



Forestry Workgroup September Meeting

September 2nd, 2026
9:00 - 11:00 am

[Visit the meeting webpage for meeting materials and additional information.](#)

Purpose:

- Review 2025 planting and Progress data to inform updates of the Forest Buffer and Tree Canopy indicators on Chesapeake Progress
- Provide information about the Bay program reporting and verification process to inform discussions on opportunities to improve reporting of watershed forestry BMPs
- Review the near-final draft of the Healthy Forests and Trees Management Strategy

Actions and Decisions:

- **At-Large Member Nominations**
 - FWG conditionally confirmed Craig Highfield and Lydia Brinkley as at-large voting members, pending any stops or holds from members via email since a quorum was not established at the meeting.
 - Current members (both signatory and at-large) should let Katie (Katherine.brownson@usda.gov) know if you have any blocking concerns with these nominations by COB 9/16. Otherwise, we will consider these nominations to be approved by the Workgroup.
 - Post meeting note: No concerns were received so Craig and Lydia's nominations for at-large voting membership are considered approved.
 - Two additional at-large member positions are available, so please consider nominating yourself or a colleague to fill one of these remaining positions.
- **Draft 2025 planting data for indicator updates**
 - Please review the draft 2025 data for the Forest Buffer and Tree Canopy indicators (included in the second part of [this presentation](#)) and let Katie know if there are any key points to explain trends we should include in the documentation that will be submitted to the Bay Program as we update these indicators.
 - Anne Hairston-Strang and Katie Brownson will follow up on the Maryland acres for Urban Tree Planting, which may be showing far higher than they actually were.
 - As requested by Julie Mawhorter, Katie Brownson and Auston Smith will explore comparing the no expiration numbers with WIP targets to see how that differs from what was shown.
- **Reporting and verification of Forestry BMPs**
 - If you have questions about the new Agroforestry practices, or have previous historic agroforestry BMPs to report from before this was approved as a practice, reach out to ensure that historical reporting are accounted for.

- FWG will revisit the approach of reviewing the draft progress data early on and flagging any issues.
- Katie Brownson will work with Julie Mawhorter and others to look at jurisdictions' QAPPs as a starting point to assess who is reporting tree plantings and identify gaps to address to make sure we're capturing all planting in our annual progress reporting.
- **Healthy Forests and Trees: Challenges and Management Approaches**
 - Voting members should let Katie know by COB 9/10 (and sooner if possible) if you have any blocking concerns with moving this draft Strategy forward to the Healthy Landscapes Goal Team. Otherwise, we will consider this to be approved by the Workgroup.
 - Post meeting note: No concerns were received so the Management Strategy is considered approved and was advanced to the Healthy Landscapes Goal Team.

Minutes

I. Announcements

- Staffer update - Julia Fucci has moved on from CRC to go back to school. Thank you, Julia! Staffers from other groups will cover upcoming FWG meetings as we look to fill the position.
- Chesapeake Bay Shared Stewardship Agreement - The 2020 agreement is in the process of being updated and is nearing completion, with expected signing on September 16th.
- USFS/EPA MOU - Updated MOU now in place to reformalize USFS relationship with the partnership.
- E3 Scenario - Forestry recommendations were presented to CWGT at their August 24th meeting. E3 Scenarios are being approved by the CWGT at their September 28th meeting, and they will be deciding on adopting the Forestry or Ag scenario for the BMPs where recommendations differed between the two groups.

Lead: Katie Brownson, USFS

Decisions:

N/A

Actions:

N/A

II. At-Large Member Nominations

Two nominees for the open at-large voting member positions, Craig Highfield and Lydia Brinkley, (re-)introduced themselves to the group.

Lead: Katie Brownson, USFS

Decisions:

- FWG conditionally confirmed Craig Highfield and Lydia Brinkley as at-large voting members, pending any stops or holds from members via email since a quorum was not established at the meeting.

Actions:

- Current members (both signatory and at-large) should let Katie (Katherine.brownson@usda.gov) know if you have any blocking concerns with these

nominations by COB 9/16. Otherwise, we will consider these nominations to be approved by the Workgroup.

- Two additional at-large member positions are available, so please consider nominating yourself or a colleague to fill one of these remaining positions.

