Chesapeake Bay Program
Science. Restoration. Partnership.

Forestry Workgroup Minutes

January 7th, 2026
9:00 am- 11:00 am
Visit the meeting webpage for meeting materials and additional information.

Purpose: This meeting introduced a plan for Forestry Workgroup 2026 meetings, and saw presentations on Forest Fragmentation, Forest Patch Distribution, and BiodiversiTREE.

Minutes

I. Announcements

See the posted Agenda for the full list.

- Reminders
  - o Upcoming Chesapeake Bay Program Webinar: Communicating Forest and Tree Canopy Trends Using High-Resolution Data, Jan 14th 12-1 PM. Register at: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_iqoAU8iaSaG1FgfJRRvtgg
  - o Call for nominations for new Healthy Landscapes goal co-chairs (see Jan 5 email from Julia Fucci). Nominations are due to Peter Claggett (pclagget@chesapeakebay.net) by Jan 16th.
- Revised 2025 Watershed Agreement: The revised 2025 Watershed Agreement was officially approved by the Chesapeake Bay Executive Council meeting at their Dec 2 meeting. Check out the final revised agreement here!
  - o Bay Program leadership approved a revised framework for a new structure the eliminates the Management Board and organizes the outcomes under four new goals (that will likely become goal teams)
  - o Signatories are going to be working to develop more detailed recommendations for revising the structure and governance of the program over the coming months which will go to the Management Board for approval before it is disbanded in June.
  - o Management Board will also be developing a template for the new Management Strategies.
- Upcoming STAC workshop: Healthy Forests: Proactive Strategies for Managing Threats and Promoting Conservation
  - o Scheduled for Feb 24 and 25 in Frederick, will be invite only, but we are hoping to make a virtual option available to enable additional attendance.
  - o Let Katie know if you are interested in participating virtually (katherine.brownson@usda.gov)
- Announced during the meeting:
  - o The Inaugural Mid-Atlantic Agroforestry conference is **June 4th and 5th** in State College, the focus will be on forest farming and multifunctional buffers

o   Please fill out the Workgroup Survey to let us know if you are satisfied with our meeting time, frequency, and if there are any special topics you would like us to cover this year

II.   Round Robin

Each Jurisdiction shared an update:

- **New York**: Ava Glasser shared that USC is continuing to try to make forestry positions available within the watershed. Applied to several grants but awaiting on contracting. Recently awarded Arbor day funds to pilot a program to reforest upland areas utilizing volunteers. Received a grant to reforest 70 acres of urban area in the Upper Susquehanna watershed that will span 49 parcels.
- **Pennsylvania:** Teddi Stark shared that there will be another Watershed forestry summit in July of 2026, and they are hoping to partner with CBF Pennsylvania to celebrate the conclusion of the 10 million trees program. They are currently renewing a contract with the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy that employs a lot of our urban and community forestry team. Robbie Coville shared that the Agroforestry Conference is June 4 and 5th, registration to come. There is also information on this in the announcements section above.
- **Delaware:** Chris Miller shared that they are working on getting new Foresters in, new staff starting in January. Looking to hire more moving throughout the year. We started the Forest Resiliency Fund with a grant from the US Forest Service and have seen money on the ground already in practices such as invasive species removal.
- **Maryland**: Anne Hairston-Strang shared that the new Public information officer for the 5 Million Trees Program starting next week. We will also be rolling out a program for landowner cost share for resiliency and carbon shortly. Alanna Crowley shared that there has been a significant increase in buffers from 2024 to 2025.
- **West Virginia:** Jeremey McGill shared that they are doing the five year review of their State Forest Action Plan. If you have anything from West Virginia let him know. There have been fires through December due to the dry season.
- **D.C:** Rob Corletta shared that they are onboarding a new urban forester next week, and should be opening up more entry level positions in the next few months they will share with everyone. Planting season is on track at 3200 trees.
- **Virginia:** Patricia Nylander shared that the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation established a maintenance grant program through VDEQ, with 2 million awarded to complete maintenance work on existing buffers. Virginia has received a block grant to help land owners with timber and other losses associated with impacts of Helene. Virginia will have a new state forester as of January 20th, Terry Lasher.

III.   Fragmentation Analysis Presentation

- Louis Keddell and Charlotte Weinstein from The Chesapeake Conservancy presented a recently-completed analysis of forest fragmentation in the watershed, including an overview of the methods used and analysis outputs.
- The Chesapeake Conservancy created a draft fragmentation data viewer that includes the fragmentation analysis, the plantable space analysis, and few other relevant ancillary datasets. The data will eventually be incorporated into the State of Chesapeake Forests Storymap for public distribution, but in the meantime, please let Katie know if you have any input on the viewer or data (katherine.brownson@usda.gov).
- **Discussion**- how might we best publicly release this data?
    - ▪ A potential webinar was suggested for later in the spring to showcase the data, highlighting potential applications and key takeaways from the analysis. This would

happen once the data viewer is finalized and integrated into the State of Chesapeake Forests Storymap.

▪ **Nancy Sonti**: I noticed canopy over turf was included, is that because it can be the edge of the forest and we want to make sure that's captured?

● **Charlotte Weinstein:** Yea, that was part of the reasoning. For the tree classes we included, we used the definition of soft canopy, and tree canopy over turf fell within that.

