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Public feedback on the revised Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement



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General feedback

- The revised Watershed Agreement needs uniform, plain language outcomes and targets with consistent formats and deadlines
- The Agreement needs to include regular progress reporting, provide transparency and accountability, and include real consequences for missed targets
- The Program should be more ambitious, not back off previous goals
- Calls for additional assessment and mitigation for solar and industrial-scale development (like warehouses and data centers) that threaten forests, farms and water quality



Feedback on Land Use Decision Support




DRAFT OUTCOME LANGUAGE:

- Develop and disseminate relevant and actionable land use information to organizations and communities involved in local and regional land use planning. This information will include past, present and future conditions, as well as the potential environmental and socioeconomic consequences of changing conditions.

DRAFT TARGETS:

- Continually increase the number, variety and/or geographic scope of use cases (e.g., watershed protection, aquatic connectivity, stormwater, tree canopy, or redevelopment) to inform land-use decisions and maintain the ecological integrity of watersheds supporting good stream health.
- Highlight at least two widely applicable use cases annually to showcase best practices and share this information with local governments and partners through Story Maps and/or other communication products.

Land Use Decision Support Feedback

- Support for outcome and strengthening conservation amid development
 - Need to empower local governments
 - Calls for more ambitious numeric targets on use cases
 - Need more specificity on what the focus will be in terms of specific land conversion types and what tools will be developed
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Feedback on Protected Lands



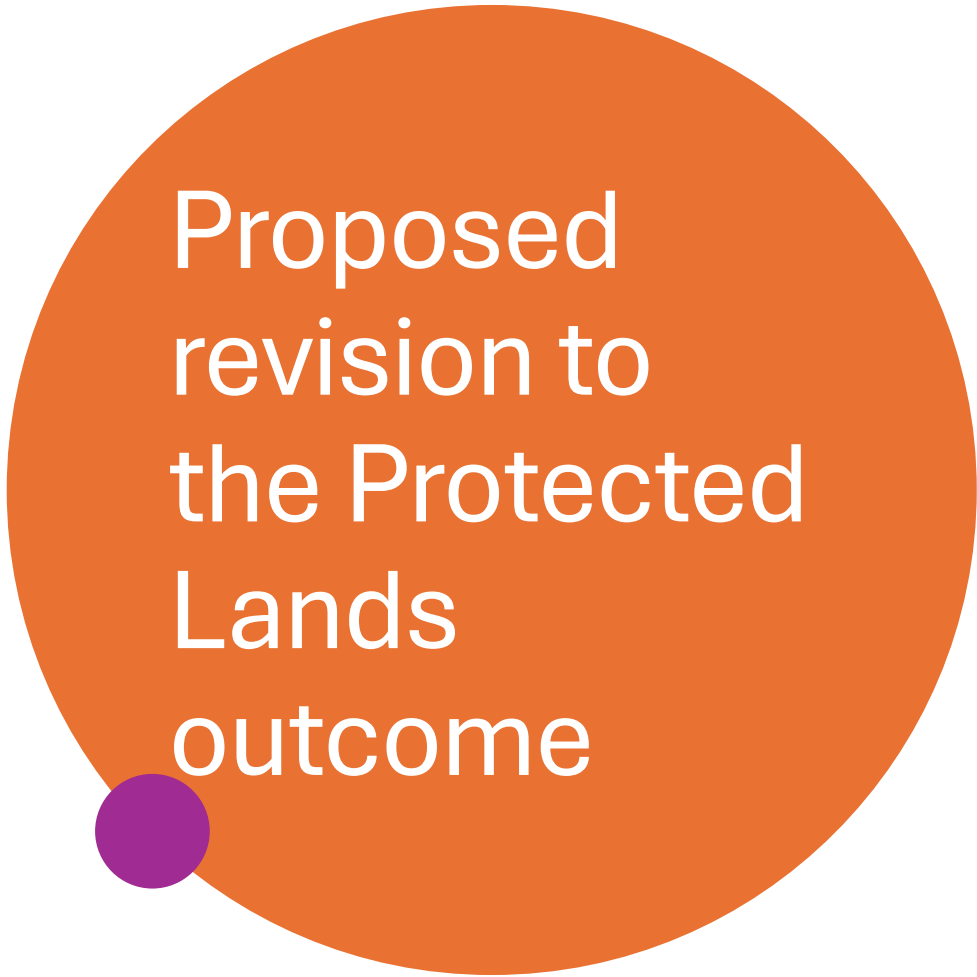
DRAFT OUTCOME LANGUAGE: Protect critical landscapes within the Chesapeake Bay watershed to protect water quality, enhance biodiversity, support sustainable livelihoods, ensure military readiness and national defense, and honor cultural heritage.

