

Stakeholders' Members Present: Mary Sketch Bryant, Andrew Der, Matt Ehrhart, Doug Faulkner, Bill Fink, Verna Harrison, Bobby Hughes, Ann Jurczyk, Hamid Karimi, Julie Lawson, Joseph Maroon, Olivia Martin, Patrick McDonnell, Bill Noftsinger, Abel Olivo, Alisonya Poole, Sara Ramotnik, Charlie Stek, and staff Jess Blackburn and Alex LoCurto.

Speakers/Guests Present: Kate Fritz, Amy Handen, Lucinda Power, Dylan Burgevin, Sarah Brzezinski, Kathy Stecker, Anna Killius, Kevin Schabow, Lee McDonnell, Kayli Ottomanelli, Megan Thyne, Khesha Reed

Meeting presentations and materials are located at:

[Stakeholders' Advisory Committee Quarterly Meeting \(May 2026\) | Chesapeake Bay Program](#)

Thursday, May 21, 2026

The Stakeholders' Advisory Committee Chair, Abel Olivo, called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM. The meeting objectives are (1) Learn and discuss the primary elements of the approved Management Strategy template for the four *Watershed Agreement* Goals; (2) Hear briefings on initial priorities for the Goal Teams as they begin drafting their Management Strategies; and (3) Identify the September Quarterly Meeting theme for a “deep dive” topic to support the development of the annual report of recommendations.

Business Meeting

- The February 2026 Quarterly Meeting minutes were approved as submitted.
- Abel Olivo requested time at the September quarterly meeting to discuss how the Committee should take formal positions when consensus cannot be reached, including a potential change to the bylaws to offer more concrete guidance.
- Ann Jurczyk announced that she will be scaling down her work with CBF starting July 1st and that the September quarterly meeting will be her last with the Stakeholders' Committee.
- Julie Lawson will be transitioning off of the Stakeholders' Committee after 11 years, due to her new role as a co-chair of the Engaged Communities Goal Team. The December quarterly meeting will be her last with the Stakeholders' Committee.

Coordinator's Report

Jess reviewed the Committee's activities over the past quarter, including meetings between Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia advisory committee members and leadership from their respective state environmental agencies. Discussions in PA and MD focused on proposed revisions to the Chesapeake Bay Program's structure and governance, while VA's newly reconstituted Chesapeake Bay Advisory Group received updates on the refreshed *Watershed Agreement* and provided input on implementation priorities. Across all three meetings, members shared feedback and state-specific priorities to help inform ongoing Bay Program efforts.

The Committee received an update on membership changes, including the resignation of VA gubernatorial appointee, Tim Rupli. Members welcomed two new Maryland gubernatorial appointees, Olivia Martin and Sara Ramotnik, who previously served as an Alliance appointee.

The chairs and vice chairs of the four advisory committees met ahead of the Principal Staff Committee (PSC) meeting to coordinate feedback on key issues. They developed a shared message emphasizing the importance of maintaining advisory committee independence, ensuring transparency in decision-making, and strengthening public accountability. The chairs also highlighted the committees' role in representing constituent perspectives and identifying emerging issues for Bay Program leadership.

Briefing on the Management Strategies

Sarah Brezezinski, EPA Chesapeake Bay Program Office

Sarah presented the framework for developing Management Strategies under the 2025 *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*. The new approach will consolidate individual Management Strategies into a single six-year Strategic Plan organized by goal area, with supporting three-year work plans that outline specific actions, partners, resources, timelines, and performance measures. The framework is intended to improve coordination across goals, strengthen accountability and adaptive management, and increase stakeholder engagement, including opportunities for public comment in January 2027 before final plan approval in June 2027. Brzezinski emphasized that the Strategic Plan will serve as the roadmap for achieving the *Agreement's* goals and outcomes, while Work Plans will provide the flexibility to address emerging challenges and opportunities.

Member Questions & Discussion

- ❖ *Why use six-year management strategy cycles when shorter cycles could allow for faster course corrections?:* The six-year timeframe was designed to provide enough time to implement actions and evaluate their effectiveness, while reducing the planning burden associated with the previous two-year review cycle. The framework also includes three-year work plans and annual progress reviews, which allows partners to make adjustments more frequently while maintaining a longer-term strategic direction.
- ❖ *Where does the Stakeholders' Committee fit into the Management Strategy development process and where can members provide meaningful input?:* Sarah encouraged members of the Committee to engage during the drafting process through Workgroup and Goal Team meetings and participate in the formal public comment period scheduled for January 2027. She emphasized that stakeholder input is valuable for ensuring the plan remains accessible, relevant, and supportive of broader public participation in achieving *Watershed Agreement* outcomes.
- ❖ *How does the CBP plan to evaluate and publicly report jurisdictional progress under the new Watershed Agreement?:* The Bay Program intends to continue annual progress reporting through the Bay Barometer and other publicly available evaluations, alongside independent assessments such as regional report cards. Jurisdictions will continue to provide their annual progress reports and EPA will review milestones.
- ❖ *How was the new Management Strategies framework developed, who was involved?:* The Chesapeake Bay Program's Management Strategy approach stems from a Government Accountability Office recommendation to strengthen restoration planning and adaptive management. The current framework builds on strategies developed under the 2014 *Watershed Agreement* and was refined through Management Board review and partner input.
- ❖ *How does the new planning framework align with the 2-year milestone process?:* The Strategic Plan, Management Strategies, and Work Plans are separate from the Bay Program's two-year milestone framework, but are intended to align. CBP Staff agreed to explore incorporating milestones and other accountability measures into future planning timelines to better show how the processes connect.
- ❖ *How will the CBP ensure accountability for achieving restoration goals, when transparency alone is insufficient?:* The Program's adaptive management framework is intended to identify ineffective strategies early and allow partners to make course corrections before major deadlines are missed. Ongoing revisions to the CBP's governance and management framework will further define accountability roles and responsibilities, which will be reflected in the final Strategic Plan.

