



Stewardship Workgroup – September 2026 Meeting

September 29, 2026
11:00 AM – 12:30 PM

[Visit the meeting webpage for meeting materials and additional information.](#)

Purpose: The purpose of this meeting was to highlight Stewardship Lightning Talks showcasing stewardship efforts in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, welcome and orient new Workgroup members to the group, to provide updates on the status of the Management Strategy for the Stewardship Outcome, and to discuss the restructured Stewardship Committees.

Minutes

I. **Welcome and Agenda Overview** **11:00 – 11:05 AM**

Participants were invited to briefly introduce themselves in the chat.

Leads: Marissa O'Neill, DC DOEE (Chair); Meredith Lemke, CRC (Staffer)

II. **Stewardship Lightning Talk: Lancaster Water Week** **11:05 – 11:35 AM**

Kelly Slippey discussed the success of Lancaster Water Week and how the celebration brings together partners and community members to connect with and care for over 1,400 miles of streams and rivers across Lancaster County.

Lead: Kelly Slippey, Lancaster Conservancy

Materials: [Presentation slides](#)

Lightning Talk Highlights:

- Since 2017, Lancaster Water Week (LWW) has been an annual celebration of the 1,400 miles of streams and rivers that flow through Lancaster County. LWW has grown to include more than 40 partners putting on more than 60 events focused on engaging and educating the community about the streams and rivers.
- Diverse partnerships (e.g., with other nonprofits, corporate groups, government groups, faith-based organizations, and education groups) each have the opportunity to engage different communities and reach people where they are.
- Kelly prompted attendees to consider: *Who are the non-traditional partners in our communities who care deeply about our waterways and need to be invited to the table?*
- Lancaster Water Week Keys to Success:
 - Creating space for partners to implement unique, creative events within their wheelhouse.
 - Some of the most successful LWW activations also happen at events where folks have already gathered for a different reason, e.g., First Fridays, and doing joint events can engage community members who would not have typically showed up to a LWW event.
 - Collaboration between partners creates unique, standout events that reach beyond individual partner audiences.

- “It takes a community to heal a waterway.”
- Lancaster Conservancy’s Lessons Learned:
 - Communication is key to collaboration.
 - Partnerships take time.
 - Cohesive marketing and messaging across events and partners matter.
- Communication strategy:
 - This year, Lancaster Conservancy hosted an introductory webinar in January for anyone who is interested in hosting an event. After the webinar, interested hosts were sent an extensive FAQ sheet, an event proposal form, and a list of important dates and deadlines. Kelly also made herself available for one-on-one conversations to brainstorm and refine event ideas with partners. This resulted in high-quality event proposals.

Q&A Notes:

- Meredith Lemke - How does Lancaster Conservancy track, evaluate, and communicate participation in LWW events to capture a picture of the magnitude of outreach, engagement, and on-the-ground projects? What types of technical or logistical support does Lancaster Conservancy provide to partners to help them with event design and/or distribution?
 - Kelly – Lots of spreadsheets! I have a back of house spreadsheet where I keep track of all of the partners who we are engaging with and who we may not be able to engage this year, but can reach back out to the next year.
 - We set clear expectations from the outset (in the FAQ packet) about reporting deadlines and what types of data we want to be tracked, e.g., number of native seeds distributed, etc. We also send repeated reminders about the reporting deadline.
- Patrick Crump – Do partners bring their own funding for the activities? Do their own organizing?
 - Kelly - LC provides partners with digital assets and provides the main marketing push (e.g., through press releases, billboards, Water Week brochure, etc.) but LC does not directly provide funding for partners.
 - Central location for information: www.LancasterWaterWeek.org
 - LC no longer hosts all of the event registrations. This shift helps partners have more autonomy over their events. LC provides coaching about communication, registration, and reminder best practices.
- Julie Lawson - Have you ever experienced any “rogue” events from the community, like they weren’t registered as a partner?
 - Kelly - That was a problem in the early years. Folks thought they could kind of jump on the bandwagon and call themselves a Water Week event. It hasn’t happened as much in the past 3 years.

III. Stewardship Lightning Talk: Plant Virginia Natives Initiative 11:35 – 12:00 PM

Virginia Witmer discussed the Plant Virginia Natives Initiative, specifically the regional native plant marketing campaign and the creation of regional plant guides which have helped the initiative grow greatly over the past 17 years.

Lead: Virginia Witmer, Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program

Materials: [Presentation slides](#); [Fact-Sheet](#)

Lightning Talk Highlights:

- The Plant Virginia Natives marketing partnership is a collaborative initiative to increase the use and availability of Virginia native species. There are two key facets: (1) The statewide marketing partnership which collaborates on and coordinates shared messaging; these efforts are guided by a steering team of partners that identifies shared needs, goals, and projects. (2) A network of 10

regional native plant marketing campaigns that follows a community-based social marketing model. The development of the model started with a 2008 survey that assessed attitudes, behaviors, and awareness of native plants to assess the barriers and benefits that inhibit or could encourage the public to plant more native plants.

- 3 Main Components of the Campaign:
 - **Captivating communication materials** to gain attention and to educate about natives, e.g., regional native plant guides & www.PlantVirginiaNatives.org website
 - **Collecting a pledge** to plant natives to instill a social norm in favor of native species;
 - Providing **point of sale prompts** to reach consumers when they are deciding what to purchase and to identify native plants to retail partners.
- Regional native plant guides are one of the most popular campaign media resources. Over 200,000 hard copies have been distributed and they are free to download at www.PlantVirginiaNatives.org
- A 2025 Behavior Change Survey helps evaluate the results of these efforts:
 - There have been notable improvements in knowledge and attitudes about native species since the 2013 survey.
 - 31% feel “knowledgeable” or “very knowledgeable” today compared to 8% in 2013.
 - Information and conversations about native plants are having a big impact. 68% are more likely to want native plants as a result.
 - Garden center volunteers are making a big difference by working with retail centers to label native plants.

