



Wetlands Tidal and Non-Tidal Workgroup Meeting

Tuesday, July 14th, 2025
1:00 – 2:00 PM

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

This meeting was recorded for internal use only to assure the accuracy of meeting notes.

Purpose: This meeting is to launch the development of the new Wetlands Management Strategy by establishing a collaborative drafting timeline and reviewing an initial baseline draft.

Minutes

I. Welcome, Introductions & Announcements (1:00 - 1:05 PM)

Lead: **Pam Mason** (Virginia Institute of Marine Science, VIMS) Chair, **Tess Danielson** (Department of Energy & Environment, DOEE) Tidal Vice-Chair, **Nancy Schumm** (City of Gaithersburg) Non-Tidal Vice-Chair, and **Jeff Sullivan** (U.S. Geological Survey, USGS) Waterbirds Vice-Chair.

II. Management Strategies Introduction (1:05 – 1:20 PM)

Lead: **Sarah Brzezinski** (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, EPA).

Material: Meeting webpage [here](#).

Our efforts are guided by three interconnected documents, starting with the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement revised in 2025, which defines our shared goals and targets. Building on that, our new Strategic Plan describes how we will accomplish those goals through goal-specific Management Strategies (MS). Finally, three-year work plans will outline the short-term, collaborative actions, required resources, and specific deliverables needed to carry out these strategies.

Our Strategic Plan will be a streamlined, 150- to 200-page document comprising goal-level MS, along with an introduction, accountability chapter, executive summary, and appendix. Each goal section will include a situation analysis to evaluate shared challenges, such as changing environmental conditions, as well as optional cross-cutting management approaches to foster collaboration across Workgroups (WG). Responsibilities are clearly defined: Goal Teams (GT) will oversee the Strategic Plan to be approved by the Policy Steering Committee (PSC) while designated Outcome Authors will draft the detailed work plans.

Within the Strategic Plan, there are 21 specific outcome subsections, each spanning about 7-8 pages. These subsections will detail our baseline and current conditions, monitoring progress and

indicators, an outcome-specific situation analysis, a snapshot of existing signatory programs, management approaches, participating partners, and relevant statutory authorities. When drafting these sections, authors should consider key guiding questions regarding our greatest challenges, how to prioritize work through 2040, and where a collaborative partnership approach adds the most value.

To streamline the development process, my office is actively assisting with data collection to avoid sending duplicate requests to our partners. As you draft your outcome subsections, keep in mind that management approaches should be broad enough to encompass multiple actions while remaining specific enough to provide clear direction. Additional details regarding the confirmed list of participating signatory partners will be shared in November.

Discussion:

Q: *Julie Reichert-Nguyen:* Just to clarify, you mentioned that these will be prepared before we know which signatories are going to support which outcomes? What does the voting membership look like currently for the Wetlands WG?

- **A:** *Sarah Brzezinski:* The signatories want to see the strategies that are put in place before they sign up to participate. The strategies will be shared in draft form with the PSC on November 5th. After that, we are hoping to get the list of signatory participation but that would be a draft list for public feedback. I would encourage WGs to coordinate with their GTs early and often so that you can present your draft strategies, maybe this summer or this fall and have feedback from those signatory partners about what would enable their support or if there were any red flags that would prevent it. This would give the WG an earlier read on who will be planning to participate in strategies.
- **A:** *Chris Guy:* To establish clearer governance, GTs rather than individual WGs will now officially approve membership, though consensus-building remains the primary way of working. While the original July 30th deadline proved unrealistic, GTs are aiming to have voting members in place by mid-August while prioritizing the completion of the MS.

III. Past Management Strategies and What Has Changed (1:20 – 1:35 PM)

Lead: **Pam Mason** (VIMS).

Material: Meeting webpage [here](#).

