

June 27, 2025

c/o Melissa Ann Ehrenreich
Executive Director
Indigenous Conservation Council of the Chesapeake Bay
2000 Duke Street, Suite 300
Alexandria, VA 22314

Re: Principals' Staff Committee Response to the ICC Declaration

Dear Chiefs Adkins, Howard, Shields, Anderson, Brown, Richardson, and Adams:

The Chesapeake Bay Program's Principals' Staff Committee (PSC) thanks you for sharing your [declaration](#), dated January 15, 2025, with the Program's Management Board. We further thank you for the follow up conversations many of us have had with staff of the Indigenous Conservation Council of the Chesapeake Bay (ICC), during which we have been able to learn more about the organization and your aims.

The ICC's goal to "advance the sovereignty and capacity of tribes in the Chesapeake Bay region to reconnect and care for our ancestral lands as original stewards" is a laudable one that we support. We also acknowledge that federally recognized tribes hold a unique status as sovereign nations, not stakeholders, and that it is important for the Chesapeake Bay Program to treat them as such. Finally, we appreciate the tremendous value that Indigenous Guardianship programs, which amplify Indigenous-led conservation, indigenous knowledge, and sustainable development efforts, have brought to both the Tribal Nations and landscape and water protections efforts where they have launched, and agree that such efforts are beneficial to consider in the Chesapeake region.

We welcome your interest in engaging formally with the Chesapeake Bay Program to achieve our shared goal of restoring the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed. As you know, the Program operates under the [Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement](#), which was signed in 2014 by the Governors of the six watershed states, the Mayor of Washington D.C., the Chair of the Chesapeake Bay Commission, and the Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (on behalf of the federal government). In late 2024, these signatories, who make up the Program's Executive Council, [charged](#) the PSC with making revisions by the end of 2025 to continue and update the commitments of the *2014 Agreement*. We understand that the ICC has been participating in the Agreement revision discussions, and we appreciate your engagement.

In addition, the PSC was charged with examining the partnership's structure and process for opportunities to achieve our commitments in an effective, efficient, and inclusive manner. We

have not been expressly directed by the Executive Council to discuss changes to or expansion of Executive Council membership. Indeed, the Council's directive to revise the 2014 Agreement and not prepare a new one for signature demonstrates that expanding membership would be outside of our current charge. However, the Executive Council has made clear that they expect the revised partnership structure and processes will place a greater emphasis on engaging all communities in the watershed and be more manageable for partnership staff. Consequently, we commit that your declaration will be considered as we discuss potential structure and process recommendations.

Based on the results of these structure and process discussion, and in recognition of your declaration, we anticipate recommending to the Executive Council that, at their 2025 meeting, they further direct us to work with Tribes in the Chesapeake Bay region to further explore ideas related to your declaration. This may include considering factors such as:

- How best to ensure representation and involvement of Tribes across the watershed through the formal channels of the Program;
- How an Indigenous Guardianship Program or other programs might fit into the partnership;
- The extent to which an associated Advisory Committee, or other avenues and structures, could help elevate these factors across the partnership.

This step forward for the partnership is an important one to get right so that all partners can have confidence and clarity in roles, resources, and responsibilities. We appreciate your outreach and look forward to collaborating to elevate Indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and participation in the partnership to protect, restore, and conserve the Chesapeake Bay and the lands and waters that surround it.

Sincerely,

Josh Kurtz
Chair, Principals' Staff Committee