

**Stakeholders' Members Present:** Matt Ehrhart, John Dawes, Bill Fink, Donna Harris-Aikens, Verna Harrison, Bobby Hughes, Ann Jurczyk, Hamid Karimi, Julie Patton Lawson, Joe Maroon (remote), Patrick McDonnell, Bill Noftsinger, Abel Olivo (Chair), Kate Patton, Daphne Pee (remote), Alisonya Poole (remote), Sara Ramotnik, BeKura Shabazz, Charlie Stek, Dana Wiggins, and Staff Jess Blackburn & Alex LoCurto

**Speakers/Guests Present:** Kate Fritz, Amy Handen, Kathy Stecker, Sabine Miller, Kristin Saunders, Erin Vesey, Rachel Felver, Marisa Baldine, Stefanie Taillon, Lucinda Power, Bart Merrick, Emily Stransky, Douglas Stewart, Khesha Reed, Rick Mittler, Laura Cattell Noll, Kayli Ottomanelli

**Meeting presentations and materials are located at:**

[Stakeholders' Advisory Committee Quarterly Meeting \(May 2025\) | Chesapeake Bay Program](#)

### **Wednesday, May 21, 2025**

The Stakeholders' Advisory Committee Chair, Abel Olivo, called the meeting to order at 11:00 AM. The meeting objectives are to (1) Learn and discuss updates from the Commonwealth of Virginia; (2) Receive updates and discuss the current thinking on the revisions of the *2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement* and Chesapeake Bay Program streamlining and reorganization; (3) Advance understanding of the newly formed *Watershed Agreement Workforce Outcome*.

### **Business Meeting**

- The February 2025 Quarterly Meeting minutes were approved as submitted.
- The Stakeholders' Executive Committee approved a bylaws exception allowing Bill Fink to serve on the new Agriculture Advisory Committee while retaining his Stakeholders' Advisory Committee membership.
- The Committee reviewed the [Membership and Governance Survey results](#) to help the subcommittee and Stakeholders' EC reduce barriers to leadership roles.
  - Members supported dedicating annual agenda time for this topic to better understand member needs.

### **Virginia Updates and Perspectives**

*Stefanie Taillon, Virginia Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources*

Secretary Taillon represents Virginia on the Principals' Staff Committee (PSC) and oversees five state agencies. The Secretary laid out four guiding principles from Governor Youngkin's [Executive Directive 10: Positioning the Commonwealth for Continued Success in Chesapeake Bay Restoration](#), which recognized the need for a comprehensive strategy and now shapes Virginia's approach to the effort:

1. **Evaluating Investments:** The Secretary is prioritizing a comprehensive review of major programs like the Water Quality Improvement Fund to ensure funds are used in a targeted and efficient manner while advancing the intended goals of those investments.
2. **Executing Targeted Bay Initiatives:** Secretary Taillon highlighted the launch of a statewide Wetlands Technical Team to address gaps in meeting wetlands goals by connecting previously siloed practitioners. The team's first in-person meeting fostered valuable partnerships and funding opportunities that were previously unknown to individuals. She stressed the importance of intentional engagement that drives tangible results.
3. **Operating Under Realistic Strategies:** Secretary Taillon emphasized the importance of balancing ambition with what is realistically achievable. While aspirational targets are valuable for pushing progress, she stressed that outcomes must be feasible.
4. **Exploring Innovative Ideas:** Virginia is exploring a pay-for-performance program, which recently awarded \$19 million for 9 projects. The state has also fully funded its Agricultural Cost-Share Program through

FY23-FY26 and part of FY27. The cost-share program is viewed as an important partnership between the agricultural sector and the State, with 2023 setting a record in nitrogen reductions.

Secretary Taillon reaffirmed Virginia's commitment to the CBP and the revisioning process of the *2014 Bay Agreement*. She underlined the importance of including measurable and attainable outcomes in the *Agreement* and led an internal review with state outcome leads to assess resources, partnership support, and progress. Virginia is now preparing for a 2-day meeting to gather feedback from stakeholders on the *Agreement* outcome revisions. Secretary Taillon called for streamlining CBP's governance, noting Virginia's 160+ participation slots create management challenges and silos. Virginia is working to clarify roles and improve information flow.

While not every priority can be included in the *Agreement*, Taillon emphasized that exclusion doesn't signal a lack of commitment. She stressed using plain language and relatable outcomes, noting Oyster Abundance resonates more with the public than habitat goals, and Virginia supports linking the Stream Health Outcome to local waterways to better engage communities.