In the 2014 Watershed Agreement, the program focused on a massive target of 85,000 acres of tidal and non-tidal wetlands alongside 150,000 acres of enhancement by 2025. The new 2025 Agreement narrows and refines these targets to 3,000 acres of tidal wetlands, 3,000 acres of non-tidal wetlands, 15,000 acres of combined enhancement, and targeted support for waterbirds by 2040.

Previous MS revealed significant ongoing challenges that continue to impact the partnership today. The primary gaps identified centered around tracking, specifically the disconnect between status and trends on the ground versus regulatory "no net loss" tracking, and severe capacity constraints within natural resource agencies. Furthermore, historical funding was rarely wetland-specific, forcing wetland restoration projects to compete with other initiatives like stream restoration, while outdated 1970s non-tidal mapping highlighted persistent data limitations.

To address these core issues, previous efforts were organized into functional categories, including reporting, prioritization, barrier removal, technical understanding, and local engagement. These initiatives aimed to shift the focus beyond pure water quality to high-quality habitat preservation, integrate multiple conservation goals, and improve communication across diverse audiences like private landowners, project implementers, and local decision-makers.

As a part of this process, Wetlands WG has restructured its leadership. The WG now operates under three vice chairs covering tidal wetlands, non-tidal wetlands, and waterbirds. The Black Duck Action Team was folded into the Wetlands WG.

Several key achievements and tools developed since the last strategy will directly inform the new path forward. Notable recent efforts include the completed Tidal Wetland Strategic Plan, a Non-Tidal Wetlands Communication Strategy, dedicated funding analyses, and technical Scientific & Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) reports. Combined with state wildlife action plans and mapping upgrades, these completed projects provide a strong foundation as teams build out the updated MS.

IV. Review of Initial Working Draft

(1:35 – 1:55 PM)

Lead: **Wetland Chairs.**

Material: Meeting webpage [here](#).

An initial draft of the Wetlands Outcome MS was generated with some help from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) team members using Artificial Intelligence (AI). While the AI tool successfully adopted the general structural framework outlined earlier by Sarah Brzezinski, we noticed several immediate flaws in the output. The AI generated extra, unneeded tasks at the bottom of the document and included irrelevant contextual challenges, like "fluctuations in global supply chains", demonstrating the typical quirks and noise that come with automated drafts.

The primary limitation of the draft stems from how the AI gathered its information. Because AI functions as a web crawler and recent public-facing Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) data heavily emphasizes tidal wetlands due to a recently completed strategy, the generated text is almost entirely skewed toward tidal environments. This creates a significant gap, as non-tidal wetlands represent the vast majority of wetlands within the watershed. We are actively coordinating with the NOAA team to re-query the tool for non-tidal program data, while also identifying key omissions like the National Wetland Condition Assessment in the monitoring section.

The draft currently contains incomplete sections, such as missing non-tidal statutory authorities and underrepresented state programs and will require significant editing down to achieve the necessary conciseness. To streamline the review process, the WG's leadership team plans to first refine and clean up this "straw man" draft before sharing it broadly. This approach ensures the full WG can focus their time efficiently on verifying details, filling in critical gaps, and ensuring both tidal and non-tidal initiatives are properly balanced.

Discussion:

Q: *Sarah Brzezinski:* What are people's thoughts on the challenges and management approaches, as your expertise is essential for shaping these template sections? To clarify how federal agencies fit into the "signatory programs" snapshot, EPA signs the agreement on behalf of all federal entities, but our intent is to solicit broader input from other key federal agencies.

