Guiding Principles:
The 2017 Chesapeake Bay TMDL Mid-Point Assessment

Purpose: Leading up to 2017, the December 2010 Chesapeake Bay TMDL called for an assessment to review our progress toward meeting the nutrient and sediment pollutant load reductions identified in the 2010 TMDL and Phase I and Phase II Watershed Implementation Plans (WIPs). This was designed as a mid-course check on our progress to allow necessary adjustments in strategies to ensure that the Chesapeake Bay Program Partnership (Partnership) could achieve its 2025 goals for putting the necessary practices in place to restore the Bay. The purpose of these Guiding Principles is to provide a framework for the mid-point assessment and other implementation work in the interim and to help set priorities moving forward.

The Bay TMDL 2017 mid-point assessment has three primary objectives: 1) to gather input from the Partnership on issues and priorities for both this 2017 review as well as the post-2017 period; 2) for EPA to continue its oversight role on the implementation of the Bay TMDL and determine if the 2017 interim goal of the Bay TMDL is on track; and 3) to assist in determining what changes should be considered as we move from the 2017 mid-point and focus on implementation of the jurisdictions' Phase III WIPs and meeting the 2025 TMDL goal.

Recognizing that change is inevitable over a 15 year period in a dynamic environment like the Bay, it is appropriate for us to take stock of the latest science and data, the range of available tools and controls, and how any updates will inform our collective strategies to attain applicable water quality standards for both the mid-point assessment and then the subsequent 2025 goal as outlined in the Bay TMDL.

The seven watershed jurisdictions agreed to provide updates to their current WIPs for Phase III in 2017 that will address any needed modifications to implementation actions informed by the mid-point assessment, as well as state implementation experience to date. The Phase III WIPs will ensure that all practices are in place by 2025 to ensure attainment of applicable water quality standards in the Bay and its tidal tributaries.

Schedule: EPA, the seven watershed jurisdictions, along with their federal agency partners, will continue to monitor progress towards meeting the TMDL load reductions utilizing the existing accountability framework. This accountability framework, described within the Chesapeake Bay TMDL includes the jurisdictions' WIPs, two-year milestones by jurisdictions and federal agencies, annual progress reporting and tracking, and federal actions if needed. To inform the mid-point assessment, we will follow a detailed critical path schedule that includes the following:

- Gathering Partnership input on priority needs for the mid-point assessment
- Incorporating BMP expert panel and workgroup recommendations, with a focus on adding BMPs and updating current BMPs to enhance the evaluation of progress
- Refining decision support tools, as appropriate, to enhance the evaluation of progress and crediting of actions on the ground
- Testing any refinements and, as appropriate, tool modifications in response to this testing
- Developing draft and final Phase III WIPs
- Continuing EPA oversight of WIP implementation.

The following **principles** will guide the Partnership through the mid-point assessment and Phase III WIP development process:

PRINCIPLE 1: KEEP THE FOCUS ON IMPLEMENTATION AND MAINTAIN STABLE TRACKING AND REPORTING

The number one water quality priority of the Partnership is the focused implementation of the Chesapeake Bay TMDL, the jurisdictions' WIPs and 2-year milestones, and the Federal Agencies' actions under Executive Order 13508. The mid-point assessment should not interfere with maintaining the shared goal of having practices in place by 2017 that will achieve 60% of the necessary pollution reductions compared to the 2009 Bay TMDL baseline. The tracking and reporting process of the accountability framework, which is informed by decision support tools, including models and monitoring data, will remain stable up through the mid-point assessment. EPA will continue its TMDL oversight function and assess progress through 2017. Progress will be measured against the Phase II WIP Planning Targets set in August 2011, the Phase I and Phase II WIPs, and the 2-year milestones using Phase 5.3.2 of the Watershed Model. The Partnership will also track trends of nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment in the watershed and use updated monitoring data and attainment of dissolved oxygen, chlorophyll-*a*, and water clarity/SAV standards as part of an integrated approach toward assessing progress.

PRINCIPLE2: ENHANCE DECISION SUPPORT AND ASSESSMENT TOOLS TO ENABLE SUCCESSFUL ENGAGEMENT OF LOCAL PARTNERS

Because the acceleration of implementation efforts at the local level is critical to successfully achieving the Bay TMDL implementation goals, it is essential that the tools and monitoring data and other inputs that inform accountability framework be enhanced to foster the sustained engagement of local partners in the Bay restoration process. The Partnership has an opportunity to encourage and strengthen the commitments to accelerate implementation by incorporating improved local area data and information into the accountability framework in a manner that safeguards the stability enunciated in Principle 1. The Partnership will aim to improve and expand the use of monitoring data in assessing load reduction and water quality restoration progress and in evaluating local and regional effectiveness of management actions. The Partnership will work towards aligning local information, monitoring data and other indicators with the existing modeling, planning and reporting tools that support the accountability framework and enhance the evaluation of progress.

PRINCIPLE 3: PROMOTE THE INCORPORTATION OF NEW OR REFINED BMPS AND VERIFICATION OF PRACTICES INTO EXISTING ACCOUNTABILITY TOOLS AND REPORTING PROTOCOLS

The Partnership will incorporate the work of the BMP Expert Panels as they seek to add or refine BMPs to enhance the evaluation of progress and crediting of practices on the ground. The

Partnership will also continue work towards developing, adopting and implementing verification protocols for accurately crediting practices resulting in actual nutrient and sediment load reductions. Through verification, the goal is to provide credit for practices that result in additional water quality benefits while eliminating credit for those practices that are not improving water quality because of inadequate design, installation or maintenance.

PRINCIPLE4: ADDRESS EMERGING ISSUES THAT MAY IMPACT CURRENT STRATEGIES AND FUTURE PLANS

The Partnership will work to address other complex issues, including those previously recognized by the Partnership, which can affect actions necessary to restore Chesapeake Bay water quality. Examples include: accounting for the potential consequences of population growth and continuing climate change, accounting for innovative, new technologies, factoring in new understanding of the Susquehanna River dams' influence on nutrient and sediment pollutant loads, understanding and recognizing year-to-year variability of rainfall-driven nutrient and sediment loads and their impact on Bay water quality and taking full advantage of living resources as natural filters. This is part and parcel of the adaptive management commitment of the Partnership to consider new knowledge and updates in information which can best inform our watershed restoration strategies.

PRINCIPLE 5: PRIORITIZE MID-POINT ASSESSMENT ACTIONS AND USE ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT TO ENSURE PHASE III WIPs MEET WATER QUALITY GOALS

The Partnership recognizes the need to adaptively manage the Chesapeake Bay restoration. The Partnership will provide input on and review changes in decision-support tools, such as the models and methods used to assess progress, and weigh the effects of these proposed changes against the impacts to meeting the ultimate goal of having all of the management practices on the ground by 2025 to meet water quality standards. The Partnership will carefully consider scientific, technical, financial and other implementation factors during this review.
