

## LAND USE OPTIONS EVALUATION HEALTHY WATERSHEDS GIT

### 2014 WATERSHED AGREEMENT: GOAL & OUTCOME LANGUAGE

#### LAND USE OPTIONS EVALUATION OUTCOME:

By the end of 2017, with the direct involvement of local governments or their representatives, evaluate policy options, incentives and planning tools that could assist them in continually improving their capacity to reduce the rate of conversion of agricultural lands, forests and wetlands as well as the rate of changing landscapes from more natural lands that soak up pollutants to those that are paved over, hardscaped or otherwise impervious. Strategies should be developed for supporting local governments' and others' efforts in reducing these rates by 2025 and beyond.

#### LAND CONSERVATION GOAL:

Conserve treasured landscapes in order to maintain water quality and habitat; sustain working forests, farms and maritime communities; and conserve lands of cultural, indigenous and community value.

### OUTCOME DISPOSITION ADVICE TO MANAGEMENT BOARD:

UPDATE

#### Status and Evaluation:

The CBP Partners met the immediate needs of this outcome in 2017 with the release of the Conservation Land-Use Policy Toolkit produced by the National Center for Smart Growth. This outcome represents more of a strategy or output and needs to be updated. While the intent of this outcome is still needed, as written it is difficult to understand both in name and description.

#### Why this outcome is still needed:

Consistently over the past 40 years and in every Bay Agreement, the CBP Partners recognized the importance of minimizing the conversion of natural lands and farms to development. The Bay watershed population continues to increase by ~ 1 million persons per decade and this trend is forecast to continue through 2050. While land use decisions are mostly made at local levels of government, land use change affects most outcomes in the Bay Agreement and information about the environmental effects of change can inform decisions to minimize adverse impacts. Land conservation and land use planning remain the principal means for minimizing rates of land conversion while maintaining the ecosystem and social services provided by natural landscapes and open space. In its 2024 Nonpoint source program guidance to States, the US EPA emphasizes again the importance of the watershed approach and developing Watershed-Based Plans to address both pollution reduction and pollution prevention through protection activities. Such plans will be more effective if integrated with local land use plans.

#### Value added contribution of the CBP Partnership:

The CBP Partners have the need, knowledge, and resources to monitor land use/land cover change consistently at high spatial, temporal, and categorical resolution; forecast future changes in land use, and to assess the impacts of land use change to the Bay and its watershed. When communicated strategically to local decisionmakers, this information can inform better land use decisions that minimize the conversion of valued landscapes to development.

Local land use is typically mapped by counties and varies from county to county. Only Maryland has a consistent state-wide land use map. Spatially, temporally, and categorically consistent land use and land cover maps watershed-wide are needed for calibrating the Phase 7 Watershed Model, accounting for

pollution sources in CAST, assessing rates of land conversion to development, and forecasting future land use change. High-resolution (1-meter cells) land use and land cover mapping is needed to improve the accuracy and transparency of models, inform the implementation of restoration and conservation actions, and to support several other outcomes, such as forest buffers and tree canopy. Unlike most states and counties, the CBP Partners have the needs and resources to support long-term consistent mapping and monitoring of high-resolution land use and land cover conditions and change.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Rename the outcome: “Watershed Planning”
- Update the outcome language as: **“Continually reduce the per-capita rate of natural and agricultural land conversion to development in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Develop and disseminate locally relevant information to organizations involved in the planning process on the suitability of lands for conversion and associated environmental consequences.”**
- Consider moving this outcome under a new Conservation GIT or reconstituted Watershed Health GIT that would include outcomes and workgroups related to protected lands, watershed health, stream health, tree canopy, riparian buffers, wetlands, and local leadership.

#### **Potential Outputs and Strategies:**

- Develop a framework for establishing short-term (5-year) and long-term (20-year) SMaT (Specific, Measurable, and Timebound) outputs and indicators to inform planning decisions.
- Consolidate land use mapping and monitoring activities under this outcome and produce and communicate science and data relevant to local land use decisions and watershed planning, including information on the value of protecting and connecting open spaces, the rates of land conversion, and the impacts of land conversion to water quality, stream health, flood risk, ecosystem services, and other local community concerns.
- Continue to use the high-resolution land use data to inform progress metrics (e.g., Community Tree Canopy, Riparian Buffers, Water Quality, Protected Lands, and Land Conversion) and expand the application of these data to other inform other outcomes.
- Implement the new [CBP Land Use Strategy](#) which calls for: monitoring and forecasting land use/land cover change; assessing the economic (e.g., tax revenue per acre) and environmental impacts of land use change; encouraging growth management policies such as infill and redevelopment and efforts to preserve the rural character of places; and effectively communicating land use change and management information to local decision makers.
- Develop a cohort of well-trained community ambassadors/liaisons to communicate CBP data, information, grants, and co-develop decision support tools to increase local capacity and to better understand the needs and perspectives of communities.