- **A:** *Pamela Mason:* When looking at the situational analysis, I see it as "context" that crosswalks directly with the communications and funding challenges we identified in our previous strategy. Beyond that, I am concerned that limiting our snapshot strictly to "signatory programs" omits major non-signatory contributors like Fish and Wildlife, National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and key Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) partners like Ducks Unlimited and The Nature Conservancy (TNC).
- **Response:** *Chris Guy:* We don't need to reinvent the wheel on these challenges because we can draw directly from the draft TNC report on non-tidal wetlands and the existing tidal strategic plan, and I can share access to those files. Regarding non-signatory and NGO partners, the governance guidance technically limited the federal listing to EPA, but we take credit for the massive amount of on-the-ground work our NGO and agency partners do. I suggest we simply create an additional "other partners" subheading in the template to capture these critical efforts; if the PSC wants to remove them later, they can, but we should make the document our own. Process-wise, the chairs will take on creating a refined draft first, followed by a dedicated WG meeting in early-to-mid August.
- **Comment:** *Kevin Du Bois:* Looking at the signatory snapshot, I want to point out that limiting this section strictly to EPA isn't fully representative because other federal agencies like NOAA and Fish and Wildlife do a significant amount of work in the wetlands space. Since non-EPA federal agencies are technically not direct signatories, a rigid interpretation of the template risks excluding their vital contributions.
- **Comment from chat:** *Gregory Noe:* The USGS also contributes to support the outcome through science (but not funding for implementation). Having that added is important for USGS staff to justify continued contributions. In the USGS we literally list WWG needs in our internal planning and prioritization documents to align our work with your needs.

Q: *Kevin Du Bois:* Could you clarify the use of the term "snapshot"? What is the intent behind that? In thinking about the end user, I would want to avoid an exhaustive list of every program and rather have a summary. I think it makes sense to highlight unique efforts rather than repeating the same common programs seven times across different states.

- **A:** *Sarah Brzezinski:* The term "snapshot" was chosen deliberately to avoid creating an exhaustive, year-to-year list of every supporting program across the watershed. Its goal is to feature each jurisdiction's "spotlight" program, showcase the diversity of efforts, and recognize partner contributions without projecting future appropriations. Understanding these existing efforts helps us avoid duplicating work, identify gaps or underrepresented approaches, and serve both public interest and strategic planning goals.
- **Comment:** *Chris Guy:* Because state wetland programs span multiple agencies, I suggest restricting each entity to their top two signature programs: one tidal and one non-tidal. We

can draw from the existing 2022/2023 Wetlands Action Plan as a baseline. The MS should remain a high-level overview of our top priorities, while granular details, comprehensive lists, and secondary actions belong in the work plan or an appendix. Additionally, I will work offline to share source documents (like the draft TNC report) with the chairs, as many internal files are not currently accessible on the public webpage.

Comment: *Pamela Mason:* Regarding the draft text, which is currently all AI-generated, I strongly ask partners to directly write out their preferred text rather than giving verbal suggestions, so we can co-produce the document efficiently. Ultimately, our overall situational context remains unchanged: we are still losing wetlands and face ongoing funding and communication hurdles, but we now have better tools to address these challenges.

- **Comment from chat:** *Denise Clearwater:* If you are sending AI-generated text, please flag it so we know to revise with correct information.

V. Summer Drafting Timeline & Deliverables (1:55 – 2:00 PM)

Lead: **Wetland Chairs.**

Material: Meeting webpage [here](#).

VI. Adjourn (2:00 PM)

Next meeting: August 18th from 1-3PM.

Attendance:

- Daniel Koval (CRC)
- Cassandra Davis (DEC)
- Heather Hepburn (MDE)
- James Spatz (PADEP)
- Megan Beever (CBC)
- Nancy Schumm (City of Gaithersburg)
- Shelby Reisinger (PADEP)
- Kristen Saacke Blunk (Headwaters LLC)
- Elisa Frazier (DEQ)
- Gregory Noe (USGS)
- Jeffrey Sullivan (USGS)
- Melissa Yearick (Upper Susquehanna Coalition)
- Denise Clearwater (MDE)
- Erin Reilly (CBNERR-VIMS)
- Emily Young (ICPRB)
- Sarah Hilderbrand (DNR)
- Kevin Du Bois (DoW-CBP)
- Karinna Nunez (VIMS)
- Allison Rogerson (DNREC)
- Michelle Henicheck (DEQ)