

Beyond 2025 Small Groups

DRAFT Recommendations to the Steering Committee

February 26, 2024 (Updated w/ Climate Recommendations)

Shallow Waters

1. Climate-Resilient Restoration

Prioritize system-scale shallow water habitat restoration that provides social, economic, and ecological benefits while also providing resilience and connectivity under changing land-use and climate conditions.

2. Integrated Modeling and Monitoring

Improve understanding of connectivity and habitat function under changing conditions by expanding Chesapeake Bay and watershed monitoring and modeling to include continuous shallow water habitats.

3. Adaptation Strategy to inform Habitat Management and Project Planning

Implement a process for climate adaptation in shallow water habitats that integrates adaptation science and community engagement elements. Primary steps include conducting vulnerability assessments and modeling habitat transitions under alternative future scenarios, engaging the community in setting priorities for planning, implementing measures at both local and system scales while sharing knowledge, and evaluating the effectiveness of the measures to improve the desired outcome.

4. Communication and Engagement

Strengthen the connection between people and shallow water habitats by communicating the importance of these ecosystems and their socio-economic benefits to stakeholders. Develop active and sustained engagement with communities to understand their values and utilize social science strategies to develop stewards of their local waterways. Align actions and funding to these values and socio-economic considerations.

5. Effective Governance, Collaboration, and Innovative Funding

Shift the effort, resources, and accountability evenly across the outcomes. Prioritize product over process and adjust outcomes and funding accordingly. Manage shallow waters as an interconnected ecosystem that leverages collaboration among the Bay Program partnership and organizational structure.

People

1. **Governance and accountability**

Utilize an independent expert on equitable and collaborative partnerships to reimagine the governance, structure, accountability framework, and decision-making process of the Chesapeake Bay Program. This would increase public transparency, establish a participatory priority and budget setting process, and strengthen power-sharing with an expanded group of collaborators. As part of this work, consider broadening signatories, centering leadership at the Goal Implementation Team level, and codifying a governance structure that empowers the Advisory Committees and a broader community of diverse representatives to participate in decision-making and ensure accountability of all partners and the partnership.

2. **Representative Goals and Outcomes**

The Goals and Outcomes of the Chesapeake Bay Program need to reflect the needs of people at the most local level and the impacts of a changing environment on the people that live within the watershed. The Chesapeake Bay Program's measures of success should be developed through community engagement and should reflect the priorities of the communities who live within the watershed. The Program's goals, metrics, and messaging must resonate with and meet the relative needs of watershed residents whose health and livelihoods depend on a healthy environment and sound governmental policy.

3. **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice**

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice must be the frame from which all work of the Chesapeake Bay Program flows, which can be done by institutionalizing and activating the DEIJ Implementation Plan throughout the partnership's structure and efforts. This will require the Program to provide the capacity and financial resources necessary for effective and sustained implementation of the plan.

4. **Networks and capacity building**

Create intentional partnerships with networks focused on issues related to Watershed Agreement goals to learn from those networks and accelerate outcome attainment in collaboration with their members. To support this the Bay Program should embrace its role as a capacity builder of partners, working with them to identify shared priorities, funding those priorities, sharing best practices, and recognizing their voice in CBP management actions and decision-making. The Chesapeake Bay Program must ensure that communities of color and other underrepresented groups have a voice in shaping the future.

5. **Social science**

Create a budget and staffing allocation plan to support the strategic application of social science best practices, research, and synthesis to advance goal achievement and ensure partnership impact.

Clean Water

Recommendation 1:

Review and revise the accountability framework to improve our effectiveness, particularly in reducing nonpoint source pollution, and increase emphasis on measured outcomes and water quality data in our assessment of progress.

The Accountability Framework includes four key elements: 1) Jurisdictions' development of Watershed Implementation Plans (WIPs), 2) Jurisdictions' development of two-year milestones to demonstrate progress, 3) EPA's commitment to tracking and assessing progress, and 4) EPA's commitment to taking appropriate federal actions if jurisdictions fail to develop and implement WIPs or fulfill milestones. The Chesapeake Bay Program can review and revise the first three of the four framework components. The goal is to create space for jurisdictions to pursue opportunities that may improve water quality and living resource response but are not currently being incentivized when determining progress through the use of the Chesapeake Assessment Scenario Tool (CAST). Another primary objective is to identify resources needed to abide by the Accountability Framework and to effectively manage nonpoint sources of pollution. For progress assessment, we recommend maintaining the use of CAST, but also incorporating multiple lines of evidence and additional measures of progress. Specifically, we recommend increasing emphasis on measured outcomes and water quality data in our assessment of progress.