### **Member Questions & Discussion**

- ❖ *What is the date for a restored Bay and what is the legacy you want to leave behind:* A fully restored Bay will never happen, it is a generational effort. We need realistic goals to guide us, knowing that we may not hit every target, but the *Agreement* lets us reassess and keep progressing. My hope is to leave the Bay better than I found it.
- ❖ *Thoughts on the Workforce Outcome and addressing staff capacity gaps:* Virginia sees the Workforce Outcome as key to expanding participation in Bay restoration and showcasing its economic impact. Workforce development is a state priority, supported through efforts like Virginia Works.
- ❖ *Prioritization of land conservation in Virginia:* Virginia uses ConserveVirginia, a GIS tool that guides land protection priorities and grant scoring. The state has exceeded its contribution to the CBP's protected lands goal and is cautious about breaking down targets by jurisdiction, preferring flexibility given its existing tools.
- ❖ *Status of 30% land conservation by 2030 goal in Virginia:* Virginia does not have a "30 by 30" goal but is exploring the idea with partners. It's under talks, though unlikely to be in place before the *Agreement* is finalized.

### **Chesapeake Bay Program Updates**

#### *Lucinda Power, Branch Chief, CBP Partnerships and Accountability*

Lucinda reviewed the 2024 Executive Council (EC) charge to update the *Watershed Agreement* and streamline CBP governance. At the May Management Board (MB) retreat, outcome language was updated. The PSC will review it on May 23 and aims to approve a draft *Agreement* for public feedback starting July 1. A follow-up PSC meeting is set for June 27. Public feedback will be reviewed in early September, with revisions planned before the EC's December 2025 meeting. The current *Watershed Agreement* has 10 goals and 31 outcomes. After the MB's review, 21 outcomes will be grouped under 4 goals: Clean Water, Engaged Communities, Conserved Lands and Watershed Health, and Thriving Habitat and Wildlife. The PSC will review this proposal on May 23 and vote on the revised *Agreement* structure.

Lucinda reviewed progress on streamlining the Bay Program's structure and governance. The PSC and MB tasked GIT 6, co-chaired by Lucinda and James Martin (VA), to lead the effort. The team identified five priorities: clarifying roles across groups; updating the Strategy Review System for better progress tracking; ensuring collaborative, science-based decision-making; using a clear logic framework for planning and delivery; and defining resource needs and leadership before expanding outcomes or setting new targets. At the May 23rd meeting, the PSC will review and discuss a proposed response to the Indigenous Conservation Council (ICC), which has formally requested to become a signatory to the *Agreement* and seeks the creation of an Indigenous Advisory Committee with dedicated funding. In addition, the PSC will receive more detail about the public feedback process, including how comments will be collected through a dedicated email ([comments@chesapeakebay.net](mailto:comments@chesapeakebay.net)) and the [Beyond 2025 website](#).

### **Member Questions & Discussion**

- ❖ *Outreach Strategy for the 60-day comment period:* Rachel Felver and Marisa Baldine have developed an outreach strategy for Beyond 2025 by actively reaching out to groups across the watershed using a "network of

networks” approach. Outreach also includes blogs, editorials, and webinars timed with the public comment period. They are also relying on MB and PSC members to help spread the word within their own networks.

- ❖ *Will jurisdictions be re-signing the revised Watershed Agreement:* There is no plan among the jurisdictions to re-sign the *Watershed Agreement*. The members of the EC at the December meeting will be asked to approve the revisions to the *Agreement*, including reducing the number of goals from 10 to 4, updating the vision, preamble, and principles, and adopting the revised outcome language.
- ❖ *Clarification on the PSC response to the ICC:* The PSC will review a draft response to the ICC proposal, which acknowledges the federally recognized tribes as sovereign nations and supports their interest in formally joining the CBP. While the PSC will not make a final decision on specific requests like signatory status or forming an advisory committee, they’ll explore how an Indigenous Guardianship Program could fit into the partnership and consider the value of an Indigenous Advisory Committee.

### **Stewardship & Engagement Subcommittee Priority Part One: Workforce Outcome**

*Julie Patton Lawson, Workforce and Education Program Analyst, DOEE*

*Bart Merrick, Education Coordinator, NOAA Environmental Science Training Center*

Julie Lawson, speaking as a DOEE employee, described her role leading workforce and education planning in DC’s Green Economy branch, including a 3-year strategic plan. She noted the CBP Diversity Workgroup ended in January due to a federal executive order, prompting non-federal members to form an action team. They found jurisdictions struggle to meet goals because of staffing shortages, emphasizing the need for a diverse, representative workforce.

Anticipating the Diversity Outcome’s removal, the group reframed it as a Workforce Outcome to build a more inclusive, skilled green workforce. Presented to the MB in March, the proposal supports jurisdictions in expanding and retaining workers who advance Bay goals and local economies. Before the May MB retreat, Julie secured support from all nine signatories. The outcome targets increasing green career awareness, expanding credentialed training, and supporting worker hiring and retention. Next, the action team plans to build a community of practice linking environmental agencies and workforce boards.