DRAFT TARGETS:


- **Protected Lands:** By 2040, permanently protect an additional 1.5-2 million acres of land throughout the watershed at the federal, state or local level.
- **Forests:** By 2040, permanently protect a total of _XX_ acres of forest, of which XX% are in riparian areas.
- **Wetlands:** By 2040, permanently protect a total of _XX_ acres of wetlands, focusing on the protection of buffer zones.
- **Watershed Health:** By 2040, protect a total of _XX_ acres of natural lands in watersheds that support good stream health.
- **Tribal Lands:** Support the sovereignty and duty of care of tribal nations and communities by securing protection status and/or co-management agreements for a total of _XX_ acres of tribal homelands.
- **Agricultural Lands:** By 2040, permanently protect a total of _XX_ acres of agricultural lands within the Chesapeake Bay watershed.
- **Community Greenspace:** By 2040, permanently protect a total of _XX_ acres of community greenspace.

Protected Lands Feedback

- Set more ambitious and specific targets
- Expand definitions and metrics
- Support for elevating conservation alongside restoration
- Clarify the relationship between related outcomes and targets




Proposed revision to the Protected Lands outcome




By 2040, permanently protect a total of 10.8 or 11.3 million acres of land throughout the watershed at the federal, state, or local level, building on a 2025 baseline of 9.3 million acres already protected and continually increase the protection of forests, riparian forests, wetlands and adjacent areas, natural areas supporting healthy streams, agricultural lands, tribal homelands, and community green spaces.


+ • ◦ Healthy Forests and Trees Outcome Feedback

- Desire for more ambitious goals
 - Also some concerns about achievability
- Establish more strategic priorities (for example, prioritizing contiguous forest stands, using native vegetation, planting in places)
- Highlight the importance of having diverse age class forests for forest health, sustainable forest product economies and wildlife
- Add “manage” to the Outcome language : “Conserve, **manage** and restore forests...”
- Add a new Forest Management target to develop and implement forest harvest management plans
- Establish interim targets

