



## Chesapeake Bay Program

*Science. Restoration. Partnership.*

## Forestry Workgroup Meeting Minutes

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

[Meeting Materials](#)

### Attendees

Adrienne Kotula, CBC  
Alanna Crowley, MD DNR  
Amanda Scheps, VA DOF  
Anne Hairston-Strang, MD DNR  
Aurelia Gracia, NPS  
Bay Hanson, USFS  
Cassie Davis, NYS DEC  
Celine Colbert, PA DCNR  
Chris Peters, PA NRCS  
Craig Highfield, ACB  
Dan Coy, MD DNR  
Daniel Koval, CRC  
Deya Ramsden, VA DOF  
Emily Beach, CC CIC  
Emily Heller, EPA CBPO  
Emily Shosh, DCNR BOF  
Erica Carlsson, DC DOEE  
Heidi Bonnaffon, MWCOG  
Helen Golimowski, Devereux Consulting

Jeremy McGill, WV DOF  
Joel Cockerham, Cacapon Inst.  
John Rowe, WV DOF  
Julie Mawhorter, USFS  
Kalaia London, PA DCNR  
Katie Brownson, USFS  
Marilyn Yang, CRC  
Matt Keefer, PA BOF  
Meghan Mulroy-Goldman, VA DOF  
Molly Hassett, NYS DEC  
Orsi Lazar, PA DCNR  
Ranier Lucas, Upper Susquehanna Coalition  
Rick Turcotte, USFS  
Rob Schnabel, CBF  
Robbie Coville, PA DCNR  
Robert Corletta, DC DDOT  
Sarah Brzezinski, EPA CBPO  
Susan Minnemeyer, Nature Plus  
Suzanne Hartley, PA DCNR  
Teddi Stark, PA DCNR

<b>9:00</b>	<b>Welcome and Introductions – Anne Hairston Strang (MD FS, FWG Chair)</b>  For roll call purposes, please enter your name & affiliation in the chat box. Call-in participants are requested to identify themselves verbally.
<b>9:05</b>	<b>Announcements – Katie Brownson (USFS, FWG Coordinator)</b>
<b>9:10</b> (20 min)	<b>State Forest Conservation Progress</b>

To gain a better picture of forest conservation across the Chesapeake Bay watershed, we held a round robin to give each state the opportunity to describe how they are approaching forest conservation and to give an update on their efforts and progress.

### **Pennsylvania**

**Matt Keefer:**

- PA's clean and green preferential tax program provides tax breaks to private landowners who enroll to keep their land as forest or agricultural land.
- C2P2 grant programs provide funding for conservation easements and land acquisitions.
- Fee simple acquisition program involves PA DCNR directly purchasing lands for conservation. In the last decade, they have acquired around 100,000 acres.
- Developing a working forest easement program. There has been initial pushback to this program.

**Anne Hairston-Strang:** What was the pushback against the easements?

**Matt Keefer:** It's a lot about private property rights and keeping private lands on the tax rolls and keeping options open for potential solar installations, etc.

### **New York**

**Cassie Davis:**

- NY has a statewide 30 x 30 (30% protection by 2030) conservation goal that includes open space and forested lands
- Upper Susquehanna Coalition was funded for a NFWF grant for natural filters program looking at permanent protection and afforestation projects

**Rainer Lucas:**

- Mentioned with the current funding landscape, they are working on moving towards more state funding projects to maintain and increase their capacity

**Molly Hassett:**

- NY is working on revising their open space plan which will help the department prioritize forest acquisition
- Several grant programs that support land acquisition

### **Virginia**

**Amanda Scheps:**

- VA's Office of Working Lands was newly created in this fiscal year and expands upon a 20 year old program called the Forest Land Conservation which includes both forest and farm land, focused heavily on properties likely to be managed and under threat of conversion
- 60 year state history of conservation easements
- 24-40 locally operating land trusts that are enabled to hold easements, distinct from federal or state owned easements
- Attractive tax incentives to support conservation easements and reduce land conversion of agriculture and forest lands
- 4 million acres conserved, about 17 % of the state

- VA General Assembly has directed them to develop a statewide forest land and urban tree canopy conservation strategic plan

### **West Virginia**

**John Rowe:**

- WV's only funding source is the Federal Forest Legacy Program and there is a lot of interest in the Eastern Panhandle where the watershed facing particular threats from subdivision developments and increase in solar/wind developments
- Currently have 4 projects and two being surveyed, that would be 11,300 acres and they have 12 projects in the pipeline and are ready to compete for more funding

**Anne Hairston-Strang:** Do you have any tax programs/incentives for forested lands?

**John Rowe:** We have the managed timberland tax and senate tax program, Jeremy McGill is the program manager for that. Essentially, if landowners are willing to manage their timber they get a tax break, our easements do allow traditional forest uses which includes forest management and timber harvesting.