Q&A Notes:

- Marissa – How have you tailored your stewardship program over the years to meet the needs of different audiences?
 - Virginia – Just after Covid, we needed to address a new barrier – an influx of gardeners who were new to gardening. We developed a 12-part series on landscaping with Virginia natives and gardening 101, and developed a guidance document of questions to ask yourself when you’re considering planting.
 - Virginia – We also have translated our marketing materials into 8 languages and we’re close to the release of a new guide in Spanish on statewide suitable species.
- Marissa – A question for both Virginia and Kelly: Both of your programs have been active for over 10 years now. What is one thing that has surprised you as you’ve grown the program?
 - Kelly – Year over year there’s more and more people engaging. And there is still also such a need in the community for 101 level education. Many people don’t understand what a watershed is or where the water that lands on their houses go and how they affect the folks downstream of them too.
 - Virginia – One thing I’m still learning is where to nudge and when to just let the organic nature of the initiative do its thing and this translates into conversations around whether we can or should institutionalize some or all of the work we’re doing. And we also do not have specific funding for this initiative, so the work we’ve achieved is achieved through a pooling of partner resources.
 - Virginia – Another great thing to keep in mind is all of the puns: “We have planted the seeds of change. We have seen a social norm growing towards the use of native plants. So, we’re seeing the fruit of our labor ripening, and these relationships blossoming between organizations and people who otherwise would not have come together to the table.”

IV. Stewardship Workgroup Membership and CBP Updates

12:00 – 12:15 PM

Stewardship Workgroup leadership provided a brief history of the Stewardship Workgroup for new members and provided context regarding the new governance structure for the CBP. Then,

new members were invited to introduce themselves. Finally, leadership provided updates on the status of the Management Strategy for the Stewardship Outcome.

Leads: Marissa O'Neill, DC DOEE (Chair); Katie Ayers, EPA (Coordinator); Meredith Lemke, CRC (Staffer)

Materials: [Stewardship Workgroup Meeting September 2026 presentation](#); [Chesapeake Bay Program Strategic Plan Deadlines](#)

Discussion Notes:

- The Stewardship Management Strategy chapter was submitted to the Engaged Communities Goal Team for review and feedback by October 9th, 2026.
- The Engaged Communities Management Strategy, containing chapters from the Local Government Leadership, Public Access, School District Environmental Literacy Planning, Stewardship, Student Environmental Literacy Experiences, and Workforce outcomes, will be submitted to the Policy Steering Committee (PSC) for review and feedback at their November 5th meeting.
- The Public Feedback Period for the full CBP Strategic Plan is January 5th-31st, 2027. The workgroup will 1) continue revising the Stewardship Management Strategy chapter and 2) begin drafting the Stewardship workplan after this period.

V. Stewardship Workgroup Committees Updates

12:15 – 12:25 PM

Stewardship Workgroup leadership briefly shared the vision, short term actions, and long-term actions of the two restructured Action Teams. Participants were invited to provide feedback on the vision statement document by EOB October 2nd.

Leads: Meredith Lemke, CRC (Staffer); Marissa O'Neill, DC DOEE (Chair)

Materials: [Stewardship Workgroup Meeting September 2026 presentation](#); [Stewardship Committees Vision Statements](#)

Action Items:

- Stewardship Workgroup members are invited to provide written feedback on the Stewardship Committee Vision Statements document **by EOB October 2nd**.
- Members are invited to indicate interest in participation in the Committees via Google Form and when2meet **by EOB October 17th**.

Discussion Notes:

- Two small committees will be formed to advance Workgroup priorities and short-term actions between quarterly Workgroup meetings.
 - **Stewardship Network Ambassadors Focus Areas:** maintaining and improving the Chesapeake Steward Map; keeping contact info and network data current; identifying and strengthening partnerships; using network science to inform stewardship collaboration; offering training and outreach to increase understanding and use of network mapping tools.
 - **Stewardship Resource and Capacity Committee Focus Areas:** collecting and organizing useful resources; curating practical tools (e.g., Local Concepts playbook, Chesapeake Behavior Change) for stewardship practitioners; elevating case studies and success stories; sharing research, training opportunities, and funding information; distributing content through various communication channels (e.g., newsletters, recorded webinars, write-ups from Lightning Talks).

VI. Wrap-Up

12:25 – 12:30 PM

Lead: Katie Ayers, EPA (Coordinator)

VII. Adjourn

12:30 PM

Next Meeting: December 2nd, 11:00 AM –12:30 PM

Attendance:

- Amy Handen, EPA Chesapeake Bay Program Office
- AshLeigh McKinney, Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control
- Bernie McGurl, Lackawanna River Conservation Association
- Jenna Talbot, Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control
- Jenny McGarvey, Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay
- Jodi Sulpizio, Penn State Extension
- Julie Lawson, DC Department of Energy and Environment
- Katie Ayers, EPA Chesapeake Bay Program Office
- Kelly Slippey, Lancaster Conservancy
- Lauren Sauder, Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay
- Madi Corbin, AmeriCorps VISTA with West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection
- Marissa O'Neill, DC Department of Energy and Environment
- Mary DeWees, West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection
- Matthew Kierce, Chesapeake Monitoring Cooperative
- Meredith Lemke, Chesapeake Research Conservancy
- Patrick Crump, Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network
- Riley Lewis, SouthWings
- Shruti Syal, Virginia Commonwealth University
- Spenser Balog, Casey Trees
- Steve Raabe, OpinionWorks
- Victoria Prouty, Otsego County Conservation Association
- Virginia Whitmer, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality