

Protected Lands Outcome

Background

Outcome Language

As stated in the Chesapeake Bay Agreement, the Protected Lands Outcome is as follows:

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.

Protected Lands Workgroup Statement

Protecting land can prevent nonpoint source pollution from entering our waterways through the conservation of forests and other working lands like pasture and cropland with appropriate best management practices applied to prevent or minimize runoff. Many studies indicate that watersheds remain healthy if they retain 70-90% forest cover. Communities throughout the watershed also have many needs for protected lands to help ensure the safety and well-being of their residents such as protecting water supply, preventing flooding, supporting outdoor recreation and tourism, and maintaining economically viable working landscapes. Meeting these local protection needs can complement and reinforce the watershed-wide protection outcome and targets.

Protecting land can prevent nonpoint source pollution from entering our waterways through the conservation of forests and other working lands like pasture and cropland with appropriate best management practices applied to prevent or minimize runoff. Many studies indicate that watersheds remain healthy if they retain 70-90% forest cover. Communities throughout the watershed also have many needs for protected lands to help ensure the safety and well-being of their residents such as protecting water supply, preventing flooding, supporting outdoor recreation and tourism, and maintaining economically viable working landscapes. Meeting these local protection

Commented [1]: Comments will be accepted until August 28th.

Commented [2]: No comments - I'm excited to see the next iterations of this. Elizabeth Crisfield, ClearWater Conservancy (central PA)

Commented [3]: Not sure if this statement is still malleable, but if so, you might consider focusing instead on the benefits that forests, wetlands and riparian habitats convey to the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem, and that land protection is the first step in securing these benefits.

Commented [SW3R2]: Statement can not be edited. From CBWA. Added a workgroup statement that aims to address comment

Commented [4]: Add upland forests? Or is that reflected in the forest outcome? It's defined below. Could combine agricultural lands and forests into "working lands"

Commented [SW4R2]: Upland is reflected in the forest outcome. Outcome language can not be edited, as it is directly from CBWA

Commented [5]: May want to separate as separate metric, as in some instances Tribal Nations may want to manage land as something other than natural landscapes. Could edit to be "tribally managed lands?"

Commented [SW5R2]: Outcome language can not be edited, comes directly from the CBWA

Commented [6]: Targets to go here as well

Commented [7]: Acreage is not (always) a meaningful metric for urban conservation. Public / walkable access is often more reflective of impact, for example. If the Protected Lands workgroup wants to stick with acres because a different workgroup (Public Access?) is tracking access, I understand, but it might be worth adding in a sentence to explain if/why other metrics for certain land categories are not considered here.

Commented [SW7R2]: Outcome language can not be edited; it comes directly from CBWA. Will add an explanation of access vs acres once the target is developed.

Commented [8]: This comes from an OSI synthesis report which studied places like the DE River watershed. Stream sampling studies found nitrogen levels spiked when forest cover levels fell below 66 percent. When forest cover is maintained at 70 to 90 percent or greater, streams and rivers stay healthy ... [1]

Commented [9]: For example, we might look at the ICPRB assessment for source water and identify how many millions of acres they have identified just for ... [2]

Commented [SW9R2]: Work plan item

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needs can complement and reinforce the watershed-wide protection outcome and targets. n etering the

Definitions

Urban and Community Greenspaces: Publicly accessible lands in census-designated places and urban areas that provide opportunities for both passive and active recreation while offering exposure to nature. These public spaces deliver human health, community, and environmental benefits and include, but are not limited to, parks, trails, gardens, sports fields, waterfronts, outdoor gathering areas, and natural landscapes like forests or grasslands. *Definition created by the Protected Lands Workgroup and the Public Access Workgroup in 2026*

Agriculture: Lands associated with the production of crops (e.g., grains, legumes, vegetables, fruits, nuts), used for grazing livestock (e.g., cattle, goats, sheep), or for producing fodder (e.g., hay and alfalfa). *Definition from the Chesapeake Bay Land Use/Land Cover (LULC) Database 2024 Edition User Guide*

Forest: Tree canopy with an **unmanaged natural** understory that is part of a large patch. Large patches are at least 1-acre in area with a minimum patch diameter of 36-meters (~120 feet). Forest also includes small patches of contiguous tree canopy that do not meet forest area and/or width requirements, such as agricultural windbreaks and small woodlots, where the understory is assumed to be undergoing natural or managed succession. *Definition adapted from the Chesapeake Bay Land Use/Land Cover (LULC) Database 2024 Edition User Guide*

Riparian Forest: natural or re-established woodlands next to streams, lakes, and Wetlands with a width of 30 meters (100 feet). *Definition from the US Forest Service and the Chesapeake Bay Forestry Workgroup*

Forests within a 30-meter (100-foot) riparian buffer zone:

Wetlands: Wetlands are water influenced ecosystems that reduce flooding, filter pollution, support diverse wildlife, store carbon, and provide valuable recreational and cultural benefits. *Definition adapted from Chesapeake Bay Program White Paper on Common Terminology Around Wetlands Practices in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.*

Tribal Homelands: *Definition will be developed with the Indigenous Conservation Council. Will update document once definition is available*

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Commented [10]: add wildlife habitat

Commented [SW10R2]: The PLWG and PAWG wanted this definition to be people-centric. Natural landscapes are included in the definition, which implies wildlife habitat.

Commented [11]: Would silviculture be included here? If so, should add production of forestry products

Commented [SW11R2]: Land Data Team question

Commented [12]: Is there a reason your using 1 acre and this diameter language? If not I would align it with some legal language. In Baltimore we use 10,000 sf because of a city legal definition and the MD State Forest Conservation legislation. § 5-1601 (k) (1) "Forest" means a biological community dominated by trees and other woody plants covering a land area of 10,000 square feet or greater. This would make your definition more accessible in urban areas also.

Commented [SW12R2]: Land Data Team question

Commented [13]: Since USFWS National Wetlands Inventory is being used for tracking, I suggest using NWI's definition(s).