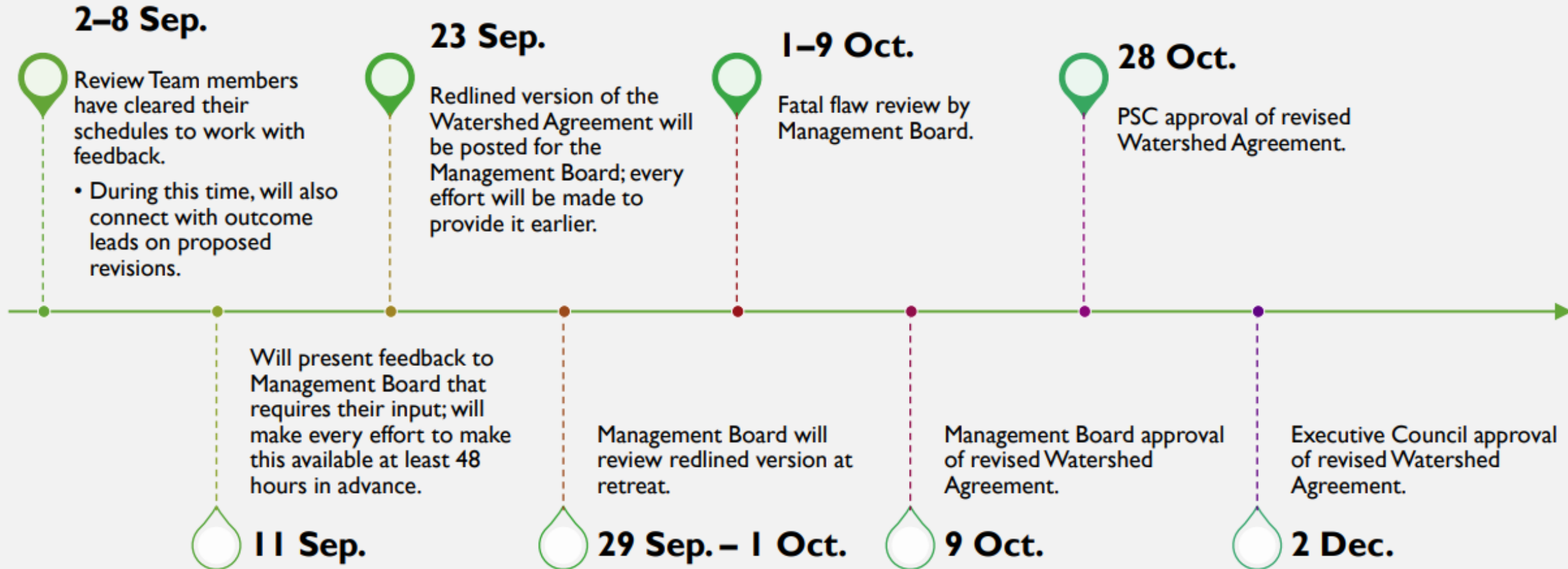


Healthy Forests and Trees: Target feedback




- Tree Canopy:
 - Add “urban” or “community” before “Tree Canopy”
 - Confusion about what we mean by “community trees”
 - Request to clarify if we are only focused on developed areas (if not, need to clarify that we won’t be tracking harvests as losses)
 - Concern about how the planting goal will be divided across the states
 - Suggest dropping “to achieve a net gain in canopy over the long term”
 - Forest Buffers
 - Change “forest buffers” to “forested riparian buffers”
 - Forest buffers & tree canopy
 - Clearly state the intent to conserve
 - Change “reduce loss” to “reduce the rate of loss”
 - Specify how much the rate of loss will be reduced by
 - Forest conservation
 - Consider changing the goal from achieving a net gain to achieving no net loss
 - Concern about how the planting goal will be divided across the states
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PROPOSED TIMELINE




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 - Updating the Healthy Forests and Trees Outcome & Targets



High-level outcome language



Conserve, **manage and** restore forests and tree cover to maximize benefits for water quality, habitat, and people throughout the watershed, with a particular focus on riparian areas and communities.

- Further emphasize how we will focus our efforts in the Management Strategy and in an accompanying backgrounder
 - Suggest the review team considers highlighting the importance of having diverse age classes and supporting forest product economies in the goal language
- 

Community Tree Canopy

Original text:

Reduce the loss of existing canopy and plant and maintain 35,000 acres of community trees by 2035 to achieve a net gain in canopy over the long term.

Tree Canopy feedback:

- Add “urban” or “community” before “Tree Canopy”
- Clearly state the intent to conserve
- Change “reduce loss” to “reduce the rate of loss”
- Specify how much the rate of loss will be reduced by
- Confusion about what we mean by “community trees”
- Request to clarify if we are only focused on developed areas (if not, need to clarify that we won’t be tracking harvests as losses)

Potential revision:

Within communities, conserve and reduce the **rate of** loss of existing canopy **by XX%** and plant and maintain 35,000 acres of trees to achieve a net gain in canopy over the long-term

Forest Buffers/ Forested Riparian Buffers

Original text:

Reduce the loss of existing buffers and plant and maintain 7,500 acres of forest buffers annually to achieve no less than 71% riparian forest cover by 2035 and 75% riparian forest cover over the long term.

Forest Buffers feedback

- Change “forest buffers” to “forested riparian buffers”
- Change “reduce loss” to “reduce the rate of loss”
- Specify how much the rate of loss will be reduced by

Potential revision:

Conserve and reduce the **rate of** loss of existing buffers **by XX%** and plant and maintain 7,500 acres of forest buffers annually to achieve no less than 71% riparian forest cover by 2035 and 75% riparian forest cover over the long term.

Should we include a numeric target for reducing the rate of loss?

Pros

- Could increase focus on addressing canopy/buffer loss
- Could increase accountability for and attention on reducing loss

Cons

- Targets will be long and dense (and potentially more difficult to understand)
- Addressing loss may not always be within the realm of our control

*Even if loss targets aren't included, could track and report on rate of loss through the indicators and establish informal targets in the Management Strategy.

