Forestry Workgroup Minutes

February 5th, 2025 | 9:00 am - 11:00 am

Meeting Materials

Attendees

Alexis Dickerson, Potomac Conservancy
Anne Hairston-Strang, MD FS
Bay Hanson, USFS
Ben Coverdale, DNREC
Beth Johnson, Sussex Conservation District
Caitlin Verdu, VA DOF
Caroline Kleis, CRC
Cassie Davis, NYS DEC
Cathryn Soriano, DNREC
Catie Soriano, DNREC
Celine Colbert, PA DCNR
Chris Miller, DE FS
Chris Peters, PA NRCS
Craig Larcenaire, USFS
Dan Coy, MD DNR
Emily Heller, CBPO EPA
Erica Carlsson, DC DOEE
Everald A. McDonald, PA DCNR
George Doumit, DE DNREC
Heidi Bonnaffon, MWCOG
Jenna Talbot, DE DNREC

Jeremy McGill, WV DOF
Joe Schell, DNREC
Julie Mawhorter, USFS
Kalaia London, PA DCNR
Katie Brownson, USFS
Kesha Braunskill, USFS
Lorenzo Cinalli, USFS
Lydia Brinkley, Upper Susquehanna Coalition
Matt Keefer, PA BOF
Meghan Noe Fellows, DE Center for the Inland Bays
Micheal Coverdale, DNREC
Nancy Sonti, USFS
Ned Brockmeyer, PA DCNR
Orsolya Lazar, PA DCNR
Rick Turcotte, USFS
Ruth Cassilly, UMD
Sarah Brzezinski, EPA CBPO
Sarah McDonald, USGS
Susan Minnemeyer, Nature Plus
Teddi Stark, PA DCNR

9:00	**Welcome and Introductions** – *Kesha Braunskill (USFS, FWG Co-Chair)* For roll call purposes, please enter your name & affiliation in the chat box. Call-in participants are requested to identify themselves verbally.
9:05	**Announcements** – *Katie Brownson (USFS, FWG Coordinator)* ● CBP Webinar: *Addressing Urban Tree Supply Challenges in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed* |Recording available here

	● CBP Webinar: Chesapeake Assessment Scenario Tool (CAST) January Webinar on Modeling Conservation |Recording available [here](#) (Click the "Develop a Plan" drop down menu and navigate to the recording listed as "Modeling Conservation") ● Timber Harvest Task Force recommendations for the forest harvesting BMP in Phase 7 were approved by the WQ GIT.
9:10 (15 min)	**[Continued Discussion on Natural Succession in Phase 7](#)** – *Sarah McDonald (USGS)* This is a follow-up discussion from the [December 2024 joint meeting](#) to evaluate whether natural succession barren and natural succession herbaceous should be classified as Compacted Pervious (also written Pervious, Compacted) in the urban context for Phase 7 of the watershed model. Summary of Sarah's proposed recommendations: ● *Natural Succession Barren* rolls up to **Construction** in urban contexts and **Harvested Forest** in rural contexts. ● *Natural Succession Herbaceous* rolls up to **Compacted Pervious (previously Mixed Open)** in urban contexts and to **Forest** in rural contexts. **Discussion** *(Natural Succession Barren)*: Anne Hairston-Strang: The recommendations sound pretty sensible, but I have a question about the sand and gravel mine in the example (referring to slide 13). Since most of these examples are going to be in the rural context, does that mean they end up in harvested forest? Sarah McDonald: Correct, I did look back through the rules capturing these things as natural succession barren and most of these examples were large forested fields in 2013 that were harvested and turned into mines. I don't have a quantifiable way of saying how much of it is actually this, but to be transparent there are cases of this and this is not a perfect class. Julie Mawhorter: I agree this makes sense in the rural areas, my only flag is for the urban areas, since some areas in the datasets may be classified as urban, but may actually not be. For instance, some of the urban census places around Norfolk, VA are quite vast and may include rural areas, so for those instances maybe they could be rolled up into harvested forest rather than construction. When setting the Tree Canopy indicator, we weighed the urban areas and clusters versus the census places, and I think we decided on the census places because it seemed to track more narrowly with the developed landscape, so maybe when you're looking at the urban area clusters, you could look to see if those areas may be picking things up more broadly as urban areas. Sarah McDonald: Thanks for this input, we can continue to play with what the definition of urban is and work on evaluating what those footprints should actually be.