III. Round Robin

Lead: Anne Hairston-Strang, MD DNR

Decisions:

N/A

Actions:

N/A

Discussion Notes:

- **DE: Taryn Davidson:** Our grant program opens for applications Friday September 4th, including a hazardous ash tree removal grant, invasive species removal grant, and our typical annual grant that covers tree planting, hazard tree removal, and tree pruning. Also, we are hosting our first ever Urban Forestry Seminar. It will be hosted in Sussex County and is geared towards homeowners, communities, and private property owners.
- **DC: Robert Corletta:** We're nearing completion on our latest urban tree canopy analysis, which is our fifth analysis since we started measuring in 2006. We're also gearing up for planting just like everyone else for the fall.
- **MD: Anne Hairston-Strang:** We've got our state fair and 120th anniversary exhibit up and running. We've been doing a lot of work related to wood utilization and the links to sustainable forestry. Recently we did a tour of Cambium with MDEM and Secretary of DNR of a facility with innovative supply chain management turning raw wood into finished packaged products all in one location. Looking to tour the Invent Wood facility in Frederick during the Allegheny Society of American Foresters meeting on February 24th.
 - o **Julie Mawhorter** shared a link to the National Urban and Community Forestry RFP related to this: National Urban and Community Forestry Challenge Cost Share Grant Program: Community Tree Resource Utilization Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) is now open and accepting applications via [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) (Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-FS-UCF-01-2026), with a *submission deadline of October 12th, 2026*. View and apply to the grant opportunity [here](#). Application instructions are available [here](#).
- **ACB: Craig Highfield:** In MD, MD FS is investing in underserved landowners, with a cost share program from a US Forest Service grant that is finally underway as of Sept 1. In PA, we're continuing the full implementation of our PWREN program which is similar to the MD FS program.
- **USFS: Nancy Sonti:** We have an oak silviculture experiment stretching from Maryland up to Massachusetts that's basically a climate-assisted immigration study of white oak and chestnut oak. Tera Trammell got a new NSF grant to support this work.
- **NY: Cassie Davis:** Our Community Reforestation (CORE) grants are open until November 4th. These are being used to restore forested natural areas in communities across the state. USC has previously been a recipient of this grant.
- **USC: Rainier Lucas:** Our groundbreaking ceremony for work from the Community Reforestation (CoRe) grant is happening in September where we will be putting 900 trees in. We have 47 acres of urban plantings planned through that grant. In addition, we are getting ready for this fall with about 20 projects, mostly riparian and wetland projects, and we're putting in agroforestry practices on 6 farms. We are planning an agroforestry training with the

technicians ahead of time to help train and facilitate the contractors for putting those in the ground.

- **ACB: Craig Highfield:** IN PA we are continuing implementation of the PWREN program. There was lots of planning but now they are moving into implementation.
- **VA: Patty Nylander:** We received our state funding to continue our Riparian Forests For Landowners (RFFL) program, our Virginia Trees for Clean Water Grant Program, and our logger BMP cost share program. Virginia has also been working on a high resolution canopy analysis with data and a report planned to be released in November. Upcoming events include the Virginia Buffer Summit on October 14th in Hungry Mother State Park, the Rappahannock Symposium on October 21st in Fredericksburg, and a backyard buffer series by the James Riparian Consortium with short trainings on how to plan and maintain buffers in more urbanized settings.
- **CI: Joel Cockerham:** We're focusing more on our growing native program this semester, where we have the school systems plant native trees as tree whips, grow them out for a couple seasons and then sell them as a fundraiser. We've got some buffers going in and some community tree plantings as well.

IV. Draft 2025 planting data for indicator updates

Katie shared numbers on forestry BMPs from the 2025 Progress Run. More detailed breakdowns of different planting data for jurisdictions can be viewed on the [posted slides](#). Katie also gave a preview of draft data for the 2025 indicator updates, including the Riparian Forest Buffer Indicator, the Tree Canopy Indicator and Forest Conservation Target (for which an Indicator will likely be developed), and led a discussion on the drivers of observed planting trends.

Lead: Katie Brownson (USFS)

Decisions:

N/A

Actions:

- Please review the draft 2025 data for the Forest Buffer and Tree Canopy indicators (included in the second part of [this presentation](#)) and let Katie know if there are any key points to explain trends we should include in the documentation that will be submitted to the Bay Program as we update these indicators.
- Anne Hairston-Strang and Katie Brownson will follow up on the Maryland acres for Urban Tree Planting, which may be showing far higher than they actually were.
- As requested by Julie Mawhorter, Katie Brownson and Auston Smith will explore comparing the no expiration numbers with WIP targets to see how that differs from what was shown.