**Anne Hairston-Strang:** Do you have a broad enrollment in that?

**Jeremy McGill:** About 20% of the state's forest lands are enrolled in the managed timberland tax incentive program, which is a significant amount.

**Matt Keefer (in chat):** : Forgot-we implement Forest Legacy Program as well.

### **Maryland**

**Anne Hairston-Strang:**

- MD adopted state goals for 30 x 30 and 40 by 40
- Program Open Space, MD's flagship land protection program from the 1970s, where land owners pay half a percent of land transfers to support an array of programs including: Stateside DNR (land acquisition into state ownership), Rural Legacy Easement (private land easement program, MD Ag Land Preservation, MD Environmental Trust (donation easement program), Greenprint (targeted lands of highest conservation conserve), and permanent CREP programs (Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program)
  - Private land easement program and it keeps private land ownership
  - MD ag land preservation foundation
- Local land acquisition and easement programs including FCA Easements, PDR-TDR (Purchase of Development Rights Transfer of Development Rights)
- Participant in the Forest Legacy program
- Two tax programs - forest conservation management agreements (15 year) and state department assessment taxation as a woodland assessment program (3 year)

### **Washington, D.C.**

	<p><a href="#">Erica Carlsson</a>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DC is unique because there are both federal, state, and private lands with a large portion the forested lands owned by NPS</li> <li>• Current work happening in areas such as Rock Creek Park, Kingman and Heritage Islands Park to clear space for new trees to grow, manage invasive species, and deal with deer grazing</li> <li>• Conservation easements are managed through their partner land trust, Casey Trees, and private owners will go to them if they want to put their land in a conservation easement</li> <li>• Adopted 40% tree canopy by 2032. DOEE manages public property and Casey Trees are doing private property</li> </ul> <p><a href="#">Robert Corletta</a>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The DC Urban Forestry Division administers the regulation of private property tree removals</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Delaware</u></b></p> <p><a href="#">Chris Miller</a> (update read on behalf of Katie Brownson since Chris was unable to attend):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DE has forest conservation educational programming from preschool through adult career development</li> <li>• Provide expert technical assistance to Delawareans for urban and private forest management</li> <li>• DE offers a free multi-use area that can be used for most types of outdoor recreation and to showcase the benefits of active land management and sustainable forestry on these lands.</li> <li>• Forest land preservation program allows DE to purchase the development rights to the property to assure the property will be managed as a working forest in perpetuity</li> </ul>
<p><b>9:30</b> (30 min)</p>	<p><a href="#">Setting New Forest Conservation Targets for the Chesapeake Bay</a> – Aurelia Gracia (NPS, Protected Lands Workgroup Coordinator) and Katie Brownson (USFS)</p> <p>Katie and Aurelia reviewed the proposal to update the Protected Lands outcome which currently has a sub-goal to permanently protect high-value forests. Feedback was requested on potential options to add new sub-goals for conserving forests and riparian forests.</p> <p><b>Summary of the presentation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Background on the PLWG: "Protected Lands" means permanently protected lands from development through purchase or donation or through a perpetual conservation or easement</li> <li>• <b>Current Protected Lands Outcome:</b> By 2025 protect an additional 2 million acres of lands throughout the watershed (with sub goals for wetlands and forested lands). Progress so far: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ According to 2022 data, there has been a 82% achievement. Soon we will have the 2024 data to see a better picture.</li> <li>○ Challenges with data collection with various formatting from states and the database which have different definitions while some data has no</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

date of establishment, so they haven't done a tracking analysis on the two two-sub goals.

- PA went through the exercise to reconcile their date of establishment data, and one of the things they uncovered was this shift towards agricultural easements, so it's likely the shift has been toward agriculture instead of forest.
- Looking beyond 2025, we have taken into account a lot of changes with capacity and funding in the federal gov't, so we are trying to find outcome language that resonates with the states and that is easy and measurable as well
- Proposed questions as we think about revising the protected lands outcome:
  - Should we set a sub-goal for the conservation of any forest land (rather than establishing a new high-priority forest layer)
  - Should we consider avsub-goal for the conservation of riparian forest buffers?