Commented [SW13R2]: Chris Guy, USFWS, Coordinator of Wetlands workgroup, suggested the Chesapeake Bay Specific definition from the wetlands white paper

Natural Areas Supporting Healthy Streams:- A healthy stream is defined as fair, good, or excellent condition as measured by an Index of Biotic Integrity. Natural areas include: forests, early successional forests, forest clear cuts, tidal and non-tidal wetlands, beaches, and exposed lake and reservoir water margins. Definition adapted from Stream Health Outcome and Chesapeake Bay Land Use/Land Cover (LULC) Database 2024 Edition User Guide

Definition will be developed with the Stream Health Workgroup

Baseline and Current Condition

Section incomplete. Will be completed by October 2026. Some numbers may vary after additional analysis.

In 2025, there were 9.3 million acres of protected lands within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. 7.1 million acres of protected forest, 811,000 acres of protected riparian forests, 1.3 million acres of protected lands used for agriculture, and 510,269 acres of protected lands within the census-designated places and urban areas footprint.

In 2025, there were 9.3 million acres of protected lands within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. In Of that number were, 7.1 million acres of were protected forest, 811,000 acres of were protected riparian forest buffers, 1.3 million acres of protected agricultural lands, and XX of were in protected wetlands.

Note: These numbers do not add up to 9.3 million; this is because lands could be counted twice, for example, a protected forest parcel in a buffer would also show up in both protected forest and protected riparian forest buffers. For information about protected forests, please refer to the Healthy Forests & Trees outcome.

Note: The priority lands do not add up to 9.3 million as one parcel can be counted towards multiple priority landscape acres. For example, a protected forest parcel in a buffer would show up in both protected forest and protected riparian forest buffers. For more information about the protected forests priority landscapes, please refer to the Healthy Forests & Trees outcome subchapter.

The Protected Lands Workgroup is in the midst of creating targets for each of the priority landscapes. The Targets will be in place by the end of 2027.

Our understanding of how these lands have changed over time continues to evolve, and our baseline assessments may shift as more complete data becomes available. The Land Trust Alliance is currently undertaking a project to improve the attribution of jurisdictional protected lands by adding dates of protection, enabling us to better track how land protection has progressed over time.

Riparian Forests

Based on the 2025 PLI and the USGS 30M Riparian Forest Buffer zone data, there are 811,000 acres of protected riparian forests.

Wetlands (including migration corridors)

Natural Areas Supporting Healthy Streams

The Stream Health Workgroup is in the midst of defining what a “healthy stream” is. Once that is determined, the Protected Lands Workgroup will analyze the watersheds of those healthy streams to identify natural areas and their protection status to get a baseline number.

Natural Areas Supporting Healthy Streams target will be in place by the end of 2027.

Agricultural Lands

Based on the 2025 PLI and the USGS Chesapeake Bay Land Use/Land Cover (LULC) Database 2024 Edition, there are 1.3 million acres of protected lands that are used for agriculture.

Tribal Homelands

The Indigenous Conservation Council (ICC) is currently in the process of identifying tribal land tenure on protected lands within Virginia. The Protected Lands Workgroup will work with ICC to scale up tracking land tenure to the whole watershed. Once the workgroup has a baseline understanding of current lands with tribal land tenure, this document will be updated.

A Tribal Homeland target will be in place by the end of 2027.

Urban and Community Greenspace

Based on the 2020 census-designated places and urban areas, and the PLI, there are 510,269 acres of protected lands within populous areas in the watershed.

Monitoring Progress and Indicators

The following datasets will be used to monitor progress of overall protection as well as specific protection of our priority landscapes.

Chesapeake Progress Protected Lands Indicator (Chesapeake Bay Program Office. (2024). *Chesapeake Progress Protected Lands_2024* (MapServer) [GIS dataset]. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

https://gis.chesapeakebay.net/ags/rest/services/ChesapeakeProgress/cpProtectedLands_2024/MapServer)

Chesapeake Bay Land Use/Land Cover (LULC) Database 2024 Edition (Claggett, P. R., McDonald, S. M., O'Neil-Dunne, J., MacFaden, S., Walker, K., Guinn, S., Ahmed, L., Buford, E., Kurtz, E., McCabe, P., Pickford, J. A., Royar, A., Schulze, K., 2025, Chesapeake Bay Land Use/Land Cover (LULC) Database 2024 Edition: U.S. Geological Survey data release, <https://doi.org/10.5066/P14BEBRC>.)

Chesapeake Bay Watershed Riparian 30m 1:24k 2024 Edition (McDonald, S.M., Thompson, R.L., Katoski, M.P., Claggett, P.R., Ahmed, L., Fitch, A., and Wolf, J., 2024, Chesapeake Bay Watershed 1:24k 10, 30 and 90-meter Riparian Buffer Zones: U.S. Geological Survey data release, <https://doi.org/10.5066/P99HZHQ0>.)

National Wetlands Inventory (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. (n.d.). *National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) dataset* (FGDC metadata XML) [Data set]. U.S. Department of the Interior. https://documentst.ecosphere.fws.gov/wetlands/data/metadata/FWS_Wetlands.xml)

Additional datasets may be added to this list

Protected Lands Indicator hyperlinked to Chesapeake Progress]

The Protected Lands Indicator (PLI) records the number of acres of permanently protected lands in the Chesapeake Bay watershed and tracks progress towards the Protected Lands Outcome. The PLI dataset was created through a data call effort by the Protected Lands Workgroup and relevant practitioners who provided geospatial data directly to GBP/USGS.

Data for the indicator is collected every other year, with the next data call in 2027. All of the following targets will be accessed on the same timeline and reported out to the partnership:

Monitoring: Riparian Forests

Utilizing the USGS Chesapeake Bay Watershed 30M Riparian Forest Buffer zone data, the USGS Chesapeake Bay Land Use/Land Cover (LULC) Database 2024 Edition, and the protected lands indicator data to identify the acreage of protected riparian forest buffers.

