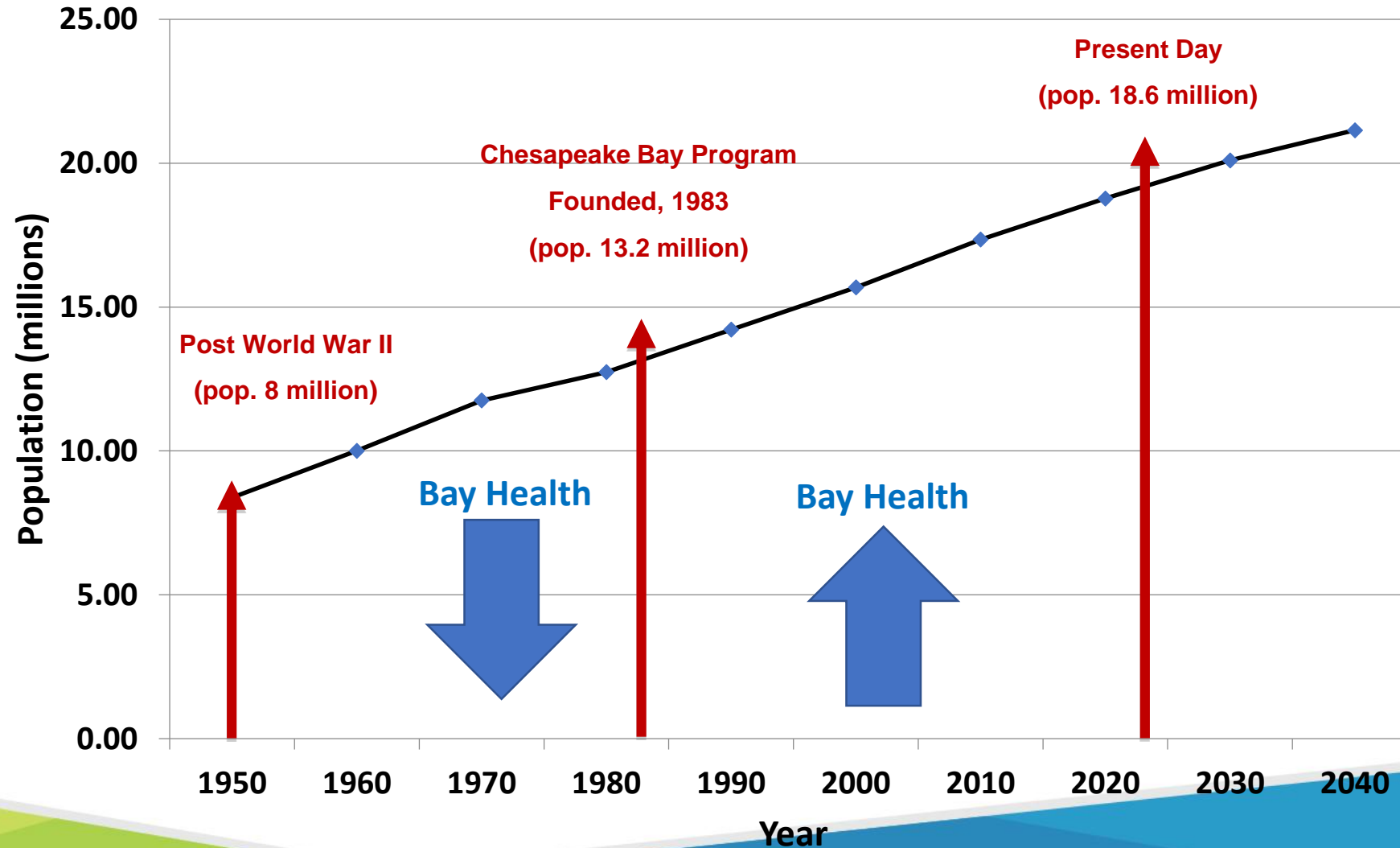


The CBP Partners have decided to elevate conservation as a fourth pillar alongside science, restoration, and partnership.



