

Protected Lands Outcome Management Strategy

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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.

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 a 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*

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*

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*

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.

Information on wetlands, natural areas supporting healthy streams, and tribal homelands will be added

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.

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 ProtectedLands_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 Situation Analysis

The following table identifies challenges to 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.

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- 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.	X	
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	x	

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.		
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
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	

Snapshot of Signatory Programs

Jurisdictional Programs

Delaware

- [Delaware Open Space Program](#) (Estimated \$3 million in Chesapeake Bay Watershed) aims to protect our natural and cultural resources, conserve biological diversity, protect parks, forests, wildlife areas, nature preserves, etc., to provide for outdoor recreation and allow for water resource conservation.

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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 in FY27) The goal of this grant program is to provide funding for land conservation partners across New York State, increase climate resiliency and adaptation, and support conserving 30% of NY's lands and waters by 2030 ([30x30 initiative](#)).
- [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.

Pennsylvania

- [Department of Agriculture Farmland Preservation Program](#) (\$22,956,951 in FFY25; additional \$17.9 million from county programs in FY25). The program is a partnership between all levels of government and non-profit organizations - with a common goal of saving prime farmland. The Pennsylvania Agricultural

Conservation Easement Purchase Program was developed to strengthen Pennsylvania's agricultural economy and protect prime farmland. This program enables state and county governments to purchase conservation easements from farmers. The program was approved in 1988 and the first easement was purchased in December of 1989. To date, 6,600+ farms have been approved for easement purchases totaling 660,000+ acres.

- [Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund](#). Created in 1993, the Key 93 initiative operated solely on realty transfer tax revenue, with 65% directed to Pennsylvania's Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). The DCNR allocation supports the rehabilitation and enhancement of state parks, forestry, trails and river protection, emphasizing the importance of conserving natural resources and promoting outdoor recreation. Funds are also directed toward grants for local recreation projects that can have land acquisition elements, and grants for land trusts are provided to plan for and acquire open space.
 - 2025 land trust acquisition grants: \$12.1 million
 - 2025 community acquisition grants: \$2.9 million
- Oil and Gas Lease Fund. Established in 1955, the Oil and Gas Lease Fund supports conservation, recreation and flood control initiatives. It has enabled the purchase of state park lands, acquisition of mineral rights, infrastructure and trail upgrades, habitat protection and restoration, and the procurement of recreational equipment.

Maryland

- [Rural Legacy Program](#) (\$15.3M in FY25) This program 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, including 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.
- [Maryland Agriculture Land Preservation Foundation](#) (MALPF) (\$24.5M In FY25) MALPF 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 amounting to over 350,000 acres since 1980.
- [Maryland Program Open Space](#) (POS) (\$34.7M in FY25) POS Stateside preserves natural areas for public recreation and watershed and wildlife protection across Maryland through the acquisition of fee simple land and conservation easements, while POS Local provides financial and technical assistance to local subdivisions for the planning, acquisition, and or development of recreational land or open space areas, including working lands, targeted ecological areas, productive farm and forest lands.

Virginia

- [Office of Working Lands Preservation](#) – (no dedicated funding) Work with public agencies and private groups to slow the loss of valuable working landscapes in Virginia through education, technical assistance, and accepting open-space easements.
- [Forest Legacy](#) – (FY25 \$2,102,500 state required match and \$8,410,000 federal) Partnership between DOF and USDA Forest Service to conserve forestland under threat of conversion to other land uses. Qualifying properties must be within identified Legacy Areas.
- [Purchase of Development Rights Program](#) – (FY25 - \$437,500 distributed to participating counties with PDR programs, all within the Bay) Partnership between DOF and participating localities. DOF equally distributes the funding allocated to the Virginia Farmland and Forestland Preservation Fund to localities that can provide matching funds for the purchase of open-space easements.

West Virginia

- [Outdoor Heritage Conservation Fund](#): A state program that gives out grants to protect important wildlife habitats, farmlands, and public recreation areas.
- [West Virginia Division of Natural Resources](#): Protects public lands through hands-on restoration projects and runs the Master Naturalists Program to train environmental stewards.

District of Columbia

- [Office of District Waterways Management \(\\$270,000 in FY26\)](#) The Office of District Waterways Management advises District agencies on waterways adjacent land-use and infrastructure decisions that affect local rivers. Through the development of the Waterways Advisory Plan, ODWM identifies priority access points and supports projects that improve connectivity, safety, and equitable access to waterfront spaces across the District.

Chesapeake Bay Commission

- As a tri-state legislative commission, the Chesapeake Bay Commission advances the goals of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement by working collaboratively with Bay Program partners to identify and pursue legislative, budgetary, and policy needs within the legislatures of our member states and the U.S. Congress.

Federal Programs

[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 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.

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.

Management Approaches 4: Protected Lands Workgroup

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.