

DATE:

Dr. Kathy Boomer, Chair
CBP Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee
c/o Meg Cole, STAC Coordinator
Chesapeake Research Consortium, Inc.
645 Contees Wharf Road, Edgewater, MD 21037

Dear Chair Boomer:

On behalf of the Chesapeake Executive Council (EC), I would like to thank you and the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) members for your continued commitment and service to the partnership as the liaison between the scientific community and the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP). Thank you also for your thoughtful recommendations to the EC (dated September 23, 2022). We appreciate the opportunity to respond to your recommendations.

The partnership is at a critical **juncture** as we reflect on our progress toward our 2025 goals and outcomes. **As we assess our comprehensive targets in the 2014 Watershed Agreement and Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) (For example, do we have the right goals, outcomes, tools and programs? Do we need to make significant changes to account for rising temperatures and sea level, high impact water flows, and the migration of new living resources into the watershed), and should we re-visit the effectiveness of our current governance and structure.** We recognize STAC's assessment that the Chesapeake Bay system's response continues to lag more than expected on some outcomes and appreciate **the Committee's** ongoing exploration of the underlying causes and information gaps that could limit our collective capacity to meet the commitments established in the Watershed Agreement. As the partnership pursues this examination, **we will regularly engage with STAC and will welcome the Committee's thoughtful feedback on these foundational issues, especially as we begin exploring the** observations of your "Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response" (CESR) Report. **The Report will be a valuable resource to inform the full breadth of the partnership (at the workgroup, goal team, Management Board, Principals' Staff Committee and EC levels) as we implement the EC's directive on Reaching and Beyond 2025.**

Acknowledging some of the STAC's specific recommendations, we offer the following responses:

- *STAC Recommendation: "Developing more effective outreach strategies is essential to increasing stakeholder willingness and capacity to implement priority BMPs across diverse communities, including the agricultural and urban sectors."*
 - **Partnership response:** The MB agrees that more effective outreach strategies **and creating opportunities for a broader range of perspectives** are critical to **both the partnership's collective success as well as the success of individual communities in the watershed. To promote these conversations and inclusion of alternative viewpoints, we will strengthen our efforts to broaden the**

conversation around implementation to include more producers and implementers, at the appropriate partnership levels. For example, the CBP is encouraging and enabling the engagement of diverse communities through the creation of the [Environmental Justice and Equity Dashboard](#). This web application integrates data from multiple sources to convey demographic, socioeconomic, environmental, and programmatic topics connected to the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement and Chesapeake specific Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ) initiatives and may be used to target specific communities for best management practice (BMP) implementation.

- *STAC Recommendation: “Target BMP implementation more strategically to those geographic areas that impose disproportionate impacts on Bay resources to achieve desired outcomes.”*
 - Partnership response: Since 2010, the **Bay** Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) allocation rules determined by the partnership have focused expected nutrient and sediment reductions in states and basins having the most impact. Using current understanding, EPA has directed funding toward the Most Effective Basins. The upcoming Phase 7 watershed model development may increase the partnership’s ability to target at an even finer scale with improved results. **The MB acknowledges that STAC and the Water Quality Goal Team are essential voices in determining a strategic framework to optimize BMP implementation considering the various geographies across the bay.**
- *STAC Recommendation: “Develop a process-based trade-off analysis framework considering all outcomes to identify the most cost-effective opportunities for advancing the Bay Program's multiple goals under changing climate conditions (e.g., addressing water quality and habitat concerns while building resiliency to extreme weather events).”*
 - Partnership response: The partnership agrees that the efficient use of management funds requires that practices that benefit multiple outcomes be emphasized. While a fully integrated process-based model could be a goal to work toward, the CBP has taken the first steps in enumerating co-benefits of management practices and spatially identified areas of concern to multiple outcomes through its cross-Goal Implementation Team mapping effort (Cross-GIT Mapping Project. chesapeakebay.net). **We ask that STAC join us in exploring the viability of a process-based trade-off analysis framework.**
- *STAC Recommendation: “Consider soil health as an integrative indicator of healthy watersheds to elevate key stakeholder concerns and highlight opportunities to provide on-site as well as downstream benefits associated with practice adoption.”*
 - Partnership response: Soil health is a useful, integrative concept that can help the partnership make progress across several outcomes. Currently, soil health practices are being accounted for individually and independently of each other (for example, reporting on cover crops, residue management, pasture management, etc.). We look forward to working with STAC to **further explore this idea and to develop appropriate definitions, metrics, and measurements of environmental effects.**

In addition, the partnership is establishing two task force groups to help implement the EC's charge on 2025. One task force will focus on recommendations leading up to 2025, due to the EC by this fall and the other will focus on post-2025 recommendations, due to the EC by the end of 2024. We expect that soil health may be added to the discussion topics for the "2025 and Beyond" group as an emerging issue when developing recommendations for the EC.