Discussion Notes:

- **Anne Hairston-Strang:** We seem to be achieving WIP goals in some years but it's not necessarily staying in the model cumulatively, but we expect that. I'm wondering whether the cumulative number, with a certain amount maybe having transferred to land use, is the appropriate evaluation.
 - Katie Brownson: This is a crude snapshot that doesn't give as good of a picture as we'd like to show the practice implementation and land use together. CBP's modeled load reduction indicator may be a better indication of how states are doing overall with incorporating BMPs and land use.
- **Julie Mawhorter:** Could we take the no expiration numbers of cumulative progress and compare those with the WIP targets to have a better sense of where we landed at the end?

- o Katie Brownson: Yes, we could. I can bring that back to a future meeting.
- o Auston Smith: Happy to help with that suggestion Katie.
- **Anne Hairston-Strang:** Regarding agroforestry, I'm wondering how we're converting to acres because it's going to be a different kind of crediting or tracking for some of the agroforestry practices. Density can vary widely and we tend to track the number of trees.
 - o Katie Brownson: You're right. If we are going to count, we're going to need to talk about it more. The agroforestry practice isn't technically a land use change practice, it's an efficiency practice. The efficiency is based on an assumption that we're converting 1/4 of the land into a forested loading rate. So, we could take 1/4 of the agroforestry acres as an approximation. We would need to all agree on that method as the most sound way to count those acres if and when they get reported. We didn't have any reported this year since that BMP just got approved.
 - o Anne Hairston-Strang: With the healthy soils programs, we're seeing interest especially for silvopasture. Some of those farmers are trying to deal with the heat, so it's a way to get more shade in pastures while still being able to have the kind of forage that you want.
 - o Katie Brownson: To the extent that we can, we should implement these practices now that they're approved by the Bay Program, but need to ensure we're all clear on what we're doing and why, and we can justify it in our documentation.
- **Rob Schnabel:** Regarding the planting numbers, what about forest loss? It would be nice to have a side by side of planted and net trees. That's a helpful communication tool.
 - o Katie Brownson: I didn't include it in those slides because we don't have any new data. We are going to keep what we had updated last time and that will be maintained in the indicator data. I think when it goes up on Chesapeake Progress, we will definitely want to continue to make that connection that we need to be looking both at the planting and the change to really keep that focus on the conservation side of things as well.
 - o Rob Schnabel: It would be great to have that state by state. That way we're able to target a little more efficiently where we need to kickstart programs.
 - o Katie Brownson: I think those tables have all the change data by state, both for forest buffers and for tree canopy loss.

V. Reporting and verification of Forestry BMPs

Auston provided an overview of the Bay Program's jurisdictional reporting and verification process. Katie reviewed relevant land uses and BMPs for watershed forestry that are typically reported and tracked. Information on the BMP type, associated pre- and post- BMP land uses, and credit duration are outlined in a table on the [posted slides](#). Katie highlighted some reporting and verification issues to prioritize addressing and walked through the new Agroforestry BMPs that were approved in 2025.

Lead: Auston Smith (EPA) and Katie Brownson (USFS)

Decisions:

N/A

Actions:

- If you have questions about the new Agroforestry practices, or have previous historic agroforestry BMPs to report from before this was approved as a practice, reach out to ensure that historical reporting can be accounted for.
- FWG will revisit the approach of reviewing the draft progress data early on and flagging any issues.

- Katie Brownson will work with Julie Mawhorter and others to look at jurisdictions' QAPPs as a starting point to assess who is reporting tree plantings and identify gaps to address to make sure we're capturing all planting in our annual progress reporting.