**Discussion:**

**Katie Brownson:** Should we zero in on high priority forests or are we okay with looking at all forests?

**Anne Hairston-Strang:** Having done countless prioritization, I'm okay with a high level forest conservation goal (not just tree canopy) with a subgoal for buffers and some of those high priority landscapes.

**Craig Highfield (in chat):** I agree with Anne

**Susan Minnemeyer:** One thought on prioritizations, one thing that came out of the MD Statewide Forest Technical study was the loss of forest in rapidly urbanizing areas, so there could be a type of goal that focuses on forests at risk of development and policies that could support them.

**Molly Hassset (in chat):** I agree with thinking about forest conversion risk too

**Katie Brownson:** Thanks Susan, some of that prioritization could also happen on the backend without having it incorporated into the outcome language itself. We could work with the data on prioritization of areas at threat of conversion or more intact areas, etc. rather than tying us into the regular data updates for the Bay Program.

**Susan Minnemeyer:** Another thought, we could look at prioritizing the most intact forests by region, so there could be regions that are rapidly urbanizing areas and look for those smaller forests that may not be picked up when looking across the whole state.

**Anne Hairston-Strang:** I think that's a good thought for the FWG strategy with Katie's suggestion that it doesn't necessarily need to be in the goal to be a strategy shared across the states.

**Rob Schnabel:** I'm a little torn on all forests, because I think it's really important to protect our headwater forests, cold water streams, and state part mountain areas where you have more contiguous forest areas, especially for our cold water fisheries, etc. I hope we don't have to just focus in one area, but keep it broad with maybe extra incentives to protect the headwater forested areas.

**Anne Hairston-Strang:** What do you think about a subgoal of buffers in headwaters?

**Rob Schnabel:** I think that makes sense since those areas dictate what happens downstream.

**Katie Brownson:** This focus on high priority lands could also be put into the watershed health proposed outcomes because they are focused on prioritizing the conservation of lands with the highest ecological integrity.

**Aurelia Gracia:** With the protected lands outcome language, our outcome is an acreage measurement, so if we were to add that subgoal language, would we track how many trees are in currently protected areas? I also want to emphasize that whatever we pick for forests in protected lands, won't preclude other groups such as the FWG or HWGIT from focusing on other aspects of forests through cross collaboration. I do like the first recommendation of counting the general goal with a subgoal for buffers. If we could walk away from this meeting understanding what those categories were for us, that would be a success for this meeting.

**Katie Brownson:** Recognizing we're limited on time, right now we can look at the LULC with the protected lands footprint and drawing from the 2017/2018 data, we are seeing about three quarters of protected lands that are in a forested land use. One thing we could consider is a new forest conservation goal could aim to maintain 75% of total protected lands in forests, so whatever they set their acreage goal, we could tier to that and say we want ¾ of that to stay in forests. This could also help us come up with management strategies towards reducing the loss of forests in the protected areas footprint. Then thinking about a forest buffer conservation target, the conserved riparian forest is 12% of the total amount of conserved forest and 8% in the total protected lands footprint, so we could similarly think about tiering a forest buffers goal to the protected lands footprint. I also hear about the concerns to target about headwaters, personally I don't see a downside with saying we need to do that everywhere and I think we could do some additional prioritization on the backend to look at headwaters in healthy watersheds.

**Robbie Coville (in chat):** That 75% footprint in forest currently is referring to forested areas, not just tree canopy, right?

**Katie Brownson:** Yes, it's "forested" and "forested other"

**Robbie Coville:** I think I agree with this point of looking at forests overall rather than high value, but also agree there are priority areas like riparian buffers, but I would argue for a conserved tree cover goal and that is because I think for many of these areas it maybe harder to achieve forest cover on a map. They're kind of the last line of defense to buffer

