



Protected Lands Workgroup Meeting

August 4, 2026
2:00-4:00pm

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Meeting Materials:

- Materials will be posted to the [meeting webpage](#) as they become available.

Purpose: Discuss progress on the Management Strategy drafting, the Urban and Community Greenspace target, potential scenarios for the Agricultural Lands target, and conservation initiatives through Sentinel Landscapes.

Meeting Minutes

- I. Protected Lands Workgroup Membership (2:10 - 2:20)**
 - Lead: Sophie Waterman, USGS, PLWG Coordinator
 - Participants reviewed the workgroup's new membership structure and the membership framework outlined in the Governance and Management Framework. See the slide deck below for information on voting members, non voting members, and workgroup structure.
 - Materials:
 - [Protected Lands Workgroup Membership Presentation August2026](#)
 - [Governance and Management Framework.](#)
 - Call for at-large members
- II. Updates on the Protected Lands Management Strategy Chapter and Jurisdictional Meetings (2:20-2:40)**
 - Lead: Sophie Waterman, USGS, PLWG Coordinator
 - Participants received updates on the drafting process of the Protected Lands Management Strategy. Sophie shared a summary of the overall takeaways from the one-on-one meetings between the protected lands coordination team and jurisdictions. Draft management

approaches can be seen in the slides linked below.

- **Requested Action:** Look out for an email with a link to the draft Management Strategy. Provide comments and feedback via that document - we will also be holding office hours (date TBD) as another opportunity to provide feedback.
- Materials:
 - [Draft Protected Lands Management Strategy Presentation Slides](#)
 - [Draft Management Strategy](#)

Key Takeaways

- The drafting process will include office hours for feedback on the management strategy in late August/September. Members can also provide feedback via email.
- Numbers presented were analyzed with the Chesapeake Bay Program's Land Use Land Cover Data - if they seem low, reach out to Sophie Waterman to double check them.
- Key challenges:
 - Addressing gaps in data, including date of establishment and public access. The Date of establishment project with the Land Trust Alliance has officially begun!
 - Building relationships within the protected lands network
 - Tackling funding challenges through innovative solutions
 - Understanding land use change/fragmentation and challenges with development and population change
- See slides linked above for the draft management approaches. This document will be sent out to the workgroup for comments as well, along with office hours.

III. Urban and Community Greenspace Target - Goal Setting (2:40-3:05)

- Lead: Sophie Waterman, USGS, PLWG Coordinator
- Participants discussed potential protection targets for the urban and community greenspace target. The focus will be on lands within Census Designated Places and Urban Areas. There was general support for an outcome-based target on the total footprint of Adjusted census designated places and urban areas. See Key Takeaways below for a discussion summary.
- **Requested Action:** Look out for an email with adjusted Census Designated Places and Urban Areas numbers for a new proposed urban and community greenspace metric.
- Materials:
 - [Urban and Community Greenspace Target Options Presentation Slides](#)

Key Takeaways

- Footprint of Census-designated places and urban areas is 7 Million acres
 - 9% of lands within census-designated places and urban areas are currently protected.
 - 4% of lands within census-designated places and urban areas are publicly accessible. (Trust for Public Land's ParkServe Database)
- Overall agreement among attendees to approach an outcome-based target on the total footprint of census designated places and urban areas.
 - (target: protect __% of the 7M acres of census-designated places and urban

areas lands.)

- Acreage numbers for Census Designated Places and Urban Areas should be the Adjusted numbers, rather than the 2020 census numbers. This proposal received general support from attendees. The coordination team will work to find adjusted numbers for jurisdictions across the watershed and will edit the proposed numbers.
 - [Department of Transportation - Adjusted Urban Areas](#)