Preliminary Management Strategy Priorities for the Four Agreement Goals:

Kevin Schabow, Director, Chesapeake Bay Office NOAA

Ken Hyer, Coordinator, Chesapeake Bay Office USGS

Lee McDonnell, Chief, Science, Analysis and Implementation Branch, EPA CBP Office

Julie Patton Lawson, Program Analyst, Green Economy Branch, DOEE

Thriving Habitats, Fisheries, and Wildlife Goal Team: the group combines the former Habitat and Sustainable Fisheries goal implementation teams. Key priorities include incorporating a new blue crab stock assessment into

management decisions, expanding brook trout monitoring, improving fish habitat and passage, advancing oyster restoration and aquaculture, strengthening stream health metrics, enhancing submerged aquatic vegetation monitoring, and developing watershed-wide strategies for tidal and non-tidal wetlands. Schabow emphasized the importance of cross-workgroup collaboration, improved monitoring and assessment tools, and integrating emerging priorities such as freshwater mussel conservation, acid mine drainage mitigation, and waterbird habitat needs. Many of these priorities will be further developed and refined as draft management strategy chapters are prepared later this year.

Healthy Landscapes Goal Team integrates four outcomes: healthy forests and trees, land use planning and decision support, protected lands, and adaptation to changing environmental conditions. Key priorities include expanding high-resolution land use data for local decision-making, accelerating forest and tree canopy restoration, and increasing permanent land conservation. The team is also advancing work on climate resilience and adaptation by identifying priority watersheds, promoting nature-based solutions, and expanding efforts beyond tidal systems to include non-tidal landscapes. As the goal team develops its management strategies, Hyer encouraged input from the Stakeholders Advisory Committee, particularly on strengthening engagement with local governments, organizations, and communities.

Clean Water Goal Team's three outcomes: reducing excess nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment (REMPS); addressing toxic and emerging contaminants; and water quality standards assessment and monitoring. Key priorities include accelerating implementation of water quality practices, improving BMP tracking through satellite imagery and AI, and making greater use of monitoring data to assess progress. A major focus will be completing and reviewing the Phase 7 watershed models, which will inform new planning targets by 2028. Those targets will inform updates to Watershed Implementation Plans (WIPs) through 2029, with revised implementation efforts beginning by 2030. The team is shifting its work on toxics from research towards partner coordination and information sharing on issues such as PFAS, plastics, and PCBs, while strengthening core monitoring networks and water quality assessment tools for targeted action across the watershed.

Engaged Communities Goal Team: a cross-cutting group that supports restoration efforts through education, stewardship, leadership, public access, and workforce development. The team includes six outcomes: local government leadership, public access, environmental literacy planning, stewardship, student environmental literacy experiences, and workforce development. Key priorities include expanding public access, strengthening environmental literacy, building local leadership capacity, and ensuring more students receive meaningful watershed education experiences. Lawson highlighted the new workforce outcome, which addresses restoration workforce shortages by promoting environmental careers, expanding training and certification opportunities, and aligning workforce development with employer needs. Management Strategy priorities include improving coordination across goal teams, developing better metrics for social and educational outcomes, engaging new partners such as education and labor agencies, and maintaining flexible, adaptive Work Plans.

Member Questions & Discussion

- ❖ *How will the Adaptation to Changing Environmental Conditions Outcome select its priority watersheds and will it consider opportunities for improvement?:* The Healthy Landscapes Goal Team has not yet developed formal selection metrics. The team is currently working with jurisdictions to identify priorities and is focusing on watersheds where existing local and regional efforts, partnerships, and momentum can support resilience-building activities. The group is also expanding participation beyond tidal jurisdictions to ensure broader watershed representation.
- ❖ *How is the Healthy Landscapes Goal Team coordinating with MD's Forest Conservation Act and local conservation requirements to ensure efforts are aligned and not duplicative?:* The goal team is still building its membership, with an emphasis on including the appropriate jurisdictional representatives and subject-matter experts. Leadership from Maryland forestry programs and the U.S. Forest Service are directly involved in the Forestry Workgroup, helping ensure coordination with existing state and local forest conservation efforts.