	<p>storm water in urban areas, and they may not qualify as a riparian buffer, but they are doing a lot of similar things for water quantity and quality. I think if we sort of broaden the view as much as we can, we're going to do our best job capturing all of the different roles that trees in urban areas provide. I also think a little bit of it in agriculture with tree cover planted in fields which are not quite forests either, but I'm more concerned with urban forestry being missed if we're focused on a forest conservation goal rather than tree cover conservation goal.</p> <p><b>Molly Hassett (in chat):</b> I guess what is the impact of tree canopy vs forest conservation to our objectives? That might help determine prioritization and inclusion</p> <p><b>Katie Brownson:</b> Currently, agricultural tree cover is likely getting captured in that “forested other” category, but I think by having a forest goal and not a tree canopy goal, we would lose exactly what Robbie is saying about that urban aspect.</p> <p><b>Anne Hairston-Strang:</b> This is a good segway into our other outcomes.</p> <p><b>Katie Brownson:</b> And I think that is a good point too that, even if we keep the protected lands goal focused on forest, we still do have a net gain goal for tree cover, so we will capture those urban trees within the context of the tree canopy outcome still.</p> <p><b>Jeremy McGill (in chat):</b> Not that tree canopy is unimportant but tree canopy in suburban or urban settings but that seems more in the wheelhouse of a different working group.</p> <p><b>Robbie Coville (in chat):</b> Not to drag this on but wanted to respond to that good thought. It could be I'm missing context about what workgroups cover what. My understanding is the relevant workgroups for urban forests would be urban stormwater and forestry, and I'd hope both will give needed attention to urban trees. If we left it up to another group, we'd want to make sure that other group (like urban stormwater WG) was adequately prioritizing urban forests.</p>
<p><b>10:00</b> (20 min)</p>	<p><b><u><a href="#">Beyond 2025 Management Board Outcome Review Update: Forest Buffers</a></u></b> – <i>Katie Brownson (USFS, FWG Coordinator)</i></p> <p>During the Management Board’s Outcome Review meeting on February 27th, the Forestry Workgroup’s outcome assessments for Tree Canopy and Riparian Forest Buffers were presented. Katie reviewed the feedback received for the Forest Buffers outcome and began discussing options to update the outcome. <a href="#">Outcome Review: Forest Buffers</a></p> <p><b>Summary of presentation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally broad MB support for the FWG recommendations to maintain an annual planting target, increase focus on conservation and maintenance, and shift from miles/year to acres/year</li> <li>• Calls, specifically from PA, were voiced to consolidate the Riparian Forest Buffer and Tree Canopy outcome into single outcome</li> <li>• Push for more attainable and realistic targets</li> </ul>

**Discussion:**

**Katie Brownson:** What thoughts do people have on this idea of consolidating?

**Rob Schnabel:** Having it separate will help counties and municipalities target things, they are kind of totally different, so having those data points separate would help prioritize things and funding.

**Craig Highfield:** Having it separate is critical for funding as a non profit, I'm not even sure what that would look like to combine them. It would be cumbersome to try and interpret that.

**Katie Brownson:** I agree it could get muddled and lost and the focus on forest buffers and tree canopy could be lost.

**Susan Minnemeyer:** Tracking forest cover with this high level of detail that the LULC allows, really helps us get to how we can conserve forests, so all of these details about what types of protection increase forest cover are really important and so some of this is the data component.

**Katie Brownson:** Yeah and I think there will be avenues to track kind of broader forest cover trends through some of the other revised outcomes like watershed health/planning. Depending on how all of these chips fall, but our suggestion to the MB was to stay focused and we already have a lot of experts working on them separately underneath this umbrella of the FWG, and in my mind consolidating may be more trouble than what it's worth rather than the benefits of consolidating.

**Anne Hairston-Strang:** My sense from the meeting was that most people appreciated the buffer and tree canopy metrics as standalone.

Erica Carlsson (in chat): When will we have our final numerical goals determined?

**Katie Brownson:** Hopefully by the end of our April meeting.

Another question we should consider is whether we stick with watershed wide goals or state goals. 69% of riparian areas are forested in the watershed, but all of the numbers increased due to the changes in how we are defining forests. Overall in this 2024 edition, there is more forest but, if you look at the trends over time we do have a net loss in acres. The original 70% goal was always supposed to be a minimum, so I'm leaning towards setting a ceiling. The CHESSIE BIBI shows that 70% would lead to a fair watershed health conditions, 72% would be good, and 78% would be excelled. Would a 75% goal be more appropriate?

**Cassie Davis (in chat):** I like watershed wide, because we have state level goals in our watershed implementation plans

**Rob Schnabel (in chat):** Katie - great job thinking beyond status quo and shooting for real positive impact! Thanks for penciling the numbers!



	<p><a href="#">Anne Hairston-Strang</a>: With limited time, I'm wondering if we should convene a subcommittee on this. Wonders about a sub-committee</p> <p><a href="#">Katie Brownson</a>: If you're interested in a sub-committee, please put your name in the chat.</p> <p><a href="#">Susan Minnemeyer (in chat)</a>: Add me to the numeric goals subgroup</p> <p><a href="#">Rob Schnabel (in chat)</a>: I'm in! Shoot high given the efficiencies of forest buffers. Need to leverage existing conservation / preservation programs as would not need additional budgets.</p> <p><a href="#">Craig Highfield (in chat)</a>: U can add me if I can attend</p>
<p><b>10:20</b> (20 min)</p>	<p><a href="#">Beyond 2025 Management Board Outcome Review Update: Tree Canopy</a> – Julie Mawhorter (USFS)</p> <p>During the Management Board's Outcome Review meeting on February 27th, the Forestry Workgroup's outcome assessments for Tree Canopy and Riparian Forest Buffers were presented. Julie reviewed the feedback received for the Tree Canopy outcome and discussed options to update the outcome. <a href="#">Outcome Review: Tree Canopy</a></p> <p><b>Summary of presentation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally broad MB support for the FWG recommendations to update with minor updates to wording shifting "urban" to "community", cite additional public benefits, and increase focus on conservation and maintenance</li> <li>• Calls, specifically from PA, were voiced to consolidate the Riparian Forest Buffer and Tree Canopy outcome into single outcome</li> <li>• Push for more attainable and realistic targets</li> <li>• Updated Tree Canopy Outcome example for discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#">Conserve and expand community tree canopy capacity to provide maximize</a> air quality, water quality and <a href="#">public health</a> benefits throughout the watershed. <a href="#">Working toward a net gain in canopy, plant and maintain ## new acres of community trees by 2035.</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Numeric target range examples for discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 24,000 acres by 2035 (continues current average)</li> <li>○ 35,000 acres by 2035 (slight increase)</li> <li>○ 50,000 acres by 2035 (larger increase)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Discussion:</b></p> <p><a href="#">Anne Hairston-Strang</a>: I think we're all pushing pretty hard in terms of tree planting and I don't think we could double that amount, but having a combination of conservation and planting would be good.</p>

	<p><b>Julie Mawhorter:</b> Going back to the strawman/example language, it does start with “conserve and expand”, so by trying to put that first, it’s emphasizing the net gain part, it's just harder to put a number on the conservation side other than tracking what’s happening, but certainly our management strategies can focus more on conservation policies.</p> <p><b>Rob Schanbel:</b> How do we reverse these trends, the first thing is stopping the bleeding then we can go towards increases.</p> <p><b>Erica Carlsson:</b> I feel like we should be more conservative in our numbers since the IRA funds are being targeted.</p> <p><b>Deya Ramsden (in chat):</b> DOF Va will get back to you about involvement in the updates to the plan.</p> <p><b>Robbie Coville (in chat):</b> We don't want to over-promise and under-deliver too much</p> <p><b>Susan Minnemeyer (in chat):</b> Note from Maryland forest study - protected areas and ag easements both generated increased tree canopy, both from tree planting in these areas but also growth of existing trees. Medium aged trees expand tree canopy the most quickly. Tree planting may take 5-15 yrs to appear in the data, although after this time the trees will expand quickly</p> <p><b>Anne Hairston-Strang:</b> Should we also do a sub-committee?</p> <p><b>Julie Mawhorter:</b> If anyone has suggestions on the wording we will send these around, we may not need a committee for refining the wording, but in terms of the numbers, if folks have initial thoughts on the three scenarios, I would love to get a pulse check from the states.</p> <p><b>Anne Hairston-Strang:</b> I would start with the current planting rate because our current planting rate is much higher than what we started with. I don’t think we need to use the 10 year average, but we’re facing challenges on the state level too in terms of funding so we want a clear and productive tree canopy goal.</p> <p><b>Robbie Coville (in chat):</b> Right, I was thinking now may be a hard time to surpass the rates achieved in the last four years.</p> <p><b>Julie Mawhorter:</b> To conclude, we will get this language out and will be welcoming feedback by email before the April FWG meeting.</p>
<p><b>10:40</b> (10 min)</p>	<p><b><u>Forestry Workgroup Planning for 2025</u></b> – <i>Katie Brownson (USFS, FWG Coordinator)</i></p> <p>To chart the workgroup’s path for the remainder of the year, Katie reviewed the <a href="#">draft planning document</a>.</p>

	If folks have any other ideas, feel free to reach out to Katie and Marilyn, or add comments directly into the document.
<b>10:50</b>	<b>Round Robin</b>  <i>Ran out of time.</i>
<b>11:00</b>	<b>Adjourn</b>