Discussion

- **Parker Agelasto:** The census-designated places from census data are fixed in time 2020 data. Then it goes out and there is an iterative process that each locality can weigh in on, and say that certain areas for urban areas need to be re-aligned. This creates 'Adjusted census designated places and urban areas', which becomes an official map for the locality. The VA adjustment ended up having the area grow by a third after during this adjustment. The adjusted number should be the one we use, as that is the one that the localities and the state is using.
 - <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/86408fc31c514c47bc1c9638a1c85bcb>
 - [2020 Adjusted Urban Area Boundaries - Overview](#)
 - **Jeff Lerner:** Agree with the comment, how can we get the adjusted numbers across the watershed?
 - **Parker Agelasto:** Each state is encouraged to do the adjustment, and it drives federal transportation dollar funding which adds incentivization to do it.
- **Desiree Shelley:** I agree with the last comment. I also think that having separate targets or a distinction between protection and public access is important and will help see where there are disparities. While we are still defining Tribal Land tenure. This conversation closely ties to Indigenous land tenure. The complexity to access does matter.
- **Kerri Batrowny:** for tracking public access on wildlife areas in DE, public access is easier to track on parcel-wide basis like areas open to hunting. Parks are harder due to trails - a parcel with a trail for access doesn't mean the whole parcel is open to public access. DE is still considering if they have to track it or not.
- **Rob Schnabel:** Yes! Protection should be tied to Community and Conservation benefits
- **Jeff Swinehart:** We should be cautious in assuming that all protected lands need to allow some sort of access. Ex: ag lands might not be the best part for public access as a working landscape that is protected.
 - Sophie Waterman: Yes, and we have other focus areas such as ag lands, forests, etc. We need to be specific about our messaging about access.
- **Daniel Koval:** Public Access workgroup will likely be working towards creating baseline numbers in order to create a metric to track access gaps in greenspace. Making sure that public access is correctly attributed in the PLWG dataset, and focusing on the distribution of those accessible sites is a focus of the workgroup.
 - **Jeff Lerner:** If we had a target on protection for urban and community greenspace, we could still report public access as part of it, but maybe not have a separate target for it. But the public access workgroup would have a target for that access, and we work together on the work.
 - **Daniel Koval:** Yes, exactly.

IV. Agricultural Target Discussion

(3:05-3:30)

- Lead: Sophie Waterman, USGS, PLWG Coordinator
- Participants reviewed baseline numbers on agricultural lands that are protected within the watershed, and began discussion on potential acreage targets to be set. See Key Takeaways below for a discussion summary.
- Requested Action: Non-decisional
- Materials:
 - [Agricultural Lands Target Presentation](#)
 - [Protect Local Waterways Resources](#)

Key Takeaways

- Want to figure out a way to encourage BMPs on protected ag lands
- Agriculture in CBP Land Use / Land Cover Data: Cropland (CROP), Pasture and Hay (PAST)
 - Baseline: Total Ag Lands: 7.9 million acres
 - 1.26 million acres of those are protected (16%)
- Target Options to consider:
 - Percent protection (protect xx acres of ag land)
 - No Net Loss (maintain current ag lands base without net loss)
 - This option may lead to misalignment among other bay program goals, and does not align with the work of the Agricultural workgroup. This type of language will likely not move into the target, but can be something to consider folding into other ideas as we move forward.
 - Priority ag lands approach: Protect prime agricultural soils, strategic ag areas, lands with existing BMPs, etc
 - It was noted that it is important to consider who has historically had access to prime soil land, how regenerative farms taking different methods might be looked over, and how the shift of farmers to a younger generation may influence this.

Discussion:

- **Rob Schnabel:** MD is not doing the best job in protecting ag land to maximize conservation benefits; different states have different ranking criteria for priority areas of conservation. Weighting criteria differently could bring different co-benefits.
- **Jeff Lerner:** Would having BMPs that went along with protection be a barrier to people interested in getting easements?
- **Kevin Tate:** in Shenandoah Valley, VA; similar to public access and land conservation not having to be linked, I think similarly BMP adoption within farmland conservation is connected but could be separated. There are some barriers to BMP adoption that could hold up land conservation. Don't want to hold back land conservation efforts just to focus on BMPs, but there is also focus from the non profit sector on how we are tying those two things together. Some federal programs through USDA do incentivize BMPs as part of land conservation. Locally here, the 30x30 target was pushed back against in the landowner community. Agree that setting targets is good; protecting prime ag soils from development / keeping farmland farmland is the messaging that is important to landowners. Lastly, I think that 'no net loss' is

not enough though it could be incorporated into the goal.