Monitoring: Wetlands (including migration corridors)

Utilizing the USFWS National Wetlands Inventory and the protected lands indicator to identify the acreage of protected non-tidal wetlands:

Monitoring: Natural Areas Supporting Healthy Streams

TBD. Will update once information is available.

Monitoring: Agricultural Lands

Utilizing the USGS Chesapeake Bay Land Use/Land Cover (LULC) Database 2024 Edition and the PLI to identify protected agricultural lands.

Monitoring: Tribal Homelands

TBD- Will update once information is available.

Monitoring: Urban and Community Greenspace

Utilizing 2020 census-designated places and urban areas, and the PLI to identify protected lands that are within populous areas in the watershed.

[Outcome Name] Situation Analysis

The following table identifies challenges ~~to that will impact progress towards~~ attaining this outcome and its targets. This analysis considers scientific, environmental, fiscal or policy-related developments that have already or may influence work during the upcoming six-year Management Strategy cycle. Consideration is given to which challenges are within and outside of CBP's ability to influence. Challenges associated with Changing Environmental Conditions are denoted with an asterisk (*). Challenges listed in bold font have been identified by the Goal Team and its Workgroups as being priorities for the Workgroup to seek to address or make progress against through the development and implementation of Management Approaches. [Add or remove rows from the following table as needed to document challenges to Outcome and/or Target attainment. Place an "X" in the corresponding box to classify each challenge as being "within CBP's ability to influence" or "outside of CBP's ability to influence"]

Challenges	Within CBP's ability to influence	Outside of CBP's ability to influence
Data gaps in the Protected Lands Indicator Dataset- Attributes of the dataset are missing key amounts of data, limiting CBP's ability to understand conserved lands within the Chesapeake fully	X	
Building relationships and trust within the Protected Lands Network- Jurisdictions have deep networks of implementers; the Bay Program does not. There is a need for the Bay Program to better coordinate with those doing the on-the-ground work	X	
Communication- <u>There is a need for communicating the importance of protection and demonstrating how it contributes to the successful achievement of a wide range of goals. Communication should be targeted to multiple audiences: the public, legislators, donors, etc.</u> <u>There is a need</u>	X	

Commented [14]: Menti question: What do you see as the challenges to meeting our goals?

Commented [15]: Sophie am I right in that working group teams developed targets for all of these areas.. urban conservation and others... Then those targets were removed. Can we site that as a challenge? Not having meaningful timebound targets or it will be hard to developing acceptable targets for each area ? Perhaps that got fixed in a different part of the work though and it's not relevant.

Commented [SW15R2]: Targets have not been removed. We will have targets; development is ongoing. They must be in place no later than the end of 2027.

Commented [16]: I agree with this need, but what is the underlying challenge that needs to be addressed? Lack of knowledge, skills, abilities among specific partners? Consider restructuring this point to first emphasize the problem that needs to be addressed. Key audiences (the public, legislators, donors, etc.) may lack awareness of the importance of protection and how it contributes to the successful achievement of a wide range of goals. There is a need for communication materials that increase related knowledge and skills.

Commented [SW16R2]: Incorporated comment

for compelling communication materials (for the public, legislators, donors, etc.) that emphasize the importance of protection and demonstrate how it contributes to the successful achievement of a wide range of goals.		
Land Use Change* - Land use is changing throughout the watershed. When land is disturbed or additional impervious surface created through development, it can increase runoff and therefore add to nonpoint source pollution loads. The Protected Lands Workgroup, with support of the Healthy Landscape Goal Team, should be working with jurisdictions and local partners to inform them of tools and resources to help them with land change planning and decisions that impact watershed health.	x	
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Population change- The overall population in the watershed is increasing, but is not evenly distributed. There are some areas of the watershed that are seeing increases in population, while others are losing population. These population changes can shape how protection is perceived in rural, suburban and urban areas.		x
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Funding- Partners are being asked to do more with fewer resources. There is a real need for funding for agency and partner capacity and technical assistance.	x	
Funding- Partners are being asked to do more with less resources. There is a real need for funding for capacity and technical assistance.		

Commented [19]: Reword as or explain how this is a challenge.

Commented [20]: Spell out acronyms.

Commented [21]: We have a workgroup that works with locals. Can this be something that we can influence? control vs influence
Land use change as a decision vs changing environmental conditions.

Commented [22]: Could this be reworded to better explain the challenge?

Commented [23]: Funding is absolutely a challenge on its own, but it is not necessarily equivalent to organizational capacity, which is also stretched by factors beyond funding - high staff turnover, legal & administrative burdens on NGOs, limited training and professional development opportunities, etc. If others are also amenable, you might consider adding a row for something like "Agency and Partner Capacity" too.

Commented [SW23R2]: Incorporated comment

Commented [24]: Agree that capacity for protection is a challenge throughout the watershed. And that its in part about funding and also a lot about people. A question is whether it should be its own challenge or combined with communication and building relationships above?

Commented [25]: What conservation programs does your jurisdiction have? Does it have specific funding associated with it?

Commented [26]: Please be sure to coordinate these programs and funding levels with signatory Goal Team members and FOD members. If there are discrepancies with what signatories provide, we can work together to reconcile the information. ~ SB

Snapshot of Signatory Programs [hyperlink text below to relevant programs]

Managing a large and difficult restoration and conservation program with "no assurance about the level of funds that may be available beyond the short term" (GAO, 2028) is a

challenging undertaking that requires individual and collaborative action from signatory partners, as well as the many communities and individuals who live, work, play and learn in our region. This “Snapshot of Signatory Resources” seeks to better recognize the significant contribution that individual signatory partners and federal agencies make towards outcome attainment. The existing programs and funding spotlighted below are not intended to represent the full range of resources available or required to support progress towards outcome attainment; only the “biggest ticket” programs are included for each outcome and signatory partner. It is important to note that funding is reported from a single point in time (fiscal year 2025) and is not representative of future investments. Identifying the most critical programs and resources that exist at a particular moment in time can help the partnership focus its collaborative efforts on activities that have the greatest impact, and which don’t duplicate the work of existing programs.