- *STAC Recommendation: "Advance a watershed planning framework focused on slowing down high impact water flows using riparian buffers, floodplains, and coastal and non-coastal wetlands to mitigate decades of overlooked human impacts and addressing multiple CBP goals."*
 - Partnership response: While these practices are credited for their nutrient and sediment effectiveness in the TMDL, the CBP has not quantified their importance to other goals and outcomes. In the near term, the partnership has emphasized the qualitative importance of riparian forest buffers and wetlands to other outcomes such as climate resiliency and habitat which factored into the partners' decision to prioritize activities to accelerate progress in achieving these outcomes. Better articulation of their benefits may help to increase their presence in planning and implementation.
- *STAC Recommendation: "Increase partnership focus on nearshore environments to better engage stakeholders and advance restoration (especially in areas where water conditions are more sensitive to land management)."*
 - Partnership response: While the partnership acknowledges the recommendation, producing sufficient management-relevant science and modeling in the near-shore area has been a consistent challenge throughout the CBP's history. With the assistance of STAC, the partnership is working on better science and modeling in these areas which may enable decision-making applicable to nearshore environments this decade. **We look to STAC for assistance in identifying the science needs required for these types of decisions, and to advocate on our behalf with the research community to fill specific research gaps.**
- *STAC Recommendation: "Encourage explicit efforts to improve connections among the jurisdictions, the Goal Implementation Teams, and the Partnership's science community to help advance a better understanding of how the Bay system will respond to CBP management under changing conditions."*
 - Partnership response: The CBP will continue, in cooperation with STAC, to refine CBP processes, **especially as we begin our work on "Beyond 2025."** Goal Implementation Teams will continue, through the adaptive management cycle initiated by STAC, to be forums for the jurisdictions to work together with scientists on these issues. The CBP will continue to coordinate with STAC to optimize the communication of management objectives and relevant science.

- *STAC Recommendation: “Use the 2025 milestones to reevaluate and refine CBP governance to better coordinate BMP implementation strategies and address emerging challenges.”*
 - Partnership response: The PSC decided at its March 3, 2022 meeting to separate the 2025 milestone process from the incorporation of Phase 7 modeling information and 2035 climate change. As noted above, the partnership is establishing a high-level task force to envision the future of the partnership as we move past 2025. **The partnership also met in May for its Biennial Strategy Review System meeting and the idea of re-evaluating and refining CBP governance was raised during many conversations both in response to emerging challenges but also whether current structures are efficient and fully representative. The MB looks forward to working with STAC to weigh both how the partnership is structured as well as how we implement our adaptive management framework.** STAC’s Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response document will be an important component of these conversations.

- *STAC Recommendation: “Invest in strengthening and diversifying a technical and construction workforce that can help communities across the Bay watershed to advance our collective goals (recognizing that restoring the Bay and impaired wetlands and waterways, enhancing climate resiliency, and supporting regenerative agriculture have outpaced technical capacity to invest resources effectively).”*
 - Partnership response: The federal, state, local, and non-governmental partners of the CBP have a long and consistent history of funding projects. Rules that incentivize diversity of recipients are being strengthened. Recent additional funding will aid in incentivizing labor supply increases.

Thank you again for your ongoing commitment to helping guide the partnership in its efforts to protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. We look forward to continuing the dialogue around these important issues and to working with you in the coming months. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to reach out to me with any suggestions that might help address these challenging issues.

Sincerely,

David Campbell
 Management Board Chair **and Acting Director**,
 Chesapeake Bay Program Office

Cc: Chesapeake Executive Council Members
 Principals’ Staff Committee Members
 Management Board Members