	Katie Brownson: It seems like a good approach, as Anne mentioned it's not perfect with the potential of misclassification of mines, but given this covers a pretty small area, it seems like classifying as harvest might make most sense.

Sarah McDonald: We may be able to pull some of these mines back out as extractive after the fact.

Discussion *(Natural Succession Herbaceous)*:
Frank Rodgers: I'm wondering if the example on the left is a fallow farm (referring to slide 14), so what if the family starts farming again, what happens then?

Sarah McDonald: That's a big struggle with trying to map these things, all we have is what happened previously and what is there now, but none of our data anywhere is perfect.

Katie Brownson: I think this is a big improvement to what was proposed before with lumping all of the natural succession classes together and assuming they are all forests and I feel more comfortable with this proposal. If anyone has other feedback they can email Sarah (smcdonald@usgs.gov). The slides will be uploaded to the site.

Sarah McDonald: Given the classes I'm recommending, I will also need to run these by other workgroups for approval, but otherwise it would be nice to have a thumbs up from the FWG on this portion.

Katie Brownson: Following the meeting, we will re-distribute the information to the FWG and give people an opportunity to review and raise any red flags. Otherwise, I think we can approve by email.

Post meeting update: A recap email was sent to the FWG on 2/5/25 asking for final feedback by 2/14/25 on the proposed natural succession class changes. No concerns were raised, therefore, the recommendations were approved. |
| **9:25** (30 min) | **Draft Tree Canopy Outcome Assessment Review & Discussion** – *Julie Mawhorter (USFS)*

Julie reviewed the draft 2-page Tree Canopy outcome assessment based on the feedback from the January 2025 Forestry Workgroup meeting.

Discussion:
Caitlin Verdu (in chat): Everything you said makes sense to me. I'll touch base with Lara Johnson to make sure she's ok too.

Frank Rodgers: Are you recommending moving away from urban and community forestry or just emphasizing the community part?

Julie Mawhorter: In the current outcome it only has urban, but if folks want to have both urban and community forestry then we could. |

	Frank Rodgers: That would align with all the state forestry programs that use the word urban and community forestry. **Anne Hairston-Strang**: Suggests moving towards the word community given our current climate. **Ned Brockmeyer**: Agreed and also mentioned many of these communities may see the word urban and don't realize that it could apply to them. **Heidi Bonnaffon (in chat)**: The proposed emphasis on adding term "community" and conservation and co-benefits all sound good to me. **Orsolya Lazar (in chat)**: Community is more inclusive and shorter to type, makes it less clunky to use in documents, outreach, etc. **Susan Minnemeyer (in chat)**: I also agree on the term community and the added focus on co-benefits **Emily Heller (in chat)**: No comments, thanks for writing that all up Julie! **Julie Mawhorter**: Thanked everyone for their feedback and encouraged people to review the 2-pager and continue sending comments. **Katie Brownson**: Wrapped up the discussion mentioning the 2-pagers and slides are due next week, so please submit by the end of the week (2/7/25).
9:55 (30 min)	**Draft Forest Buffers Outcome Assessment Review & Discussion** – *Katie Brownson (USFS, FWG Coordinator)* Katie reviewed the draft 2-page Forest Buffers outcome assessment based on the feedback from the January 2025 Forestry Workgroup meeting. **Discussion:** **Teddi Stark (in chat)**: I think it's important to keep an annual planting target as a part of the Outcome- I agree that closely tracking annual planting numbers as part of the agreement is really important, and a very clear way to show progress. **Caitlin Verdu**: Likes the idea of percentage of riparian areas over 900 miles per year, but can see the political benefit of keeping the planting goal to maintain momentum and show there still needs to be investment. Advertising the 70% milestones may help to show people that work is paying off (referred to VA hitting above the 70% goal, but since they already had many buffers in place it may have sent a misleading narrative that VA wasn't doing enough). In VA they don't measure anything by miles, so I would feel better about using the acreage instead of average.