- ❖ *Is wetland restoration in the watershed outpacing annual wetland losses, or are gains and losses occurring at the same rate?:* The partnership does not yet have a complete picture of annual wetland gains and losses, which is a key priority for the Wetlands Workgroup. The group is working to better define and track wetland restoration, creation, and enhancement activities and improve data collection across the watershed. This includes capturing projects funded and implemented by nonprofits and philanthropic organizations, which are not always reflected in partnership data.
- ❖ *How are jurisdictions expected to address the gap between the 2025 Phase III WIP targets and the anticipated adoption of new WIPs and planning targets in 2030?:* Jurisdictions are expected to continue implementing existing restoration actions between 2025 and 2030, even as the partnership develops a new set of planning targets. While progress toward current targets will vary by jurisdiction, the goal is to maintain momentum until updated targets and WIPs are established.
- ❖ *What does success look like by 2040 across the four goal areas and how the Chesapeake Bay might be different as a result of the partnership's work?:*
 - **Clean Water:** Lee McDonnell highlighted upcoming decisions around new implementation strategies and tiered targets that prioritize areas where restoration can provide the greatest benefits for living resources, particularly in shallow-water habitats. He expects these approaches to shape restoration efforts beginning in the late 2020s.
 - **Healthy Watersheds and Living Resources:** Kevin Schabow emphasized the opportunity to focus restoration in areas that deliver the greatest ecological returns, leading to improved water clarity, healthier habitats, and stronger fish and wildlife populations. He pointed to recent improvements in some waterways as an encouraging sign of what could become more common by 2040.
 - **Healthy Landscapes:** Ken Hyer expects continued progress in forest conservation, land protection, and watershed resilience. He also hopes local land-use planning will become more strategic, balancing growth, economic development, and environmental protection. Looking ahead, he envisions the partnership focusing less on individual outcomes and more on managing the Bay as a connected ecosystem.
 - **Engaged Communities:** Julie Lawson said success will depend on more people seeing themselves as part of restoration efforts. By increasing public engagement, education, workforce development, and stewardship opportunities, she hopes communities will play a larger role in both preventing pollution and supporting restoration.

Identify the September Quarterly Meeting Theme - Part One: Refining the Scope of Advice

Lucinda Power, Chief, Partnerships and Accountability Branch, EPA CBP Office

Lucinda suggested that the Stakeholders' Committee recommendations focus around directly advancing *Watershed Agreement* goals or improving Partnership operations and accountability. She encouraged the committee to prioritize actions that accelerate progress, address shared barriers, or tackle emerging issues where the Partnership can have a meaningful impact. She noted that past committee recommendations have influenced water quality planning, land-use data investments, accountability measures, and advisory committee engagement. She also acknowledged the need for better follow-up on recommendations and suggested more regular status updates. Finally, she clarified that annual charges to advisory committees are intended to provide direction, not limit their independence or ability to raise emerging issues.

Part Two: Member Feedback on a September Meeting Theme

The members utilized a *Mentimeter* poll to submit and vote on a focus topic for the September meeting. The members were first asked what Goal Team their proposed topic primarily falls under, the majority of which fell under the Clean Water goal team. The members were then asked to specify what their proposed topic for the September quarterly meeting was and to then vote upon the topic. The two highest voted topics were: "In what ways can this

Committee help to advance the clean water goals and continue to encourage accountability for making progress in a timely manner,” and the second was “How to best support 1 to 4 of the topics by helping define actionable items and guidance for achieving objectives. These ideally would be paradigm shifts. Example: zoning, community education, etc.”

Resource: [Mentimeter Results](#)

Member Reflections and Discussion

Members largely focused on how to shape the committee’s September meeting and future recommendations. A recurring theme was the need for stronger accountability, transparency, and communication within the Chesapeake Bay Program. Charlie Stek emphasized the importance of a cross-cutting gap analysis and accountability framework that spans all goal teams and advisory committees, arguing that it should remain a priority even though it was not fully incorporated into previous governance revisions. Members also discussed the need for meaningful measures of progress, particularly around water quality and how restoration outcomes affect people’s lives. Several participants noted that many proposed topics were interconnected and could be combined into a broader discussion framework for the September meeting.

Members raised concerns about accountability and coordination across the Chesapeake Bay Program. Questions focused on the connection between the strategic planning process and the goal team presentations, particularly regarding accountability, progress reporting, toxics and PFAS efforts, water quality implementation, and how two-year milestones and annual reporting fit within the broader accountability framework. Members also emphasized that topics not selected as priorities for the September meeting should not be discarded, suggesting that a running list of issues be maintained for future discussion and follow-up.

Action Items:

- Develop and circulate a draft September meeting framework that combines related priority topics, incorporates member feedback, and identifies key discussion themes.
 - ◆ Ask members to identify speakers, experts, and information needs for the September meeting.
 - ◆ Retain non-selected topics for future consideration and seek responses or follow-up opportunities rather than dropping them entirely.
- Request information on the future accountability framework, and provide the updated milestone timeline before the September meeting so members can review and incorporate it into their discussions and recommendations.

The meeting adjourned at 3:00PM.

Stakeholders’ Advisory Committee 2026 Meeting Dates

Virtual: September 16/17

Virtual: Friday, December 11