Conowingo Watershed Implementation Plan Steering Committee meeting

November 21, 2019

Activity 1 Handout: Draft Conowingo WIP Outreach FAQ Document

Why do we Need to Reduce Pollution in the Chesapeake Bay?
The Chesapeake Bay is in poor health due to pollution from a variety of sources – including stormwater runoff, air emissions, wastewater, agriculture, development, and more. For many years, pollution that flowed into the streams and rivers of the Chesapeake Bay was not managed to meet water quality standards. At the same time the population in the 64,000-square mile watershed increased significantly – rising 43 percent between 1980 and 2017, from 12.7 million people to 18.2 million people. All of this has harmed water quality in the watershed.

In 2010, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) established the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), which set nitrogen, phosphorous, and sediment reduction goals so that the Bay would meet clean water standards by 2025. Sediment can smother aquatic life and pollutants such as nitrogen and phosphorus cause algae to grow in local waterways and the Chesapeake Bay that rob the waters of oxygen. To meet these goals the seven jurisdictions (Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia) that drain to the Bay developed Watershed Implementation Plans to help guide their Chesapeake Bay clean-up efforts

How Does a Watershed Implementation Plan Work?
Watershed Implementation Plans (WIPs) identify pollutant sources and methods to address those pollutants. This is done across three general tracks: first, they identify local pollution sources by category (such as urban, agriculture, forests, wastewater treatment plants, and septic systems); second, they identify the partners and resources that can help reduce pollution; and third, they identify the best strategies to reduce pollution to meet the 2025 goals.

Why is this WIP Focusing on the Conowingo Dam?
Jurisdictions throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed have made progress cleaning up the Bay since the TMDL was established in 2010. However, recent scientific studies have shown that the dam's reservoir is nearing "dynamic equilibrium" which means it will no longer serves as a sufficient sink for sediment and other pollutants and what flows in above the dam will eventually flow out. The Chesapeake Bay TMDL WIPs did not account for the Conowingo Dam's reduced ability to trap upstream pollution. To address this problem the EPA-Chesapeake Bay Program, and the Bay jurisdictions have been working since [2017] to develop a WIP specific to the Conowingo Dam.

Is the Conowingo WIP Independent from WIPs Currently in Development in Other States?
Yes. When complete, the Conowingo WIP will be its own plan, independent of the individual WIPs currently being developed by each of the Bay jurisdictions.

How Will the Conowingo Dam WIP be Created?

To assist in the development of the Conowingo WIP, the most up-to-date data, modeling, and technology will be used to target and track restoration practices where they will have the most strategic impact. The Environmental Protection Agency contracted with the Center for Watershed Protection, the Chesapeake Bay Trust, and the Chesapeake Conservancy to assist in overseeing various tasks including coordination, project identification, and developing a financing strategy to reduce the total amount of Nitrogen delivered to the Chesapeake Bay.

Who Will Pay for the Practices in the Conowingo WIP?
New financing methods are being developed that will be designed to help expedite progress toward restoration of the Chesapeake Bay.

How Much Nitrogen Will Need to be Reduced as Part of the Watershed Implementation Plan?
Current estimates are that six million pounds of nitrogen need to be reduced as part of the Conowingo WIP. To meet this target, the Chesapeake Bay Program and partner jurisdictions are utilizing an approach called "most effective basins" that involve implementing projects on lands located both upstream and downstream of the dam. Based on the amount of pollutant load being delivered to the Bay and planned restoration efforts some watersheds downstream of the dam could offer restoration opportunities that deliver benefits to the Chesapeake Bay comparable to restoration opportunities located upstream of the dam. These cost-effective downstream restoration opportunities could also be included in the Watershed Implementation Plan if the cost per pound of nitrogen reduced is similar or better than reductions associated with projects upstream of the dam.

If you would like more information about the Conowingo WIP visit ***insert website address here***.

Bay Watershed Facts (for a call-out box):
Rivers and streams from Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia drain to the Chesapeake Bay.
The largest river that flows into the Chesapeake Bay is the Susquehanna River, which starts near Cooperstown, New York.
The land draining into the Chesapeake Bay is 64,000 square miles in size.
More than 100,000 streams, creeks, and rivers drain into the Chesapeake Bay.

Maps needed for the fact sheet:
Map of the overall Bay Watershed
Map of the most effective basins