Discussion Notes:

- Auston Smith shared a few helpful links for more information:
 - o [Program Plans and Resources](#) - Link to the 2026 progress schedule - provides more detailed timeline of annual progress steps and responsibilities.
 - o [CAST Home Page](#) - where these annual progress scenarios and other key scenarios are available for download.
 - o [CAST BMP Details](#) - Reference guides given the translation of multiple BMP names to the CAST BMP names.
- **Anne Hairston-Strang:** The work being done to flag any unexpected reporting data is great for finding issues. Issues and concerns will likely vary state by state as we all have different procedures and reporting pathways.
 - o Katie: The draft progress run is where we look to see if anything seems off and then follow-up with people directly.
 - o Auston Smith: If it makes sense, we can go through some draft data in January for draft scenario runs and flag what needs to be flagged.
- **Julie Mawhorter:** When we first set tree canopy goals, we had conversations about who is reporting tree plantings (states vs local governments vs non-profits) to consider how much is being reported through processes we have and what may not be reported. It may be helpful to do that assessment again to see who is reporting, especially from local governments, to identify where there may be gaps to get more partner data in. I'd be happy to work with people on this.
 - o Auston Smith: A lot of data reporting partners are listed in [jurisdictions' QAPPs](#). That could be a good starting point.
- **Rob Schnabel:** A lot of counties are using forest plantings for MS4 credits, which allows them not to address the impervious acres. How do you credit versus a net gain when that is kind of mitigation for not addressing impervious acres?
 - o Anne Hairston-Strang: For MS4 credits, you can use many options for treating or removing impervious surface. The trees are meant to be more of a treatment and offset, which is why the mitigation acreage is counted in a way that something like required forest replacement is not. That whole policy made a lot of sense when we couldn't track loss. Now that we have high resolution impervious cover layers, this may be a conversation we want to revisit.
 - o Rob Schnabel: It'd be nice to track this sub-watershed by sub-watershed. Tree planting for MS4 credit is clearly better than street sweeping or some of these other things that don't help with watershed infiltration or retention. But, it would be great to highlight that it's still just mitigation in lieu of addressing impervious acres. I know it's a complex issue, but just keeping that in mind when people submit forest plantings and tracking if it's for another requirement or if it's really voluntary and we're getting net gains.

- o Anne Hairston-Strang: I'd be disappointed if we tried to disincentivize tree planting in any way, because there's a really big win when you can use your MS4 program to reinforce some of these systemic improvements in the landscape.
- o Craig Highfield: With trying to convince some of these MS4 jurisdictions that reforestation and riparian forest buffers are options, I would hate to disincentivize them from picking options with these co-benefits. It's cheaper to do and it gets people away from constantly doing stream restorations, street sweeping, etc.
- o Anne Hairston-Strang: Maybe we can get an update on some of the impervious surface tracking that we have as well as an understanding of some of the stormwater requirements.
- o Rob Schnabel: I bring it up because we'd really like landowners to go the voluntary route and still get some bonuses and benefits. As long as we're counting it and showing how that's working, I think it would be a helpful tool just to show decision makers on what the impetus of planting projects are, whether it is voluntary or it is a mitigation for other requirements.
- o Anne Hairston-Strang: The other thing that's been illuminating over the decades is that it's hard to find tree planting sites. We're using trees to mitigate many things - forest clearing, air quality, water quality, etc. We need to ensure we're not displacing some other needed land uses.

VI. **Healthy Forests and Trees: Challenges and Management Approaches**

Katie summarized input received on the draft Healthy Forests and Trees Management Strategy and edits made in response. A few additional edits were made and voting members were asked for their consent to approve the draft Management Strategy by email. The Management Strategy will then be sent up to the Healthy Landscapes Goal Team to integrate into the Goal Chapter.

Lead: Katie Brownson, USFS

Decisions:

N/A

Actions:

- Voting members should let Katie know by COB 9/10 (and sooner if possible) if you have any blocking concerns with moving this draft Strategy forward to the Healthy Landscapes Goal Team. Otherwise, we will consider this to be approved by the Workgroup.

Discussion Notes:

- Since the previous draft, we added a challenge focused on crediting and incentives
- **Anne Hairston-Strang:** On the new challenge, do we want to get a sense of if people support this? Rob, do any of your concerns about MS4 permitting raise to a reason to not put it as a challenge?
 - o Rob Schnabel: No, I think it is still good to include. Is there a way to add something about incentivizing conservation of headwater forests?
 - o Anne Hairston-Strang: We could maybe say something about zero or first order streams. We explored for a number of years how to map that, which is difficult since it's in so much of the landscape. There might be an opportunity on the conservation side, like forest blocks that protect headwaters in certain settings. You need to be looking at treatment trains along flowpaths, not just headwaters.