	Cassie Davis (in chat): I agree with acreage instead of mileage. It will match the BMP implementation data we are submitting.

Katie Brownson: That's a good point about the challenge with the 70% goal, since the language in the outcome is supposed to be a minimum of 70%, but I don't think people see it that way, so keeping an annual planting goal may help to keep up the momentum. Does anyone feel strongly about taking the planting goals out?

Teddi Stark: I feel strongly that we should not take the planting goals out.

Katie Brownson: That's helpful, I'm going to tell them that we want to keep the planting goals and explain why we think it's important, even if according to the strict logic framework, maybe it's more like an output.

Frank Rodgers (in chat): I am eager to see how the RFB % changes using the hi-res new stream layer.

Susan Minnemeyer: Even in watersheds that have over 70% there are going to be areas that will benefit from forest buffers, so if we could improve that language that would be great. Additionally, in reference to the "plantable areas" suggestion, we should take tidal wetlands out of the denominator because a lot of the coastal counties may have a high percentage of riparian areas that are marshes and couldn't be planted.

Katie Brownson: That's a good point and I think keeping that simpler than the whole realm of what's plantable, such as explaining we're not trying to plant tidal wetlands makes a lot of sense. |
| **10:25** (5 min) | **<u>Next Steps: Recap of the Management Board's Outcome Review Timeline</u>** – *Katie Brownson (USFS, FWG Coordinator)*

Katie wrapped up the outcome review discussion by providing a brief update on the Management Board's Beyond 2025 timeline.

Summary of the next steps *(tentative)*:
- February: Outcome review 2-pagers due on the 13th and the MB Outcome Review meeting for the FWG outcomes on the 27th
- March - June: MB and PSC finalize the draft outcome and goal language for public comment
- July - September: Public comment period
- October: Changes are proposed based on public comments
- November: Final Watershed Agreement revisions approved |

10:30 (10 min)	**Elevating Forest Conservation in a Revised Watershed Agreement** – *Katie Brownson* *(USFS, FWG Coordinator)* As a follow-up to the January FWG meeting, Katie led a discussion on opportunities to better elevate forest conservation in the revised Watershed Agreement. With the PSC stating to elevate conservation as a pillar, she proposed two possible pathways for consideration: 1. Propose a new forest conservation outcome OR 2. Seek to elevate forest conservation through modifications to existing related outcomes (such as the Protected Lands and Healthy Watersheds) **Discussion:** Katie Brownson: Asked for feedback on the proposed paths. If we do want to move forward with submitting a new outcome, we will need help and a team. Cassie Davis: I like the latter idea of discussing with the Protected Lands and Healthy Watersheds Goal Team on how we can incorporate forest conservation into their goals as part of their outputs. Katie Brownson: Thanks Cassie, that path seems more likely to make it past the MB. Cassie Davis: Yes and I think there's room for improvement in both of those outcomes and this could be a good way to start the conversation and see where we align. Cailtin Verdu: In VA, there are concerns of making this its own outcome since we're working on our own and if there's a new Bay outcome it may require us to move towards a general multi-jurisdictional goal rather than a one tailored for VA. I think if you want to incorporate it, the second option is better, but VA is also concerned about too much reporting and would like to have control on the state level. Katie Brownson: If we were to go the route of proposing a new outcome we would be very sensitive to the perspective of the states/jurisdictions and that there is not an appetite for new tracking or reporting systems, so the focus would be leveraging existing data streams like looking at existing stewardship plants, and looking at upland planting in rural areas, but it is helpful perspective from VA. Susan Minnemeyer: Would it be possible to work on some policy goals that would encourage jurisdictions to set goals without necessarily prescribing what the goals should be? For instance, I know in the past there was a tracker of how many jurisdictions had tree canopy goals. A task for this workgroup could involve producing data products to support the development of these goals. Katie Brownson: There might be opportunities to do that with the Land Use outcomes although they are still in flux. Matt Keefer: Acknowledging that it's going to be hard, I still think that as the FWG we should do due diligence. The EC charge says to elevate conservation as a key pillar, so we should try to interpret that and maybe that's something we need to do in each of our