- **Emily Merrill:** Well said, Kevin. I agree that ideally there would be separate goals/targets for ag land protection and ag BMPs.
- **Aurelia Gracia:** To Kevin's point 30x30 felt like a top down approach to some, created some negative competition pressures, and ultimately folks wanted to focus on quality not quantity.
- **Desiree Shelley:** I think a combination would be great though I do not know how difficult BMP adoption is to track.
- **Jeff Swinehart:** Agree with Kevin. Don't want to hold up preservation due to a requirement of BMPs. Farmers may shy away from some, but we have seen success with getting land protected first, then building relationships and later being able to get the landowner to add some BMPs. In PA, there are some entities that are not placing enough value on the BMP plans; some entities are solely focused on preserving the land, but not verifying the conservation plan throughout - there could be opportunities there for collaboration. For wetland / stream corridor areas, in Lancaster county, we need to figure out ways to incentivize and compensate farmers at a value that is significant enough that would afford them the ability to take prime ag lands and convert it into pasture or wetland re-establishment work. But right now, farmers are reluctant to give up productive land for that. Lancaster county has protected 30% of the farmland in the county, that is not enough; as to no net loss target, farmland will continue to be lost, and I think it is a good target to strive for but agree with Kevin that it does not need to be the only target.
 - **Kevin Tate:** Land conservation has been a good tool to get into BMPs like Jeff just said. Vice versa too, starting with the BMP approach and easing into permanent land conservation.
 - **Rob Schnabel:** Once you compensate the landowner large sums of money with public funds you likely lose the hook for things like riparian forest buffers down the road. PUBLIC funds should maximize conservation and community benefits. Some state ranking criteria prioritizes row crops, corn / soy, which may actually increase food deserts as most goes towards animal feed.
- **Eric Hughes:** on the 'no net loss' target option - other targets in the agreement like tree planting, forest buffer, etc, would lead to lost farmland, so that might not be in alignment with other CBP priorities, as opposed to something like percent protection. With BMP discussion, understanding how preservation programs in farms work; some use conservation plans with 2 year inspection cycles - are those practices being reported back to a DEP? Are those coming back to us and are they being credited to the reducing excess nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment outcome? That tracking mechanism might not be required in all counties across the watershed, but is something that could get to the conservation outcomes as well.
 - **Kevin DuBois:** How is restoration of wetlands on ag land perceived within this context? It could be considered a loss of ag land, but it's a good thing and one of the main targets of wetland restoration (historically from the Wetlands Workgroup)
 - **Kevin Tate:** I think "no net loss" as a goal would bump up against a lot of producers views on their private property rights
- **Sophie Waterman:** a hybrid approach could be something to consider: 50% of protecting being comprised of prime farmland if we want to target those soils.
 - **Amanda Cather:** Remember also that prioritizing prime farmland may deprioritize historically disadvantaged farmers who have not always had access to prime farmland

- **Desiree Shelley:** How is agroforestry being tracked as a BMP? Is it only through Riparian buffers or does it include silvopasture? Would that be considered a loss if the trees planted are providing forage and other production?
 - **Eric Hughes:** Yes, as of last year, alley cropping and silvopasture are both agroforestry pastures that are now credited in the model
 - **Desiree Shelley:** Has forest farming been incorporated in any models as a way to meet forestry goals but also keeping those lands in production?
 - **Eric Hughes:** Forest farming is not credited as a BMP in the CBP suite of modeling tools
- **Rob Schnabel:** Don't think we should separate working lands from conservation set asides (tree line windbreaks, forest / stream buffers, etc.). Conservation lands play an important role in the working lands being successful; some counties are starting to prioritize just working lands, and would deduct points in protection if there are forest buffers which is counter to what we want to see happen.
- **Amanda Cather:** I am also concerned about the idea of prioritizing some production systems (eg pasture) over others (eg row crop) when it comes to farmland protection - there is potential for regenerative production and BMPs within all of these production systems and that feels key to keep in mind
- **Emily Merrill:** Could expand "prime" to also include "state & locally important ag soils". That broadening may somewhat help address Amanda's point (and others).
- **Kevin Tate:** Another thought, similar to Amanda's about historical access and land loss issues, part of the discussion and goals about agricultural land conservation should include the transition of farmland to future generations of farmers and land managers. And/or the ability of easements to make land more affordable and available to future generations. There are 5 times as many farmers over 65 in VA as under 35.