Maryland

Programs

Rural Legacy Program (\$13,400,880 in FY 2027~~15,329,028~~) provides grant funding for the preservation of the natural resources and resource-based economies of Maryland through the purchase of conservation easements and fee simple acquisitions located in designated protection areas in partnership with local land trusts or counties. These areas include prime agricultural and forest lands, wildlife habitats, and cultural resources that, if conserved, will promote resource-based economies and maintain the fabric of rural life. ~~provides funding to preserve large, contiguous tracts of land and to enhance natural resources, agricultural, forestry and environmental protection while supporting a sustainable land base for natural resource-based industries.~~

Program Open Space Stateside (\$21,005,650 in FY 2027~~Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2025~~) preserves natural areas for public recreation and watershed and wildlife protection across Maryland through the acquisition of fee simple land and conservation easements. Fee simple purchases are managed as State Parks, Forests, and Wildlife and Fisheries Management Areas.

Program Open Space Local (\$60,108,361 in FY 2027~~Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2025~~) provides financial and technical assistance to local subdivisions for the planning, acquisition, and/or development of recreation land or open space areas.

Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (\$38,726,423 in FY 2027~~Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2025~~) purchases agricultural preservation easements that forever restrict development on prime farmland and woodland and has permanently preserved land in each of Maryland's 23 counties.

Maryland Environmental Trust (~~Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2025~~) works with landowners, local communities, and land trusts to protect Maryland's most treasured landscapes and natural resources as a legacy for future generations primarily through donated conservation easements often co-held with local land trusts. MET accomplishes this work by providing direct assistance, information and innovative tools to ensure the ongoing stewardship and public concern for the natural, historic, and scenic resources of the state.

Commented [27]: Hi - I just wanted to confirm what time period you want funding appropriations for the MD programs. We are currently in state fiscal year 2027 (July 1, 2026 - June 30, 2027) so have those appropriations available if you want most recent or if you want state fiscal year 2025, I can fill those amounts in. Thanks.

Commented [28]: Yes, you can use 2027 appropriations

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Commented [29]: POS is funded through real estate transfer taxes which is a very clever way to generate funding for open space protection whenever land is bought and sold. It only comes into play when a land transaction occurs which means most landowners only contribute a few times in their lives. It has been in place since 1969. Should we mention these innovations in this document or later as part of the management approaches?

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Greenspace Equity Program (\$7,000,000 in FY 2027 Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2025) provides grants to eligible applicants- land trusts, nongovernmental organizations, county and municipal governments for enhancing the public health and livability of overburdened and underserved communities by implementing projects to preserve, create, and improve public greenspace in overburdened and underserved communities. **Whole Watershed Program** a five-year pilot program, targeting five watersheds with the goal of improving watershed health through a diverse selection of environmental actions. **National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4)** provides credits for permanent conservation easements for forest acres that are vulnerable to development pressure. Easements must be within an MS4 jurisdiction and cannot be funded or co-held by the State.

County Land Preservation Programs purchase conservation easements in numerous Maryland counties, each with their own focus and local funding sources. Programs are enabled by local legislation and administered by county governments often in partnership with local land trusts. provide funding-

Local Land Trusts accept both purchased and donated conservation easements and fee simple property in all Maryland counties in both rural and urban areas. In addition to publicly available funding and grants, land trusts also raise private funding for permanent land conservation.

Legislation

The Maryland the Beautiful Act established ambitious land conservation goals: conserve 30% of the state by 2030 (30 by 30) and conserve 40% of the state by 2040 (40 by 40). Through the combined efforts of state agencies, local governments, the federal government, and nonprofit land trusts the first goal to conserve 30% (1,856,889 of 6,189,629 land acres) was achieved in 2024, well in advance of the 2030 goal year. Maryland is now working towards the second goal to conserve 40% by 2040.

Virginia

Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (\$16 million Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2025) funds the protection of farmlands, forests, lands of historic or cultural significance, natural areas, open spaces, and parklands.

Virginia Battlefields Preservation Fund (\$5.25M). This program supports the fee simple purchase of, or purchase of protective interests (i.e. easements) in Virginia battlefield properties.

Virginia Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Historic Preservation Fund (\$2M in 2027). The intent of the program is to support Virginia's historically underserved and underrepresented communities through protecting their associated cultural and historical sites. This fund will provide grants for the acquisition, protection, and rehabilitation of historic and archaeological sites of significance associated with Black and Indigenous communities and People of Color in the Commonwealth.

Virginia Farmland and Forestland Preservation Fund Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) matching grant (\$437,500)

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Commented [30]: Add the MD Forest Conservation Act allows for forest banking. Justin Bowers and Dan Coy could direct you to the right chapter of the legislation.

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Commented [31]: How do we capture the conservation investment of Virginia's Land Preservation Tac Credit, currently \$75 million annually?

Commented [32]: Could add State Clean Water Revolving Loan Funds, as they can be used for land conservation as well

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Land Preservation Tax Credit (\$75 million) allows landowners who permanently donate qualified conservation easements or land to receive a state income tax credit equal to 40% of the donated property's fair market value.

Community Flood Preparedness Fund DCR (\$100M in 2026)

The CFPF is a pivotal element of the Commonwealth's broader strategy to mitigate growing climate threats, providing financial resources to support local and regional efforts in flood risk management and climate adaptation. The fund is designed to address issues across all of Virginia. Green Infrastructure is a large focus

Preservation Trust Fund VOF (\$150,000)

PTF grants are intended for acquisitions, easements, and other methods of permanently protecting open space for farming, forestry, recreation, public access, wildlife, and water quality. In addition to land protection, VOF also provides Easement Assistance grants, which are income-based cost-share assistance grants to landowners conveying an open-space easement to VOF or to a locality.