We also added a numeric target for reducing loss within the forest conservation target



Community Tree Canopy



Revision options:

A: **Within communities, conserve and** reduce the **rate of** loss of existing canopy **by 60%** and plant and maintain 35,000 acres of trees to achieve a net gain in canopy over the long-term

Planting target	35,000
Gap to target (from 2024)	17,918
Annual planting acres needed (2025-2035)	1,629
Annual gap to compensate for losses	2,126
Loss reduction needed to achieve no net loss	56.62%
Annual losses reducing current losses by 60%	1,502

B. **Within communities, conserve and** reduce the **rate of** loss of existing canopy **by 33%** and plant and maintain 45,000 acres of trees to achieve a net gain in canopy over the long-term

Planting target	45,000
Gap to target (from 2024)	27.918
Annual acres needed 2025-2035	2.538
Gap to compensate for losses	1.217
Loss reduction needed to achieve no net loss	32.41%
Annual losses reducing current loss by 33%	2,515.85



Forest Buffers/ Forested Riparian Buffers



Potential revision:

Conserve and reduce the **rate of** loss of existing buffers **by 33%** and plant and maintain 7,500 acres of forest buffers annually to achieve no less than 71% riparian forest cover by 2035 and 75% riparian forest cover over the long term.

Option for including a numeric target for reducing the rate of loss to achieve 71% forested by 2035:

Acres/year planted	7,500
Total planted to 2035	97,500
Forest cover in 2035 (maintain current loss)	3,278,258
% forested 2035 (maintain current loss)	70.5%
Forest cover in 2035 (reducing 33% of current loss)	3,302,225
% forested in 2035 (reducing 33% of current loss)	71.0%

Forest Conservation

Original text:

Reduce the loss of forests to development through planning and conservation and plant and maintain ## acres of new forests by 2035 to achieve a net gain in forests over the long term.

Forest Conservation feedback

- Consider changing the goal from achieving a net gain to achieving no net loss
- Concern about how the planting goal will be divided across the states

Proposed revision:

Achieve a net gain in forests over the long term by reducing the rate of forest conversion to other land uses by 33% and planting and maintaining 155,000 acres of new forests by 2035.

Justification for modifications

- Reworked the outcome language to lead with the long-term goal of achieving a net gain in forests
- To emphasize the focus on conservation, established a numeric target for reducing the rate of forest conversion to other land uses to complement the planting target
- Together, the numeric targets for planting and reduced forest conversion would support achieving a (slight) net gain in forests

Numeric Target Calculations

Achieve a net gain in forests over the long term by reducing the rate of forest conversion to other land uses by 33% and planting and maintaining 155,000 acres of new forests by 2035.

- Loss:
 - Annual rate of net loss (2013/14-2021/22): 14,020 acres
 - Reducing 14,020 by 33%= $14,020 - 4,626 = \mathbf{9,394 \text{ acres}}$ target for the maximum annual rate of loss
 - There has been a 13% increase in the annual rate of loss between the two time steps currently available (2013/14-2017/18, 2017/18-2021/22)
- Gains/Planting
 - Additional planting needed to achieve 155,000 acres- 103,400 acres
 - Average annual planting needed 2025-2035= **9,400 acres**
 - This would be a doubling of our current average planting rate (4,700 acres/year)

Potential revised Forest Conservation target including forested protected lands

Achieve a net gain in forests over the long term by reducing the rate of forest loss by conversion to other land uses by 33%, permanently protecting a total of 8.2/8.5 million acres of forested lands, and planting and maintaining 155,000 acres of new forests by 2035.

- Pros of including protected lands target
 - Would integrate all of the forest-related targets under the Healthy Forests and Trees umbrella
 - Would clarify that permanent land protection is a critical component of a broader strategy to conserve forests
 - Likely easier for the public to understand
- Cons of including protected lands target
 - Would break up the protected lands targets across multiple outcomes, requiring additional coordination with the Protected Lands Workgroup
 - May result in protected lands targets having different timelines (2035 under Healthy Forests, 2040 under Protected Lands)



Next steps

- Management Board to discuss Forest Conservation target 9/11
 - Red-lined edits due to the Bay Program 9/19
 - Management Board retreat 9/30-10/2
 - Management Board approval of full revised watershed agreement 10/9
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