V. Sentinel Landscapes

(3:30-4:00)

- Lead: Kevin DuBois, DoD
- Participants learned about different Sentinel Landscape programs across the watershed and their connection to land protection efforts.
- Requested Action: Non-decisional
- Materials:
 - [REPI and Sentinel Landscape Partnership Programs Presentation Slides](#)
 - Youtube Video: [The Florida Grasshopper Sparrow: Connecting a Sentinel Landscape](#)

Key Takeaways

REPI (Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration) Program:

- REPI funds can satisfy the match for resilience or conservation program of any federal agency. Installations can leverage intergovernmental support agreements to fund state or local governments to conduct off base natural resource management activities
- 19 Sentinel Landscapes exist across the country. The Chesapeake Bay Watershed has 4 Sentinel Landscapes: Virginia Security Corridor Landscape (includes the Tidewater Potomac Landscape), Middle Chesapeake Landscape, Kittatinny Ridge Landscape. See the slides for information on each one.
- Sentinel Landscape Partnership Program coordinates across federal agencies, state and local

- governments, and NGOs to advance sustainable land use practices around military installations
- REPI funds can provide compatibility, resilience, and quality of life projects to installations and defense communities.
- Each Sentinel Landscape has at least one coordinator, whose job it is to put together plans of priority projects, find priority geographic areas, and bring partners together who may be working in those areas as well.
- GIS mapping can be explored to find overlap priority areas across partner programs.

VI. Adjourn

(4:00pm)

- **Next Meeting: October 6, 2:00-4:00pm**
 - **Good News Round Robin: Exchange positive updates, including new initiatives, grant opportunities, program successes, and emerging resources that support protection work.**
- Cacapon Lost Rivers Land Trust in WV, closed their 59th conservation easement of 136 acres, and one of 177 acres is coming up this month
- MD Rural Legacy program requires 100 foot buffer on streams; CBF planted a 26 acre forest buffer in Frederick County, Catoquin Creek, which elevated a 250 acre farm and the ranking criteria to get a permanent easement funding through the legacy program
- Land Acquisition and Planning dept at MD DNR attended a celebration of the acquisition of a property that became the first State park in Wicomico county in MD, acquiring a 445.8 acre property. The park will likely open in 2027, but the acquisition has been completed.
- DC DOEE met with Casey Trees, which just acquired a 12 acre forested parcel in Ward 8, placed a conservation easement, and will open it up to the public with trails.
- Lancaster Farming Trust - completed 17 conservation related projects implementing agricultural BMPs on 17 farms so far this year. All of those farms are under permanent preservation through conservation easements.
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Attendees:

- Daniel Koval, CRC
- Sophie Waterman, USGS
- Jeff Lerner, EPA
- Cass Klingaman, NY DEC
- Cheryl Wise, MD DNR
- Jenna Talbot, DE DNREC
- Kerri Batrowny, DE DNREC
- Samantha Cotten, DE DNREC
- Carly Costello, DE DNREC
- Michelle Campbell, DC DOEE
- Emily Merrill, Cacapon & Lost Rivers Land Trust
- Ellen Shepard, VA's United Land Trusts
- Jennifer Perkins, American Farmland Trust
- Amanda Cather, American Farmland Trust
- Rob Schnabel, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
- Kevin Tate, Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley
- Jeff Swinehart, Lancaster Farmland Trust
- Desiree Shelley, Indigenous Conservation Council
- Parker Agelasto, Capital Region Land Conservancy
- Chase Douglas, Chesapeake Conservation Partnership
- Kevin Du Bois, DoD
- Aurelia Gracia, NPS
- John Wolf, USGS
- Taylor Woods, USGS
- Maggie Woodward, CBC
- Megan Beever, CBC
- Emily Heller, EPA
- Sarah Brzezinski, EPA
- Eric Hughes, EPA