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Delaware

Agricultural Lands Preservation Program allows landowners to voluntarily preserve their farms through a two-phase process. The first phase, which does not include payment to the landowner, establishes an Agricultural Preservation District through a 10-year agreement. In the second phase, the landowner may be paid to permanently sell the farm's development rights through an Agricultural Conservation Easement. allows landowners to voluntarily preserve their farms through a two-phase process. The first phase, which does not include any payment to the landowner, is known as an Agricultural Preservation District. In phase two, the landowner is paid to sell their farm's development rights, known as an Agricultural Conservation Easement.

Forestland Preservation Program allows landowners to voluntarily preserve qualifying forestland through a similar two-phase process. The first phase, which does not include payment to the landowner, establishes a Forestland Preservation Area through a minimum 10-year agreement. Once the property is enrolled in an established Forestland Preservation Area and remains in compliance with program requirements, the landowner may apply for the second phase: the sale of a permanent Forestland Preservation Easement. The easement permanently restricts development while allowing the property to remain a working forest under an approved forest management plan.

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Delaware's Forestland Preservation Program protects forestlands through perpetual conservation easements:

Open Space Program Statewide land protection program established in 1990 through the Delaware Land Protection Act. The program involves four eligible Divisions: the Division of Parks and Recreation and the Division of Fish & Wildlife within the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC); the Delaware Forest Service within the Department of Agriculture; and the Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs within the Department of State.

The program works to protect and conserve lands that support natural resources, wildlife habitat, greenways, waterways, natural areas, outdoor recreation, and historic and cultural resources. The Open Space Program is guided by the Open Space Council, which meets quarterly and makes recommendations to the Secretary of DNREC regarding the coordination and acquisition of land, including fee-simple acquisitions and conservation easements.

The General Assembly appropriates \$10 million annually to the Open Space Program from proceeds of the Realty Transfer Tax. Each year, the Governor may adjust this funding through the budget process. Of the annual appropriation, \$9 million is allocated for land acquisition, while the remaining \$1 million is deposited into an infrastructure account. These infrastructure funds support reinvestment in key open space facilities and amenities, including campgrounds, trails, visitor centers, recreational amenities, and hunting, fishing, and wildlife-viewing areas.

coordinates the acquisition of Parks, open space, natural areas, forests, wildlife habitat, greenways, and waterways:

Outdoor Recreation, Parks and Trails Program**Park, Greenways, and Trails**

Grants a matching grant program assisting with public park land acquisition and outdoor recreation facility development in Delaware.

Delaware Natural Areas Preservation System: Statewide program established in 1978 and governed through 7 Del. C., Chapter 73. The program identifies significant Natural Areas throughout Delaware and provides for their permanent protection through their dedication as Nature Preserves.

Under the statute, a Natural Area is defined as "an area of land or water, or both land and water, whether in public or private ownership, which either retains or has reestablished its natural character (although it need not be undisturbed), or has unusual flora or fauna, or has biotic, geological, scenic or archaeological features of scientific or educational value."

The Nature Preserves Program permanently protects designated Natural Areas through a legally recorded instrument such as a deed of restrictions, a conservation easement or, when the property is state-owned in fee, Articles of Dedication. It is important to

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distinguish between Natural Areas and Nature Preserves: designation as a Natural Area does not, by itself, provide regulatory protection at the state level. Permanent protection occurs when a Natural Area is formally dedicated as a Nature Preserve.

There are currently 34 dedicated Nature Preserves throughout Delaware. The program is guided by the Natural Areas Advisory Council, which makes recommendations to the Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control on matters related to Natural Areas and Nature Preserves.

Pennsylvania

Farmland Preservation Program was developed to strengthen Pennsylvania's agricultural economy and protect prime farmland.

Pennsylvania Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund a critical dedicated funding source for recreation and conservation projects, libraries, and historical preservation initiatives.

Environmental Stewardship Fund is used for environmental restoration and conservation and community revitalization projects. Receives revenues from an increase in the fee charged for dumping trash at landfills and has received funds from the 2005 Growing Greener bond initiative.

Oil and Gas Lease Fund In 1955, the Pennsylvania General Assembly created the Oil and Gas Lease Fund. Money received from oil and gas leases on state lands (except for Game Lands) are directed to be placed in the Oil and Gas Lease Fund, to be used a broad range of conservation infrastructure, including land acquisition.

New York

- New York State Conservation Partnership Program, (\$138,000 within watershed FY25) State grants used to leverage public and private funding for building capacity of land trusts to help advance open space protection farmland preservation, and resource conservation goals.
- Open Space Conservation Grant Program, (\$25 million statewide to be awarded) The goal of this grant program is to provide funding for land conservation partners across New York State and increase climate resiliency and adaptation.
- Forest Conservation Easements for Land Trusts, (\$404,250 within watershed FY25) State grants for land trusts to protect forestland through conservation easements and provide community benefits.

Environmental Protection Fund: A source of funding for capital projects that protect the environment and enhance communities. Capital projects are usually large projects that purchase land or construct facilities.

Legislation

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30x30: Conserving 30% of New York's Lands and Waters by 2030. This legislation will promote biodiversity and preserve New York's wildlife, forests, and clean water sources, which are all essential to New York's health and economy.

Washington, D.C

West Virginia

- Outdoor Heritage Conservation Fund
- County Farmland Protection Programs (some are funded by property transfer tax revenue)

Federal

Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Fund USFWS/NFWF

- **Chesapeake Small Watershed Grants USFWS (\$23 million)**
- **Chesapeake WILD USFWS (\$6.9 million)**

Forest Legacy Program USFS a conservation program administered by the Forest Service in partnership with State agencies to encourage the protection of privately owned working forests lands through conservation easements or land purchases.

Community Forest Program USFS a grant program that provides financial assistance to tribal entities, local governments, and qualified conservation non-profit organizations to acquire and establish community forests that provide community benefits.

Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program DoW (\$10.3M) a grant program administered by military installations in partnership with local land trusts to protect land outside of installations. REPI funds both conservation easements and fee-simple purchases for the purposes of reducing incompatible development, habitat protection, and increased resiliency.

Land and Water Conservation Fund DOI

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program USDA Is a Farm Bill program with two components. Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) protect croplands and grasslands on working farms and ranches by limiting non-agricultural uses. Wetlands Reserve Easements (WRE) protect, restore and enhance wetlands which have been previously degraded due to agricultural uses.

Conservation Stewardship Program USDA

Recreational Trails Program US DOT Funded by gas taxes paid by off-road vehicles, the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is dedicated to the construction, restoration and maintenance of nonmotorized and motorized recreational trails (paved and unpaved) and trail-related facilities.

American Battlefield Protection Program NPS supports community-driven stewardship of historic resources. NPS ABPP administers four grant opportunities: Preservation Planning, Battlefield Land Acquisition, Battlefield Restoration, and Battlefield Interpretation grants.

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Commented [33]: Should explain that the Chesapeake Bay also has several (4) Sentinel Landscapes that overlap its area which are coordinated by DOW and can help both guide and leverage REPI dollars. Sentinel Landscapes have capacity that other landscape initiatives sometimes lack.

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Regional Conservation Partnership Program NRCS This funding allows for NRCS conservation activities with partners that offer value-added contributions to expand the ability to address on-farm, watershed, and regional natural resource concerns.

Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership NRCS This funding opportunity is a component of the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program's Wetland Reserve Easements, and is intended to target and leverage resources for carrying out high priority wetland activities on eligible lands.

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Management Approaches for Outcome [#]: [Outcome Name]

[Management Approaches will outline the general approach needed to fill existing gaps and identify the partnership's role in that approach. These are the actions that the program will undertake to address the challenges to goal and outcome attainment that are described in the Situation Analysis. The Management Approach section should include how local governments and other stakeholders will be kept informed and involved.

- Each Management Approach should seek to address one or more stated challenge(s).
- Management Approaches should be specific enough to guide partnership efforts over the coming six years and to enable the partnership to determine if work related to the Management Approach has progressed at an appropriate pace. Example: a Management Approach would not be "communications and outreach," but rather "Assess Blue Crab Stock Status and Communicate the Results to Managers and the Public." Management Approaches should be specific enough to be meaningful and provide transparency about the work that partners will collaboratively undertake.
- Management Approaches at the Goal and/or Outcome-level should describe and seek to address "signatories, other state and federal agencies, local governments, Indigenous representatives, nonprofit and private partners are engaged; where actions, tools, financial support and technical assistance are needed to empower local governments and others to do their part; and what steps are necessary to facilitate greater participation in achieving the Outcome."
- Outcome-level Management Approaches should speak to the strategies and actions that Chesapeake Bay Program Partners should undertake over the next six years to address challenges that impact specific Outcomes.
- For each Goal-level Management Approach, a statement should be included to describe which Outcome workplans will include related projects or actions.]

Commented [34]: Will metrics/tracking mechanisms be added to any of these? Without that, some seem a bit nebulous/hard to know if progress is being made.

For example, 3.4.1 could include specific, measurable goals like 1) identify & document data collection protocol for each jurisdiction & 2) accurately update protected lands data every 2 years (or every year).

Management Approach 3.4.1: Data, Tracking & Targeting: Accurate and comprehensive tracking of protected lands over time is essential to achieving the Protected Lands Outcome and its Targets.

High-quality data—particularly complete attribution of protection dates and public access status within the Protected Lands Indicator—are critical for assessing current conditions, setting up targets, and evaluating progress toward the Protected Lands Outcome.

This approach requires the Protected Lands Workgroup to coordinate with data managers to improve protected lands datasets' completeness and consistency, ensuring that all information is properly attributed and suitable for detailed analysis.

The Protected Lands Workgroup will also identify, quantify, and—where feasible—monetize the ecological, hydrological, and community benefits of land protection across the watershed, while assessing emerging issues and potential approaches for addressing them. These insights, along with jurisdictional plans (example: State Wildlife Action Plans), will help guide the strategic prioritization of conservation investments.

Management Approach 3.4.2 Funding Conservation & Protection

Sustained, accessible funding is critical for conserving and restoring protected lands. The Protected Lands Workgroup will work to expand both access to funding and the total resources available for protection and restoration activities. It will support partners in identifying and leveraging diverse funding opportunities, addressing challenges such as limited capacity and difficulty finding appropriate funding sources. In collaboration with the Chesapeake Bay Program, the Workgroup will also explore ways to use appropriated funds more effectively.

To maximize long-term value, the Workgroup will promote conservation and restoration strategies that advance multiple outcomes—including water quality, habitat and forest protection, climate resilience, and community well-being—and encourage coupling conservation and restoration efforts to increase environmental and community benefits.

Management Approach 3.4.3 Engagement, Communication & Outreach

The Protected Lands Workgroup will strengthen land conservation and increase protection across the Chesapeake watershed by actively engaging practitioners, improving communication resources, and expanding outreach that supports voluntary conservation and restoration activities.

Over the next six years, the workgroup will engage directly with the Protected Lands Network—including land conservation practitioner networks (such as the Chesapeake Conservation Partnership), federal and state agencies, local governments, nonprofits, and community partners—to build trust and cultivate meaningful, collaborative relationships. Through regular engagement, workgroup meetings, and knowledge-sharing, the Workgroup will deepen its understanding of on-the-ground challenges, opportunities, and priorities. These strengthened relationships will support coordinated conservation strategies.

advance shared goals, and enhance long-term stewardship of critical lands throughout the region.

The Workgroup will also develop and provide communication resources that help jurisdictions, local governments, and partners convey the environmental, economic, military readiness, and community benefits of land conservation and protection, especially the protection of our priority landscapes. Tools such as fact sheets, case studies, and messaging materials will support informed decision-making and build broader support for conservation at local and regional scales.