jurisdictions because it will vary. Directly connecting forest conservation and the functions that they play and provide and connecting that directly to water quality and clearly communicating that to folks will be important. In PA for example, there's going to be economic development, so where do we focus this development, ag lands or forests is something to keep in mind as we navigate. STAC also recently came out with a recent report on the role of nonpoint source pollution and the importance of nonpoint source BMPs are important, so connecting this to the STAC report would be good. I think we should aim high, while also realizing that working through the existing outcomes might be where we land.

Katie Brownson: I tend to agree, it will be harder to capture the role of forest management and stewardship, but I don't think it's impossible. But I do like the idea of the jurisdictions coming back and talking about what they each are doing in their jurisdictions and then guiding this discussion based on that. I may reach out to some of you to prepare for this discussion.

Caitlin Verdu (in chat): I have to hop off, but please feel free to follow up with me if you need any other info from VA. Thanks, all!

Susan Minnemeyer (in chat): I believe there's a lot of literature that supports the cost effectiveness and superior outcomes of conserving forests vs planting trees. I'm more familiar with these in the climate context - where forest protection is considered the most cost effective climate solution. If the Forestry Workgroup could pull together research more aligned with water quality goals that could be very effective.

Matt Keefer: In recent HWGIT meetings, there was discussion about what a definition of conservation could be. We had internal discussions about it in PA between the agencies and kicked a few definitions around that I can send to you. I don't think there's an accepted definition of what conservation in the Bay Program means since it could mean a lot of things, but we tried to weave in active management. Maybe that's something we could work on within this group.

Katie Brownson: In the early stages of the Beyond 2025 discussion there was push to define conservation, but there was pushback from LGAC and there was too much disagreement, but we could look at this within the context of forest conservation and we can try and define what this means for us.

Matt Keefer (in chat): **Proposed Conservation Definition:**

Conservation is the sustainable use and management of natural resources to ensure their long-term viability. Conservation aims to equitably provide for human benefits while maintaining and improving ecological function. Practices include tree planting in communities, reforestation and habitat restoration, agricultural best management practices, sustainable forestry, and maintaining working lands through easements and acquisition.   If needed, we can also include the comparison to protection and preservation:

	Compared to conservation, protection and preservation focus on safeguarding ecosystems from harm and degradation. Protection measures include habitat preservation with limited intervention, pollution control, and enforcement of environmental regulations. While conservation aims to consider human needs, preservation and protection are more about safeguarding ecosystems from harm and degradation. Both approaches are essential for maintaining the health, resilience, and biodiversity of our planet. Susan Minnemeyer: One thing we could do is point to the existing research of the effectiveness of conservation versus planting trees, maybe for GIT funding. Katie Brownson: Unfortunately GIT funding will not be available, but this leads into Lorenzo's STAC proposal.
10:40 (10 min)	**STAC Proposal- Forest Conservation: Integrating Forest Health Management into Conservation Practices** – *Lorenzo Cinalli (USFS)* Lorenzo reviewed a STAC proposal he was working on to hold a workshop designed to develop recommendations on how the Bay Program can achieve meaningful conservation outcomes through forest health management and stewardship. Katie Brownson (in chat): STAC Workshops website: https://www.chesapeake.org/stac/workshops/ Lorenzo Cinalli (in chat): Forest Conservation & Health STAC Proposal: https://d18lev1ok5leia.cloudfront.net/chesapeakebay/documents/STAC-Proposal-Forest-Conservation-and-Health-2.4.25.pdf If you would like to provide feedback on the proposal or participate on the steering committee for the Workshop, please email me at Lorenzo.Cinalli@usda.gov by EOD Today, Wednesday 02/05
10:50	**Round Robin** *Ran out of time*
11:00	**Adjourn**

Supporting Documents and Links:

- 2014 Watershed Agreement

- Phase 1 Beyond 2025 Steering Committee Report

- Executive Council Beyond 2025 Charge (Final 2024 Version)