CBP is elevating conservation because effective environmental management means restoring what once was **and** conserving what we have. Federal, state, and local governments work together within their respective authorities to achieve conservation

Conservation and Restoration in a Changing Bay Watershed



Celebrating our Successes

- Submerged Aquatic Vegetation increased ~20%, from 2021-2023
- 9,590 miles of forest buffers planted along rivers and streams since 2010
- 1.4 million acres of land protected from development since 2010
- Oyster habitat fully restored in six of 10 targeted tributaries; 2019 market-size abundance of oysters (453 million) was the 5th highest level since 1999.
- Implementation of Best Management Practices since 2009 is estimated to have achieved reductions in nitrogen, phosphorous, and sediment pollution by 14%, 13%, and 5% respectively.

<https://www.chesapeakebay.net/what/publications/2023-bay-barometer>

More good news stories:

<https://gis.chesapeakebay.net/wip/dashboard/>

Chesapeake Executive Council Charges (2022, 2024)

- 2022 EC charge directed the Principals' Staff Committee to recommend a critical path forward that prioritizes and outlines the next steps for meeting the goals and outcomes of the *Watershed Agreement* beyond 2025.
- 2024 EC charge charted a path forward for revising the *Watershed Agreement* by the end of 2025



Chesapeake Bay Program Partnership
Executive Council Charge to the Principals' Staff Committee: Charting a Course to 2025 and Beyond
Adopted October 11, 2022

As the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) partnership nears the 2025 date that the partnership set for several of the goals and outcomes under the *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement (Watershed Agreement)*, there are many successes to celebrate. At the same time, emerging issues and changing conditions (e.g., climate change, growth, new scientific data) have impacted the levels of effort needed to meet our collective restoration priorities. We, as a partnership, remain committed to using the best available science in restoring the Chesapeake Bay as we accelerate toward the deadline and anticipate continued progress post-2025.

Thus, this Executive Council charges the Principals' Staff Committee (PSC) in recommending a critical path forward that prioritizes and outlines the next steps for meeting the goals and outcomes of the *Watershed Agreement* leading up to and beyond 2025. The PSC is to report back to the Executive Council at our 2023 annual meeting with recommendations on how to best address and integrate new science and restoration strategies leading up to 2025. At our 2024 annual meeting, the PSC is to prepare recommendations that continue to address new advances in science and restoration, along with a focus on our partnership for going beyond 2025.

In undertaking such a process, the PSC should address the following considerations:

Science

- Identify new and emerging scientific data and studies which could modify our progress reporting and adaptive management approach, as well as the goals and outcomes under the *Watershed Agreement*.
- Enhance our monitoring and reporting capabilities to improve our understanding of existing conditions and trends.
- Define the existing and emerging challenges (e.g., climate change conditions, increasing growth, diversity, equity, inclusion and justice considerations) to accomplishing the partnership's work under the *Watershed Agreement*, and how addressing those challenges might alter our collective restoration priorities, including the possibility of extending the target date for completing restoration of water quality beyond 2025.
- Identify opportunities to leverage action across multiple goals and outcomes of the *Watershed Agreement*.

Restoration

- Develop and begin to implement a communication strategy that identifies key partnership successes, associated ecosystem improvements and areas where more effort is needed.
- Provide snapshots of outcome attainability under the Agreement (e.g., which outcomes are likely to be met by the date(s) set by the partnership, which won't, and why) and options for communicating these snapshots to demonstrate progress in achieving our outcomes and the remaining work to be done, including gaps to be addressed.

Partnership

- Focus on moving beyond 2025 by seeking ways in which restoration can be relevant to all communities within the watershed.
- Assess the overall partnership to determine whether we
 - Are effectively hearing from and listening to all stakeholders, and
 - Have systems of evaluation and decision-making to enable meaningful action and allocation of partnership resources.
- Based on this assessment, develop recommendations for potential improvement.