- o Craig Highfield: With MS4, it comes down to what the credit is worth. Ideally, we'd love forests to be planted where it is best for water quality. I like the idea of that, but how complicated would that be to go back through how things are credited to award higher credits for something up in the watershed?
 - o Anne Hairston-Strang: Connectivity mapping could be an area for important work to be done.
 - o Katie Brownson: Rob, what you're suggesting may be more for a management approach than a challenge. I added some language about increasing awareness about the value of forests and forest conservation in these management approaches.
 - o Nancy Sonti: I like these edits.
- **Joel Cockerham:** We're considering forest understory health e.g. issue of deer population overgrazing understory. Is there a place to consider promoting improving forest understory vegetation and health, which plays a large part in flood mitigation?
 - o Katie Brownson: I think that is captured in the list of challenges, which includes aspects about deer overabundance and degrading forest structure. Note the challenges are high level, so we don't want to get overly specific. As we get into specifics in the workplan about how to address stressors, that's where we may get into this.
 - o Joel Cockerham: I'm wondering if there are any BMPs that can focus on that understory stressor.
 - o Katie Brownson: That came up at the Forest Health Workshop. The key for this is demonstrating a clear water quality benefit. That's something that we can definitely flag to carry over into the workplan.
 - o Anne Hairston-Strang: To consider forest condition, Vermont has a good indicators dashboard: [Vermont Forest Indicators Dashboard](#)
 - o Anne Hairston Strang: We could call out coordination with wildlife agencies as a beginning to ensure we're aware of policy and management actions that they undertake. Considering how to balance long-term habitat conditions with today's needs is important.
- **Katie Brownson:** For the added challenge, we don't necessarily need to outline how we'll address it, but having it as a challenge lets us consider it.
 - o Anne Hairston-Strang: I see multiple thumbs up, so I think there is support for including this as a challenge. We want to use our regulatory requirements to get the best watershed outcome.
 - o Craig Highfield: There's a huge potential just with the amount of funding in MS4s, so I think we should definitely keep it in there.
 - o Rob Schnabel: We're losing a lot of forest buffers because of stream projects, so I feel like something needs to be in there about forest cover being undervalued. It could be good to also mention the negative impacts of MS4, not just the positive impacts.
 - o Anne Hairston-Strang: Do we want to call out buffers in particular? Stream restoration may not be the biggest loss of forest buffers, but it's really noticeable and it's really mobilizing some people to hate stream restoration.
 - o Rob Schabel: Maybe it makes sense to explicitly say stream restoration. There's lots of retrofit opportunities and that never happens because that's more costly than doing a stream project given the credits that are received for stream work.
 - o Katie Brownson: I don't think we want the challenge to be too specific, and I sense there is some sensitivity about stream restoration. We can probably be more specific in the workplan.
 - o Nancy Sonti: Agreed, Katie.
 - o Anne Hairston-Strang: Yes, let's keep it in mind for the further specificity in the workplan.

- o Katie: Once we're pretty confident that management approaches are set, then we'll get working on workplan development and we can refer back to this annotated version to see the comments on this and other topics.
- **Anne Hairston-Strang:** Thank you, Katie, for an excellent job on listening to people's input and thinking about how this document relates to the rest of the Bay Program.

VII. Wrap Up and Adjourn

Next Meeting: [Wednesday, October 7, 2026](#) from 9:00am - 11:00am

Attendees:

- Katherine Brownson, USFS
- Nancy Sonti, FS, MD
- Anne Hairston-Strang, MD DNR
- Petra Baldwin, CRC
- Peter Claggett, USGS
- Taryn Davidson, DDA
- Patricia Nylander, VA DOF
- Lorenzo Cinalli, DC DPR
- Cassie Davis, NYS DEC
- Craig Highfield, ACB
- Robert Corletta, DDOT
- Julie Mawhorter, USFS
- Sarah Brzezinski, EPA CBPO
- Cass Klingaman, NYS DEC
- Samantha Cotten, DNREC
- Emily Heller, EPA CBPO
- Lydia Brinkley, USC
- Auston Smith, EPA CBPO
- Ranier Lucas, USC
- Joel Cockerham, CI
- Nicholas Miller, MDA
- Heidi Bonnaffon, MWCOG
- Rob Schnabel, CBF
- Maggie Woodward, CBC
- Michelle Katoski, USGS