Recommendation 2

Since the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) was developed to achieve attainment of tidal water quality standards for 92 segments, identify a tiered implementation approach recognizing pollutant reductions are needed throughout the watershed and can be phased over time consistent with state/regional workplans and resources. This approach will align with state and/or local water quality priorities, anticipated habitat, living resource, and watershed responses, cost effectiveness, and climate resiliency.

Recommendation 3:

Establish and promote effective cross-program coordination for water quality monitoring to inform watershed health and water quality restoration programs focusing on data-driven decision-making. Promote the use of state and local monitoring and assessment for incorporation into program goals, as appropriate, which may include learning, status and trends analyses, and evaluation of meeting water quality and living resource goals.

Recommendation 4:

Provide opportunities to increase nonpoint source implementation and incentivize effective and innovative nonpoint source management across all sectors. Demonstrate measurable ecosystem responses, target and empower small-scale watershed restoration that addresses the needs of the community, and promote outcome-based efforts. Address known challenges associated with nutrient mass imbalances to include fertilizers and unknown sources.

Recommendation 5:

Identify opportunities to expand on existing local liaisons programs that connect, empower, and inform the federal, state, and local partners to grow awareness, educate, provide administrative and technical assistance, and increase implementation efforts across the watershed.

Healthy Watersheds

- 1. Data, Tools and Monitoring:** Through the use of partnership-approved monitoring data, assessments, and tools, characterize and track watershed health at various scales to inform and increase implementation.
- 2. Planning:** Support strategic green infrastructure planning for watershed health at multiple scales.
- 3. Community and Partner Engagement:** Increase the reach and effectiveness of Local Community and Partner Engagement through capacity building.
- 4. Watershed Actions:** Integrate land conservation and stewardship more explicitly into the goals of the Bay Program
- 5. Accountability:** Revise the Bay's Accountability Framework to promote protecting, restoring, and maintaining watershed health.

Climate

1. Develop and implement a framework for a climate adaptive Bay and watershed of the future.

Align Chesapeake Bay Agreement goals with climate change. Establish a more holistic climate adaptation goal(s) and set numerical outcomes. Identify and support strategies essential to adapting Bay conditions to anticipated climate change impacts, including by enhancing climate adaptation science, updating current practices, and prioritizing strategies that consider multiple benefits. Adapt partnership structure and increase capacity to effectively advance integration of climate considerations. Apply structured decision making (SDM) and other decision science tools at all levels of the CBP decision-making process.

2. From Vulnerability to Resilience: Prioritizing efforts and resources for communities facing increasing climate risks.

Prioritize efforts and resources to communities most vulnerable to ever-increasing risks or with highest cumulative risk. Cultivate climate-resilient communities by building community capacity to adapt to climate change (i.e., increasing adaptive capacity). Promote nature-based solutions to improve infrastructure to withstand the effects of climate change and incorporate into community plans and policies. Support efforts to develop effective and equitable policies for relocation that account for cultural, economic, and social constraints at the individual and community level. Improve involvement and outreach by directly engaging communities and supporting efforts to build networks of practice at different scales throughout the watershed.

3. Promote carbon stewardship as a holistic approach to climate mitigation.

Advance understanding of carbon stewardship science. Improve consideration of carbon in land use planning and decision-making. Improve regional coordination around carbon stewardship using natural climate solutions.

4. Promote strategies for healthy and productive ecosystems under changing climate conditions.

Aim to protect and conserve healthy ecosystems while promoting positive change. Enhance confidence and use of nature-based solutions. Develop and apply indicators that will allow for better understanding and tracking of ecosystem health status and change. Pursue additional research to estimate future conditions under different scenarios of management and compounding stressors. Provide support for social science, communication strategies, and venues for partnership discussion to provide a proactive approach in preparing for ecosystem change.

5. Promote regenerative agricultural production and regionally based food systems in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

Expand and increase collaboration with other entities that share common goals around regenerative and regional-based food systems. Support scientific advances in accounting for agricultural carbon/soil health and the impacts of BMPs and other climate-smart agricultural practices on soil health. Consider development of a soil health outcome. Identify strategies within the CBP framework to further incentivize policies and practices that benefit soil health and promote regenerative regional food systems. Evaluate how the current CBP structure could be modified to facilitate the long-term, systemic change needed to move towards regenerative regional food systems.