Management Approach 3.4.1: 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.

Management Approach 3.4.6: Developing and tracking targets of our priority landscapes. Utilize land use land cover data to analyze and understand patterns in the landscape to identify critical landscapes and strategic opportunities, and synthesize information and priorities from existing state plans (e.g., State Wildlife Action Plans, State Forests Actions Plans, etc.) as well as existing watershed or landscape scale initiatives to build on existing implementation networks or

Management Approach 3.4.5: Describe, quantify and if possible monetize the various benefits of protecting land within the watershed. Integrate these 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, forest canopy, adaptation and resilience, and community well-being, ensuring that investments in protected lands deliver broad and lasting benefits across the watershed.

Management Approach 3.4.2: Identify, assess, and leverage funding or finance opportunities to strengthen protection initiatives, technical assistance, and capacity-building programs:

Commented [35]: Recommend spelling out the acronym

Commented [36]: yes please

Commented [37]: Should this be merged with management approach 3.4.1?

Commented [38]: Sophie I see this action will address the need and perhaps it was a different working group that developed targets for urban lands and others. Given the experience of those getting totally removed later at a different level. I think its worth considering how to navigate target recommendations.

Commented [39]: Moved the order to make a bit more sequential. The protected areas is important for getting the accurate baseline. Then we need to set new targets for critical landscapes in each of our land types. Then we could use an assessment of the multiple benefits of those lands. This might help us gauge the funding needs to achieve our outcome and help us explore creative funding or finance options. And to make it all work we need to build capacity within our protected lands network, help them communicate and engage landowners and funders to secure the resources needed to accelerate protection.

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Commented [40]: Stacked benefits

Commented [41]: Potential alternate: Strategically prioritize conservation efforts to maximize benefits for the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed

Commented [42]: This seems to imply that we can articulate these co-benefits. And we can if we utilize methods like MD DNR has pioneered for quantifying and monetizing ecosystem service benefits. Should we call out the need to identify these benefits consistently across the watershed?

Commented [43]: Workshop the word outcome Objectives?

Commented [44]: priorities?

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jurisdictions and other partners have expressed that protection work is becoming more challenging due to limitations with funding, capacity, and technical assistance. Funding Opportunities may exist (as summarized in the signatory profiles above) but access to those funds for some practitioners can be a challenge and access to funds exist, but they can be challenging to find. The Protected Lands Workgroup 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. Encourage coupling conservation and restoration efforts

Management Approach 3.4.3: 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. Focusing on trust building, The Protected Lands Workgroup will foster meaningful connections with land conservation practitioners, federal and state 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. In so doing, the Workgroup will 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.

Management Approach 3.4.4: 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, military readiness, and community benefits of conservation at the local scale, helping build support for land protection initiatives and informed decision-making.

Management Approach 3.4.5: Describe, quantify and if possible monetize the various benefits of protecting land within the watershed. Integrate these 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, forest canopy, adaptation and resilience, and community well-being, ensuring that investments in protected lands deliver broad and lasting benefits across the watershed.

Management Approach 3.4.5 Addressing emerging threats to conservation and protection within the watershed

Commented [45]: This sentence effectively says that the Finding of existing funds is the key challenge. It's one challenge, sure, but total amounts and access are still important factors. If the PL WG can't address those (arguably harder to fix issues), then they don't need to be part of the strategy, but I think we should still acknowledge them.

For example, the America the Beautiful program's priorities align well with our land trust's work but only state agencies are eligible to apply for relevant categories. WVDNR historically hasn't been interested in leading a project, and therefore WV NGO's able to do the work are shut out.

Commented [46]: Seconding this.

Commented [47]: Agree. I think there is a good understanding of the funding sources available, the issue is access (Like Emily says) and/or capacity at NGO or localities to secure, manage, and implement some of the funding sources.

Commented [48]: Call out other organizations that are funding protection and conservation work (CCP fed funding navigator) track funding and gather feedback from those who receive funds

Commented [49]: Is it really "identification" that's needed, or would it be more accurate to say "The ... [4]

Commented [50]: Agreed! Or even "... for adequate funds and for the use of appropriated funds to adv ... [3]

Commented [51]: advocate for use and/or increasing appropriated funds

Commented [52]: Add Tribal Nations in specific callout here to address increasing work with them & lever ... [5]

Commented [53]: Call out CCP

Commented [54]: I recommend coordinating with SET on this approach

Commented [55]: I think that it would be good to have these generally, but also broken out by conservati ... [6]

Commented [56]: Restoration and conservation- how to communicate they go hand in hand

Commented [57]: Stacked benefits

Commented [58]: Potential alternate: Strategically prioritize conservation efforts to maximize benefits ... [7]

Commented [59]: This seems to imply that we can articulate these co-benefits. And we can if we utili ... [8]

Commented [60]: Workshop the word outcome Objectives?

Commented [61]: priorities?

Commented [62]: Stating the painfully obvious here... Most of the emerging threats to conservation seer ... [9]

~~Management Approach 3.4.6~~ **Developing and tracking targets of our priority landscapes. Utilize land use land cover data to analyze and understand patterns in the landscape to identify critical landscapes, and synthesize information and priorities from existing state plans (e.g., State Wildlife Action Plans, State Forests Actions Plans, etc.) as well as existing watershed or landscape scale initiatives to build on existing implementation networks.**

Commented [63]: Should this be merged with management approach 3.4.1?

~~Management Approach 3.4.6~~ **Develop outreach plans and metrics for increasing voluntary wetland restoration and conservation**

Commented [64]: Sophie I see this action will address the need and perhaps it was a different working group that developed targets for urban lands and others. Given the experience of those getting totally removed later at a different level. I think its worth considering how to navigate target recommendations.