Chesapeake Executive Council 2024 Charge

“Furthermore, it is the intent of the Chesapeake Executive Council, that these changes reflect:

- Elevating conservation as a key pillar of the Chesapeake Bay Program, alongside science, restoration, and partnership”

Beyond 2025 Steering Committee Report

Restoration and Conservation Section

- The Steering Committee recommends that the Bay Program elevate Conservation as a key guiding pillar alongside Science, Restoration and Partnership (HW 4)
- The Steering Committee recommends planning for the restoration and conservation of nearshore habitats, inclusive of tributary rivers and streams— some of the most important places for people and the most productive habitats for living resources (CESR, P2, SW1).
- The Steering Committee recommends streamlining goals and outcomes, as well as overall partnership structure, to improve the integration, efficacy and efficiency of restoration and conservation efforts.

Beyond 2025 Steering Committee Report

Science & Partnership Sections

- The Steering Committee recommends enhancing the local benefits of Chesapeake restoration and conservation by improving alignment with regional, state and local plans and priorities (CW2, CW5).
- The Steering Committee recommends prioritizing and improving communications and transparency with the partnership's outreach and engagement activities to spur stewardship, drive restoration and conservation momentum and ensure long-term Program efficacy.
- The Steering Committee recommends enhancing the partnership's understanding of anticipated changes, and how conservation practices respond to those changes (EC Charge).
- The Steering Committee also recommends a greater focus on conducting social science research and applying its findings to ensure restoration and conservation efforts align with the well-being of people (ERG F8, C7).

Beyond 2025 Phase 1 Public Feedback

- “The recommendations to support system-scale conservation and restoration planning and implementation for habitats and communities, and to integrate... impacts into Bay program models and programs, are of special interest.”
- “The undersigned wish to state their support for the recommendation that the Bay Program elevate Conservation as a key guiding pillar alongside Science, Restoration, and Partnership.”
- “The proposed elevation of Conservation as a key guiding pillar alongside Science, Restoration, and Partnership marks a significant and much-needed step forward in our collective effort to protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay watershed.”
- “The CBP needs to utilize conservation as a framework for their work.”

What does “elevating” conservation in CBP mean?

- Federal, state, and local governments working together within their respective authorities to achieve collective conservation goals; and
- CBP considering ways to including conservation in CBP policy, planning, management strategies, communications, etc.



Chesapeake Bay Program

Science. Restoration. Partnership.



Local Governments: Critical CBP Partners

Federal Agencies
(EPA, USFS, USGS, NPS,
NOAA, others)

- Funding
- Science & Research
- Data
- Modeling
- Regulatory oversight

State Agencies
(DEQs, DNRs, DPs)

- Allocating funds
- Technical support
- Permitting
- Project siting
- Science & Research

Local Governments,
NGO's, Citizen
Groups



On the ground restoration
and conservation!

How CBP is Elevating Conservation



Specific Proposed Examples of CBP Elevating Conservation Beyond 2025

- Protected Lands Outcome: Centers both people and nature more explicitly in where and why we care about protecting lands
 - Outdoor recreation/public health, military readiness, protecting the places important to people
- Public Access Outcome: Increased focus on geographic distribution, maintenance helps center the outcome around conservation where people live and for people's benefit

[Proposed Outcome Language](#)

Why now, why you, and so what?

Why now?

- Broad recognition that conservation is necessary for the long-term health of the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed

Why you?

- Local governments are critical conservation partners

So what?

- Promotion of the benefits of conservation actions achieved by CBP Partners
- Increased efficiency and effectiveness of restoration efforts



Thank you!

Contact Info:

Keith Bollt

**Partnerships and Accountability Branch
US EPA Chesapeake Bay Program Office**

bollt.keith@epa.gov

Thanks to:

Lucinda Power, US EPA CBPO

Breck Sullivan, USGS

Peter Claggett, USGS

Rachel Felver, Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay

Catherine Krikstan, UMCES