

Draft Protected Lands Management Strategy



Protected Lands

Development and land conversion are among the top stressors facing the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem. Permanently protecting lands from development is one way to combat the loss of forests, wetlands and other valuable wildlife habitat.

Outcome:

Permanently protect critical landscapes within the Chesapeake Bay watershed to protect water quality, enhance biodiversity, support sustainable livelihoods, bolster local economies, honor cultural heritage and protect the mission and resilience of military installations.

By 2040, permanently protect at least an additional 2 million acres of land above the 2025 baseline of 9.3 million acres. The 2 million acres will include specific targets for: riparian forests; wetlands (including migration corridors); natural areas supporting healthy streams; agricultural lands; tribal homelands; and urban and community greenspace.

Baselines

In 2025, there were **9.3 million acres** of protected lands within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

Priority Landscape	Current Acreage
Forests*	7,103,907 acres
Riparian Forests	811,049 acres
Wetlands	TBD
Agricultural Lands	1,262,295 acres
Urban and Community Greenspace	510,269 acres
Tribal Homelands	TBD
Natural Areas Supporting Healthy Streams	TBD

Monitoring Progress

- Chesapeake Bay Protected Lands Indicator
- Chesapeake Bay Land Use/Land Cover (LULC) Database 2024 Edition
- USFWS National Wetlands Inventory
- USGS Chesapeake Bay Watershed 30M Riparian Forest Buffer zone data
- 2020 Census-Designated Places and Urban Areas

Challenges

Challenges	Within CBPs ability to influence	Outside of CBP's ability to influence
Data gaps in the Protected Lands Indicator Dataset	X	
Building relationships and trust within the Protected Lands Network	X	
Funding	X	
Communication	X	
Land Use Change/Fragmentation		X
Population Change		X

Draft Management Approaches



Maintain high-quality protected lands data to help the partnership understand the full scope of protected lands within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

The Protected Lands Outcome depends on accurate tracking of protected lands over time. Advancing conservation as a core pillar of the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) also requires a clear understanding of how recent conservation efforts contribute to multiple ecological and societal outcomes. High-quality data, including comprehensive attribution of establishment dates, public access status, and GAP status, is essential for accurately assessing conditions across protected lands and evaluating progress toward conservation goals. The Protected Lands Workgroup will coordinate with data managers to improve data completeness, consistency, and accessibility, ensuring that datasets are properly attributed and suitable for analysis.

Identify, assess, and leverage funding opportunities to strengthen protection initiatives, technical assistance, and capacity-building programs.

Jurisdictions and other partners have expressed that protection work is becoming more challenging due to limitations with funding, capacity, and technical assistance. Opportunities and access to funds exist, but they can be challenging to find. The Protected Lands Work will identify, assess, and help partners leverage funding to increase our protected lands footprint, capacity, and technical assistance. The Workgroup will also work with the Chesapeake Bay Program to identify how we can use appropriated funds to advance conservation and protection.

Actively engage with the Protected Lands Network within the Chesapeake to build trust and relationships with those who are implementing protection

Trust is the foundation within a network. The Protected Lands Workgroup will foster meaningful connections with land conservation practitioners, agencies, nonprofits, and other stakeholders involved in land protection efforts. The Workgroup will build trust through regular engagement, collaboration, and knowledge sharing to better understand on-the-ground challenges, opportunities, and priorities. Strengthen relationships that support coordinated conservation strategies, advance shared goals, and enhance the long-term protection and stewardship of critical lands throughout the Chesapeake region.

Develop and provide communication resources that help jurisdictions and local governments convey the benefits of land conservation and protection.

The Protected Lands Workgroup and Chesapeake Bay Program will create and share fact sheets, case studies, messaging tools, and other resources that communicate the environmental, economic, and community benefits of conservation at the local scale, helping build support for land protection initiatives and informed decision-making.

Integrate Chesapeake Bay co-benefits into the priorities and activities of the Protected Lands Workgroup

The Workgroup will promote conservation and protection strategies that support multiple outcomes, including Chesapeake Bay water quality, source water and groundwater protection, habitat conservation, climate resilience, and community well-being, ensuring that investments in protected lands deliver broad and lasting benefits across the watershed.