IV. Baltimore Forest Patch Analysis

● Miranda Mockrin and Nancy Sonti, Scientists from the USFS Northern Research Station, presented an overview of forest patch delineation methodology and study results, as well as an introduction to an accompanying online tool. You can see the Urban Patch Viewer Tool here.
   o Links to published manuscripts about: urban-rural patterns, historical legacies, and urban ownership patterns.
● **Discussion**
   o **Katie Brownson**: It was really interesting to see the Baltimore Forest Patch analysis and the watershed-wide fragmentation analysis side by side and seeing the similarities
      ▪ **Nancy Sonti**: There are so many similarities, and I think it just shows that if you really drill down in a place, and you have local experts and local data you can really do some useful analysis. The fact we have this map for the whole bay is incredible, if you have a certain interest in a place you can get a lot out of it.
   o **Katie Brownson:** I could see linking to the forest patch viewer in the forest fragmentation analysis as an example of how these analyses can inform decision making because they are very compatible

V. BiodiversiTree Presentation and Discussion on Future Tree Planting

● John Parker and Justin Nowakowski of SERC presented results from BiodiversiTREE, North America's longest running large-scale experimental reforestation, and introduced Functional Forests, a new reforestation initiative launching in Spring 2026.
● SERC is looking for collaborators as they kick off their new Functional Forests initiative this spring. Reach out to John Parker if you are interested (parkerj@si.edu)
● **Discussion**
   o **Craig Highfield:** Have you factored in any sort of site preparation before you do your experiment? Every site is going to be different, is there anything to keep that uniform?
      ▪ **John Parker:** I wanted to till and put some clover in, particularly white clover would be really nice for keeping weeds down, but we didn't really have time to get any of this really established so effectively what we are going to do is mow all the fields pretty low and then stump treat the sweet gums that are there now, and that is only really problematic in one of the fields; the other three look virtually identical.
   o **Anne Hairston-Strang:** I had a question on your first round, the natural region plots, how are they doing?
      ▪ **John Parker**: They're really cool. It more or less started as you would expect, with 85% sweet gum, 10% tulip poplar, and 5% extra, we are starting to see self thinning. If you look at the LIDAR structural complexity values in

our natural regeneration plots, they are exactly what you would expect from our existing chrono sequence plots. We planted 12 species mixtures so the structural complexity within those plots is higher than the natural regeneration plots, it's a hint that planting these late succession species that we are planting enhances that one component and is an important indicator.

- o **Anne Hairston-Strang**: Yea, from our perspective the idea that we can get some of our native forests like our Oak Hickory forest through natural regeneration without historic fire is one of those things that inspires us to do more active management and planning
  - ▪ **John Parker**: Absolutely. And this is an issue that we have not 100% resolved, but we are not planning to do any maintenance like mowing, we are planning on letting them go, so low maintenance plots will effectively be sort of like an enrichment planting within natural regeneration. So things will grow there. So the question is in these high diversity plots do you retain that diversity or does it get swamped out by the natural regeneration that is already happening?
- o **Katie Brownson**: At the Bay Program, water quality is a primary consideration and one of the things we are trying to do in the forestry workgroup is help build the case that a healthy resilient forest is good for water quality. Based on your research, had you thought about how to better make that linkage between the functional metrics you were looking at and some of the benefits that a forest could provide?
  - ▪ **John Parker:** We've done a little bit of work with Rebecca Hale. We did a little bit with rain fall through traps, putting out buckets and capturing the rain through fall in various plots as one way of looking at what happens to the nitrogen that is deposited in a plot or at least coming through the canopy. It was pretty inconclusive but again it was just one summer with some sporadic rain. We didn't learn a lot but we did figure out some methods. What we would like to do if we have the money to do so, is a rain fall through experiment coupled with piezometers we could put in every plot and look at the groundwater. The flow through a plot is more difficult, as it is a flat site.
- o **Rob Schnabel**: You mentioned organic matter, but did you also look at aggregate soil stability because that is what determines the infiltration of water as our storm events get bigger, and typically that is associated with diversity, the more plant diversity the more microbial diversity. So I wonder as you take soil samples, starting to look at aggregate, stability, and maybe doing some infiltration tests would be a wonderful things to add on.
  - ▪ **John Parker:** That's a great idea, that is really helpful advice.

VI. Forestry Workgroup Planning and Priorities for 2026
- Katie led a discussion regarding priorities for 2026, and requested input from the Workgroup on key topics to address, potential speakers or presentations for future meetings, and meeting timing/duration/frequency.
- You can find the survey here, or at the top in the announcements section.
- You can view the 2026 planning document here.

Our next meeting is on February 4th, 2026 9:00am - 11:00am

Attendees:

Daniel Koval, CRC	Julia Fucci, CRC	Katherine Brownson, USFS	Samantha Cotten, DNREC	Louis Keddell, CIC
John Parker, SERC	Nancy Sonti, USFS	Jenna Talbot DNREC	Anne Hairston-Strang, DNR	Richard Turcotte, USFS WV
Patricia Nylander, DOF	Erin Sonnenburg, CRC	Craig Highfield, ACB	Charlotte Weinstein	Emily Beach, CIC
Elliott Kurtz, Chesapeake Conservancy	Heller, Emily, EPA CBPO	Kathy Hawes, SE Partnership for Forests and Water	Jeremy McGill, WV DOF	Heidi Bonnaffon, MWCOG
Peters, Christopher, FPAC-NRCS, PA	Lydia Brinkley, USC	Ava Glasser (USC, NY)	Julie Mawhorter, USFS	Chris Miller, DE FS
Teddi Stark, PA DC	Alanna Crowley, MD DNR	Miranda Mockrin, MD FS, MD	Rob Schnabel, CBF	Robbie Coville, PA DCNR
Katie Ayers, EPA CBPO	Lucas Ranier, USC	Robert Corletta, DDOT	Erica Carlsson, DOEE	Kristen Heberlig, CBF
Matthew Baker, UMBC	Cassandra Davis, NYDEC	Everald McDonald, PA DEP	Peter Claggett, USGS	Michelle Katoski, USGS
Brockmeyer, Ned, PA DCNR				