



Chesapeake Bay Program
Science. Restoration. Partnership.

March 7, 2024

Dr. Larry Sanford
Chairperson, Science and Technical Advisory Committee
645 Contees Wharf Road
Edgewater, MD 21037

Re: Management Board Response to the Science and Technical Advisory Committee Recommendations

Dear Chairperson Sanford:

On behalf of the Chesapeake Bay Program's Executive Council and as Chair of the Management Board, I want to thank you and the Science and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) for your recommendations (dated September 23, 2023) to the Executive Council at its October 19, 2023, annual meeting. These recommendations reflect the critical role of STAC in supporting the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership in advancing its goals and outcomes toward greater Chesapeake Bay watershed restoration. We very much appreciate the opportunity to respond to these recommendations and look forward to continuing the conversation with STAC and the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership on their implementation.

The Management Board would like to thank STAC for all their hard work, especially the publication, *"Achieving Water Quality Goals in the Chesapeake Bay: A Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response"* (CESR). We appreciate the time and dedication to complete this report and look forward to our continued work with STAC on the issues facing us. This informative report has already helped guide needed conversations for how the partnership moves toward and beyond 2025.

This year, STAC has made three recommendations to the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership. Each of these is important and we are happy to have STAC's continued engagement as the partnership moves forward. We believe that there are opportunities for STAC to be an active participant in the recommendations that were made.

Please find as follows, the Management Board's responses to each of STAC's recommendations, as well as an enclosure which reflects activities and dialogues to date on these important issues:

Recommendation 1: Consult with a wide array of stakeholders to refine program goals, objectives, and implementation strategies; to identify tractable, equitable solutions; and to build willingness to support the Bay Program's initiatives. Exploring the potential to increase the impacts of water quality and restoration investments on living resources will likely result in refocusing attention on the parts of the watershed and estuary that matter most to people as well, including the rivers, streams, and associated wetlands of the watershed and the shallow nearshore waters and shores of the estuary. 2025 represents a key opportunity to engage stakeholders and to reconsider the meaning of restoration beyond achieving Total Daily Maximum Load (TMDL) targets.

Response: We have some opportunities in motion already and look forward to exploring others. The Management Board, through the formation and charge to the Beyond 2025 Steering Committee, is actively working to fulfill the 2022 Executive Council charge to develop a post 2025 partnership plan. We invite STAC to be a resource to this work. The Beyond 2025 Steering Committee is conducting small group discussions on thematic topics and has included STAC members to serve on at least one small group and to provide insight as Subject Matter Experts during these and other discussions, as those groups share findings for the Steering Committee. We look forward to continued engagement with STAC in developing effective restoration strategies that focus on living resources and people.

Recommendation 2: Continue development of incentive programs that focus on achievement of pollutant reduction outcomes rather than on best management practice (BMP) implementation. Improving effectiveness will require innovation in policy as well as pollution control. These innovations can be developed and tested with minimal disruption to the larger program through local sandboxing, which allows targeted experimentation before any major programmatic changes. More effective and systematic approaches to addressing nutrient mass imbalance issues also offer opportunities for substantial, sustained reductions in nonpoint source nutrient loads.

Response: We appreciate the recommendation and look forward to working through options that incentivize outcomes across the partnership. We would appreciate STAC's assistance with helping us define measurable outcomes to include a meaningful way to measure success. We appreciate the concept of sandboxing and look forward to working with STAC to help to continue and identify possible options where this concept can be employed. Following up with sandboxing opportunities is also a priority for the Local Government Advisory Committee.

Recommendation 3: Recognize that effective adaptive decision-making embraces opportunities to revisit and refine program goals, objectives, and implementation strategies, in addition to improving practice implementation. Restoring the Bay is primarily a problem of decision-making in the face of multiple objectives, uncertainties, and limited resources, requiring accelerated innovation and an approach of learning while doing. Robust methods exist for optimizing decisions based on available information while using appropriate logic frameworks.