Coupling conservation and restoration work

Commented [65]: Maybe isn't the right place for specific wetlands callouts but increasing voluntary restoration/conservation is a big goal for Virginia

Participating Partners

The following partners participated in the creation of this Management Strategy and expressed their intention to collaborate on Management Strategy implementation over the next six years. Per the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement, "participation in developing Management Strategies or in the achievement of Outcomes varies by signatory based on differing priorities across the watershed. This participation may include commitments such as sharing knowledge, data or information, educating the public, working on future legislation and developing or implementing programs or verified practices" (2025). Signatory partners may join implementation efforts at any time. Partners also recognize that Signatory participation is voluntary and may vary accordingly.

Commented [66]: If this is included, please be sure to coordinate and collaborate with the Wetlands Workgroup and SET. Ex: The Wetlands Workgroup has tidal wetland landowner engagement resources: <https://www.chesapeakebay.net/projects/tidal-wetlands-landowner-engagement>

- **Signatory Partners**

-

- **Other Partners**

- DoW

- USFS

Commented [67]: Is there a reason this land only specifically targets wetlands? There's a lot of voluntary forest protection that could be encouraged. What's the reason for targeting only wetlands?

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Appendix 1. Signatory Statutory Authorities Driving Outcome Attainment

Commented [68]: To be submitted by signatory partners

The law and regulation of signatory partners may support, justify or motivate their participation in the collaborative work of the Chesapeake Bay Program related to the attainment of specific Outcomes and Targets of the Watershed Agreement.

The following documentation identifies core statutory authorities that provide part of the impetus for the attainment of Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement Outcomes and their related Targets. While Chesapeake Bay Program partners acknowledge that the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement is voluntary, subject to the availability of appropriated funds, and does not preempt, supersede or override any other law or regulation applicable to each signatory, they also acknowledge that the law or regulation of individual signatories can support each partner’s participation in outcome attainment. The table below is not an exhaustive list of all relevant laws and regulations. Rather, this appendix identifies the driving motivators that can bring about signatory partner engagement in efforts described in this Strategic Plan, associated Management Strategies, and Workplans.

Goal [#]: [Goal Name]

Outcome: [Outcome Name]	
Signatory	Statutory Authority
[Signatory Name]	
[Signatory Name]	
[Signatory Name]	
[Signatory Name]	
[Signatory Name]	
[Signatory Name]	
[Signatory Name]	
[Signatory Name]	
[Signatory Name]	
[Signatory Name]	
	<u>ARTICLE 58 Implementation of the "Clean Water, Clean Air, and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act of 2022 " Environmental Conservation (ENV) CHAPTER 43-B NY State Senate,</u>

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<u>New York</u> {Signatory Name}	<u>TITLE 3 Open Space Land Conservation Projects Environmental</u> <u>Conservation (ENV) CHAPTER 43-B, ARTICLE 54 NY State</u> <u>Senate,</u>
	<u>SECTION 49-0113 Thirty by thirty conservation goal Environmental</u> <u>Conservation (ENV) CHAPTER 43-B, ARTICLE 49, TITLE 1 NY</u> <u>State Senate</u>

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Page 1: [1] Commented [8] **Anonymous** **9/8/2026 8:59:00 PM**

This comes from an OSI synthesis report which studied places like the DE River watershed. Stream sampling studies found nitrogen levels spiked when forest cover levels fell below 66 percent. When forest cover is maintained at 70 to 90 percent or greater, streams and rivers stay healthier and cleaner, and wildlife thrives. Both MN and WI use a 75% protection threshold for their statewide programs One Watershed One Plan and Wonderful Waters of Wisconsin. The USFS has studied southeastern forests and found forests are the best land use for water quality. Other studies looking at impervious cover find that once you get beyond 20-25% impervious water quality is degraded. If the Bay watershed loses more forest it will make a deteriorated situation worse.

Page 1: [2] Commented [9] **Anonymous** **9/8/2026 9:19:00 PM**

For example, we might look at the ICPRB assessment for source water and identify how many millions of acres they have identified just for SWP in the Potomac and the wider Chesapeake Bay since their assessment extended to the whole Mid-Atlantic. I suspect its more than 2 million acres.

Page 17: [3] Commented [50] **Phyllis Joris** **8/26/2026 6:28:00 PM**

Agreed! Or even "... for adequate funds and for the use of appropriated funds to advance conservation"?

Page 17: [4] Commented [49] **Emily Merrill** **8/21/2026 12:56:00 PM**

Is it really "identification" that's needed, or would it be more accurate to say "The PL Workgroup will advocate for use of appropriated funds to advance conservation"? My view is that land conservationists already know what they're doing and what they need \$ for.
1 total reaction

Andrea Reese reacted with  at 08/21/2026, 3:36 PM UTC

Page 17: [5] Commented [52] **lucas Manweiler** **8/21/2026 6:16:00 PM**

Add Tribal Nations in specific callout here to address increasing work with them & leveraging their knowledge/co-management? Or should that have its own approach section?

Page 17: [6] Commented [55] **Kevin Tate** **8/26/2026 6:59:00 PM**

I think that it would be good to have these generally, but also broken out by conservation area: Ag, wetlands, forests, etc. To be used in more specific situations.

Page 17: [7] Commented [58] **Katherine Brownson** **8/17/2026 3:24:00 PM**

Potential alternate: Strategically prioritize conservation efforts to maximize benefits for the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed

Page 17: [8] Commented [59] **Anonymous** **9/8/2026 8:10:00 PM**

This seems to imply that we can articulate these co-benefits. And we can if we utilize methods like MD DNR has pioneered for quantifying and monetizing ecosystem service benefits. Should we call out the need to identify these benefits consistently across the watershed?

Page 17: [9] Commented [62] **Andrew Szwak** **8/28/2026 1:53:00 PM**

Stating the painfully obvious here... Most of the emerging threats to conservation seem to be advancing the federal administration's priorities around energy and AI. Can this work group legitimately act on this issue?