Bart Merrick presented findings from the Career and Workforce Landscape Assessment, highlighting that every local or CBP goal creates job opportunities, but staffing shortages hinder progress, a major barrier previously noted by STAC & LGAC. They developed a training provider database covering 108 organizations, aligned with CBP goals and Goal Implementation Teams (GITs). They also created an interactive career map organizing jobs by Bay goals and tiers: origin (entry-level), gateway (mid-level), and target (career), with related GITs and training options. Key barriers include weak links between training providers and Bay employers, systemic challenges for underrepresented communities, and mismatches between job seeker interests, job availability, and access.

The report, on the [CBP Workforce Action Team page](#), recommends maintaining partnerships with training providers, using CBP influence to connect employers and job seekers, creating a clear workforce development plan, and establishing shared tools like a public knowledge base to ease access to conservation careers. These findings informed the new workforce outcome Julie shared, demonstrating how research shapes strategy.

### **Member Questions & Discussion**

- ❖ *Does the landscape assessment include how many jobs CBP funding has created:* This figure wasn’t in the landscape assessment. EPA’s contract with the National Center for Environmental Economics (NCEE), initiated by Martha Shimkin before her retirement from EPA CBP, was studying the economic impact of CBP investments. It’s unclear if that work continues.

### **Stewardship & Engagement Subcommittee Priority Part Two: A Local Look at Workforce Programs**

*Richard Baugh, Member of LGAC, former Mayor of Harrisonburg*

*Douglas Stewart, Fellowship Coordinator, Piedmont Environmental Council*

*Emily Stransky, Chesapeake Bay Trust*

Richard Baugh, explained that Harrisonburg's growth, which was unusual for a small urban area, stemmed from job availability and affordable housing, which attracted a diverse workforce. This led to the highest percentage

of English language learners in Virginia public schools. While housing has become less affordable since the 2008 recession, a recent study highlights shifting demographics as the bigger challenge. Baugh emphasized the urgent need for workforce development, with local leaders focused on attracting and retaining workers for key roles in Chesapeake Bay restoration.

Douglas Stewart highlighted the [Randall Conservation Fellowship](#), an 8-week hands-on learning program for undergrad and postgrad students in environmental fields. Though not a workforce program, it offers exposure to conservation work through a hybrid model, three weeks in the Piedmont region and five virtual. Fellows' study includes: biology, sustainability, and environmental policy, and offers them insight into an environmental career.

Emily Stransky leads the [Chesapeake Conservation Climate Corps \(C3\)](#), a year-long, stipend-supported program launched in 2010. C3 places young adults at Maryland host organizations to build green career skills through hands-on experience, training, and professional development. The program emphasizes workforce development, climate action, environmental justice, and DEI. Challenges include limited funding, high demand, and stronger participant support. CBT aims to expand the program to other Bay jurisdictions, strengthen alumni connections, and improve career pathways.

### **EPA Chesapeake Bay Program Funding Update**

*Khesha Reed, Deputy Director, EPA Chesapeake Bay Program*

Deputy Director Khesha Reed updated the Committee on the CBP Office's budget, which remains uncertain. Although FY25 began on October 1 of 2024, there is still not an approved operating plan. Congress passed a Continuing Resolution, and we received a budget, but we haven't been authorized to spend the funds. An early draft budget proposed a decrease for the CBP office, but no details on that reduction have yet been distributed. We also haven't received any information on our FY26 budget. Based on current signals, we anticipate funding cuts and increased scrutiny of spending, even as costs including payroll, equipment, and operations continue to rise.

Given this outlook, we are actively identifying ways to reduce spending across the CBP Office. We are reviewing all areas for potential savings including grants, contracts, travel, etc. While we deeply value the input of all our Advisory Committees, we will need to explore savings across those groups as well. We don't yet have a specific budget target but hope to have more clarity on FY25 soon. FY26 and beyond remains uncertain, and that year will mark the end of our five-year infrastructure funding, which will represent another significant funding loss.

### **Member Questions & Discussion**

- ❖ *Has EPA been overspending:* No, EPA has not overspent its budget. EPA utilizes every dime of our money that is allocated but if we receive a reduced budget as anticipated, then we will have to make cuts.
- ❖ *Highlighting the CBP's value to Region 3 Administrator:* We've had several positive meetings with our Regional Administrator who seems to recognize our program's value and speaks positively about our work in budget discussions with Congress. But, we still don't know who is making the final budgeting decisions.
- ❖ *Timeframe for concrete answers on funding:* We are hoping for some info about our operating plan by next month (June) which could then allow us to make some decisions and give folks more info. This is the latest we have ever received an operating plan or a budget in my career at EPA.
- ❖ *Impact of Administration's cost-cutting efforts on current grants:* All infrastructure grant funding, which is separate from our regular budget, was sent out as soon as it was received in early October last year. Unlike other agencies, CBP grants have not been frozen, so grantees have been able to continue to spend down the existing funds. However, because of our lack of budget, we haven't been able to add new funding to those grants.