Response: STAC was instrumental in setting up our current Strategy Review System (SRS) process and we look forward to your assistance with future evaluation and adaptation of that process, as part of the Beyond 2025 efforts. We invite and encourage STAC to bring forward more information to the partnership regarding how to employ decision science at all levels of the partnership.

Thank you again for your commitment to both the partnership and restoring the Chesapeake Bay and its local waterways. The Management Board looks forward to working with you and STAC on implementing these recommendations.

Sincerely,



Martha Shimkin

Director

Chesapeake Bay Program Office

Enclosure: Documentation of Commitments, Actions, and Activities to Address the 2023 STAC Recommendations to the Executive Council

STAC Recommendation(s)	Description of Commitments/Activities/Actions Taken or Planned to Address Recommendation(s)	Supporting Documentation (e.g., weblinks, dates, etc.)
1	Pennsylvania's Phase 3 WIP served as a catalyst for a broader, ecosystem-based approach in Pennsylvania. For example, Lackawanna County's County-wide Action Plan includes focus areas of agricultural preservation (benefits of green space and local food production), acid mine drainage and abandoned mine lands, which impact both public health and aquatic life.	https://www.dep.pa.gov/Business/Water/Watershed-Restoration/Chesapeake-Bay-Watershed-Restoration/WIP3/GetInvolved/Pages/Countywide-Action-Plans.aspx
1	The Department of Defense (DoD) Chesapeake Bay Program annually publishes its Annual Progress Report, and it includes DoD accomplishments related to all aspects of Executive Order 1350508 for Chesapeake Bay Protection and Restoration – Abundant Life, Conserved Land, and Engaged Communities as well as Clean Water.	https://www.denix.osd.mil/chesapeake/dod-cbp-quarterly-journals/
1	The DoD has designated two new Sentinel Landscapes (Tidewater and Potomac) in the Virginia Security Corridor to enhance land conservation, habitat restoration, and climate resilience. These are in addition to the existing Middle Chesapeake Sentinel Landscape (Maryland) and the proposed Kittatinny Ridge Sentinel Landscape (Pennsylvania).	https://sentinellandscapes.org/landscapes/virginia-security-corridor/
1	West Virginia's primary participation focus in the partnership is the water quality goal. West Virginia is participating in the Beyond 2025 process that is considering new/refined goals and objectives and will support new directions to the extent that they are practicable for West Virginia to implement and benefit water quality in the watershed.	N/A

1	Virginia has a Stakeholders Advisory Group that is charged with reviewing annual progress and making recommendations towards the implementation of the Commonwealth's agricultural commitments in the Phase III WIP. The group includes representatives from the Department of Conservation and Recreation, agricultural organizations, environmental organizations, Cooperative Extension, VA Association of Counties, and the VA Association of the Commissioners of the Revenue. This work helps inform Virginia's participation in the Bay Program.	https://rga.lis.virginia.gov/Published/2024/RD100/PDF
2	The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP) submitted a STAC workshop proposal on February 4, 2024, entitled, "How Thinking Small Nets Big Benefits for the Chesapeake Bay."	STAC Workgroup Proposal and Letters of Support available upon request.
2	The DoD CBP is working with partners to promote regulatory sandboxing to advance beneficial use of dredge material and thin layer placement wetland applications for climate resilience.	N/A
2	West Virginia thinks that more BMPs are generally needed throughout the watershed. We have little ability to direct BMP placement to improve BMP efficiency. West Virginia's "important BMPs" (e.g., livestock access restrictions and buffers) provide water quality benefits at all locations they are implemented. That said, West Virginia supports the Beyond 2025 Clean Water Small Group recommendations aimed at improving nonpoint source BMP implementation, promoting outcome-based efforts and addressing nutrient imbalance areas.	N/A
3	West Virginia is participating in the Beyond 2025 process that is evaluating the program structure and accountability framework and will support recommendations intended to improve the effectiveness of adaptive decision making.	N/A