Chesapeake Partnership Indicators Past, Present, and Future

Issue: The Partnership needs to update its indictor framework to address the 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement. This paper provides a summary of the scope and proposed approach for the indicator update.

How the Partnership Uses Indicators

The Partnership relies heavily on the use of indicators to show our progress to public and oversight groups, and to adjust our actions to achieve the progress we have committed to. Indicators are published on our websites and used throughout the year in our press releases, news stories and social media messages. Key indicators are summarized at the end of the year in a single document, the Bay Barometer, to present a bigger picture of Bay and watershed health and restoration. Data collected to develop the indicators are used by a wealth of partners, including signatory representatives and nonprofit organizations.

Indicators and their data are also used by the Partnership to evaluate our progress. For instance, the Reducing Nitrogen, Phosphorus and Sediment Pollution indicators are one of the key lines of evidence EPA uses when reviewing the jurisdictions' progress toward meeting their two-year milestone targets. EPA and others also use it to report on GPRA goals and as part of the Agency's strategic planning. Other federal agencies use indicators to report on progress toward meeting outcomes committed to under the EO 13508 Strategy.

Moving the Indicators Framework into the Future

The current indicators framework is 10 years old and was based on *Chesapeake 2000* goals and commitment. When tracking or monitoring programs were no longer funded, indicators were removed, often impacting the Partnership's ability to communicate fully on specific functional groups (e.g. Watershed health, Bay health). When other commitments were established, such as the Chesapeake Bay TMDL, the Executive Order 13508, or the Chesapeake Action Plan, minor changes or additions were made to the indicators, but the framework was never re-evaluated.

The *2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement* articulates a new vision, goals and outcomes for the Chesapeake Bay Program. The Partnership is implementing an adaptive management process to manage the workload. The current indicators framework is being re-evaluated to determine how it should evolve to meet the Partnership's needs.

Scope: This re-evaluation must address the needs of the Partnership to measure and report progress toward the Agreement goals, outcomes, and management strategies to the interested public, oversight organizations (GAO, OMB, citizen organizations), and internal units (Management Board, PSC, EC, advisory committees). The indicators must also support decisions that will help the Partnership manage adaptively to reach outcomes, ensure the outcomes are meeting the intended goals, and ensure the goals are addressing the Partnership's vision. The re-evaluation should also consider how the framework can help achieve the implementation of the Chesapeake Bay Accountability and Recovery Act, particularly in providing accurate and transparent information to the independent evaluator.

For the effort, the Partnership must consider geography and scale, indicators that can provide information on changing environmental conditions, indicators that can be used for multiple outcomes,

and indicators that will show relationships between and among outcomes, between outcomes and goals, and between goals and the vision. This indicators framework will provide information to support the design and development of ChesapeakeProgress and ChesapeakeDecisions, both part of a suite of ChesapeakeStat websites.

Next Steps

Approach: An adhoc team has been established to update the Partnership's indicator framework and includes representative from STAR, GIT 6 (ChesapeakeStat), communications, and the web team. The team has initiated conversations on this re-evaluation and has begun meeting with GIT personnel to better understand what indicators are in place, what needs to be developed, and what new monitoring or tracking programs are needed to support this work. The team will use the feedback from the GITs and other CBP groups to develop a revised indicator framework. The revised indicators framework will provide an organized structure for understanding and communicating how we use the indicators and help the Partnership prioritize monitoring efforts.

Timeframe: The team is working toward a fall initial deadline to support timely development of ChesapeakeProgress and will interact with the GITs and Management Board during the process.

Indicators Background

History of the Indicators Program

The use of indicators to describe the health and restoration of the Chesapeake Bay watershed began in the early 1990s, with a series of graphs showing a variety of environmental conditions (such as fish populations or water quality monitoring) and restoration efforts (such as forest buffers planted or stream miles reopened to fish passage). Over the next decade, the indicators program grew to more than 100 indicators used to communicate progress.

In 2005, GAO released a report on the Chesapeake Bay Program recommending that the Partnership organize their indicators to convey more accurate and understandable information about the health of the Bay and our restoration efforts. They recommended that the Partnership develop an approach that would integrate all of these measures and thereby assess the overall progress made by the restoration effort toward the five goals outlined in *Chesapeake 2000*

The Partnership developed an indicators framework, sorting the indicators into functional groupings: Bay health, watershed health, restoration and protection efforts, and factors impacting Bay and watershed health. This framework also included an indicator hierarchy, sorting individual indicators into "reporting" and "diagnostic/detailed indicators" within each functional group (for more, see backgrounder on Chesapeake Bay Program Indicator Framework).

Partnership's Review of Indicators

The indicators framework was developed by the Monitoring and Assessment Committee, reviewed by STAC, and approved by the Management Board in 2005. The decisions for developing new indicators, retiring old indicators, and modifying existing indicators are made by the Management Board with recommendations from the affected GIT(s) and STAR. Once an indicator is approved by the Management Board, the appropriate GIT, with assistance from STAR as needed, is responsible for collecting and reporting tracking or monitoring information and data. Once the CBPO Indicators Coordinator receives the data, the charts and metadata are updated and reviewed for quality and completeness by the Indicators Coordinator and the GIT subject matter expert responsible for that indicator. The GIS Team updates relevant geographic data and maps. Once all of the information is updated, it is published on the Bay Program flagship website and ChesapeakeStat as appropriate. The Communications office determines if and when that indicator will be promoted through social media, press releases, etc., based on its editorial calendar and the newsworthy nature of the information. Any issues of concern are identified with the Communications Director at a bimonthly STAR meeting. The indicator's release may be embargoed on a case-by-case basis, but these cases are rare, with the Partnership erring on the side of transparency and timeliness.

All press releases are reviewed and approved by all partners through the Communications Workgroup. An annual Bay Barometer, summarizing Bay and Watershed health and restoration through key indicators, is released each winter. This publication uses existing indicators and progress and is approved by all signatories at the Management Board level.