### **Member Updates: Daphne Pee**

Daphne attended two Social Science Work Group meetings where they discussed ongoing challenges in integrating social science, specifically economics and behavior change, into the Bay Program. She noted that the conversation hasn't changed much in years. The group is now focusing on how to incorporate diverse knowledge types, especially indigenous knowledge, into decision-making. This raises important questions about which knowledge is recognized and valued, as it is often difficult for natural scientists to understand and equitably use



indigenous knowledge. The group plans to continue exploring how different cultures define and create “knowledge”, to better include diverse perspectives in the Bay Program.

### **Thursday, May 22, 2025**

The meeting was reconvened at 8:30AM.

#### **Coordinator’s Report**

Jess encouraged members to rethink how the Stakeholders’ Advisory Committee meets in light of future budget constraints. While four in-person meetings are unlikely to continue in the future, the goal is to avoid meeting only virtual. Jess also shared upcoming meetings and activities scheduled for the Summer and Fall. A small group of members (Donna, Hamid, Pat, John, BeKura, Abel, and Bill N.) was formed to recommend new meeting formats once the Committee budget is known.

#### **Update on the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay**

*Kate Fritz, CEO, Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay*

Kate shared that the Alliance is weathering through a very uncertain time due to federal funding instability, with frozen, canceled, and delayed grants. Despite this, the Alliance has not lost staff and remains proactive by aggressively pursuing diversified funding from corporate, foundation, and partner-based organizations to sustain its core mission. Kate expressed cautious optimism, citing support from the EPA R3 Administrator. She emphasized that people are the Alliance’s top priority and urged everyone to choose hope and action in the face of these challenges.

#### **Member Updates: Sara Ramotnik**

Sara shared that next year’s Choose Clean Water Coalition Conference will be held in Lancaster, PA from May 18-20th. Since the February quarterly meeting, the Coalition has been active at the federal level, hosting Bay Day on the Hill in March with nearly 100 coalition members gathering to advocate against funding freezes. They created a [public funding freeze tracker on their website](#), which includes canceled and paused grants. The Coalition also met with the MD Attorney General on FEMA related funding opportunities and sent letters to leadership at the Department of Interior, supporting the USGS Chesapeake Office. The Coalition has kept members informed about 501(c)(3) status concerns, submitted comments to EPA on waters of the United States, and sent a welcome letter to the new EPA Region 3 Administrator. The Coalition continues to remain committed to supporting partners through ongoing uncertainty.

#### **Member Reflections from the Previous Day**

Members agreed to reschedule the subcommittee break-out sessions for virtual meetings and continue to discuss points of recommendations in preparation for Abel’s remarks at the PSC the following day. Members voiced concern about Secretary Taillon’s statement that Chesapeake Bay cleanup will never be complete and should be viewed as a perpetual effort. They argued instead for setting a clear, time-bound goal to achieve water quality improvements, and emphasized that reaching those goals should not be open-ended. They urged the partnership to commit to achieving restored water quality by 2033, the 50th anniversary of the first *Bay Agreement*, eight years beyond the current 2025 deadline.

Several members expressed frustration with the jurisdictions for resisting the inclusion of deadlines in the revised *Agreement*. One member from Pennsylvania stated that, in practice, the deadlines and targets in the *Agreement* were effectively driving TMDL implementation. Others reminded the group that the *Agreement* should encompass broader goals than just the TMDL or water quality. Members agreed that deadlines made work more tangible and motivated sectors like agriculture to deliver measurable results.

Members appreciated the first day’s green jobs discussion, saying it was inspiring to hear about real-world progress and view this topic as essential for broadening engagement. They stressed the need for plain language to explain why this work matters, why deadlines are necessary, and how it affects people’s lives. Finally, many members agreed that the December Executive Council meeting should include a signing ceremony of some kind. One person noted that with none of the current governors expected to be in office in 2033, there is little political risk.

The meeting adjourned at 12:00PM.

### **Action Items:**

- Letter to R3 Administrator congratulating her on her appointment and to schedule a meeting with the Committee
- Map to show where members are represented across the watershed
- Bring back the local watershed context presentation
- Draft a script/elevator speech about the Stakeholders' Committee
- Ask the Membership and Governance Subcommittee to look at how the Alliance considers appointments
  - ◆ Discuss how to broaden representation
- Help Secretary Taillon to identify orgs who may want to participate in VA's stakeholder feedback session
- Convene an ad hoc group to explore meeting format changes given likely budget cuts.
- Schedule virtual subcommittee meetings to continue priorities discussion
- Schedule virtual briefing on the revised *Agreement* to kick-off the Committee's discussion for the public feedback period.
- Schedule delegation meetings with CBC on thoughts on the *Agreement*