



## STEWARDSHIP OUTCOME

### STEWARDSHIP GIT / STEWARDSHIP WORKGROUP

#### 2014 WATERSHED AGREEMENT: GOAL & OUTCOME LANGUAGE

**STEWARDSHIP OUTCOME:** Increase the number and diversity of trained and mobilized volunteers who have the knowledge and skills needed to enhance the health of their local watersheds.

**STEWARDSHIP GOAL:** Increase the number and diversity of local stewards and local governments that actively support and carry out the conservation and restoration activities that achieve healthy local streams, rivers and a vibrant Chesapeake Bay.

#### OUTCOME DISPOSITION ADVICE TO MANAGEMENT BOARD:

#### UPDATE

**Recommendation:** UPDATE the outcome to reflect how the Chesapeake Bay Program's stewardship approach has evolved over the past decade, while also making it specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART). Updates should include a wider definition of stewardship actions, that align with the spectrum of Watershed Agreement goals and outcomes that would benefit from increased action by stewards, such as Water Quality, Tree Canopy, Forest Buffers, Wetlands, Land Conservation, and Stream Health. Updates should support the unique power of the Bay Program networks to focus and scale up partners' stewardship efforts toward actions that achieve the greatest environmental impact. An update that shifts in this way will drive measurable, transformative change and improved success across all outcomes.

**Stewardship is Essential to Bay Conservation and Restoration:** The 18 million people in the watershed are one of the greatest resources toward Bay conservation and restoration, if effectively mobilized. Without public support and participation, the work of practitioners will ultimately fail. Stewardship activities strengthen the connection between communities and natural resources by fostering sustainable practices and conservation ethics. [Research](#) shows the public values stewardship as a means to improve the health of local communities and waterways.

**Stewardship and social science are vital to improve Bay Program efficacy towards achieving all Agreement outcomes.** This need has been documented in the [Enhancing Chesapeake Bay Partnership Activities by Integrating Social Science](#) report (2023) and [ERG's Beyond 2025 Evaluation](#) (2024). ERG's finding (F8) states that there is a shared vision and **need for greater integration and application of social science to improve CBP effectiveness**. The [CESR report](#) (2023) identified "implementation gaps" as a key component in why the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) has not been met, reflecting that voluntary best management practices (BMPs) were not being implemented at a rate that would help achieve the TMDL. Social science best practices specific to audiences such as landowners and farmers could develop more effective incentivization approaches for BMP implementation. **The Stewardship Outcome could be more intentionally linked to indicators that track progress toward water quality, wetlands, forest and other outcomes** noted above. This connection can be strengthened by a reciprocal emphasis on stewardship in the work of those outcomes as well. This would help to focus stewardship programming toward supporting those outcomes, and therefore aid and amplify their implementation, while also serving stewardship progress itself.

**Significance to Vision, Mission, and Goals:** The Agreement references connection with and benefits to people throughout. It is the intent of the Chesapeake Executive Council, that changes to the Agreement reflect a renewed and greater emphasis on **engaging all communities** as active stewards of a healthy and resilient Chesapeake Bay and its watershed and reflect the most **recent scientific understandings and issues** that have

emerged since the 2014 Agreement was signed. The Stewardship Outcome is directly in line with this intent. Employing social science is an effective strategy to engage with communities and individuals, particularly to enlist support for conservation and restoration maintenance as well as compliance (e.g., with TMDLs).

**Value Added:** The Chesapeake Bay Program partnership is uniquely positioned to amplify stewardship efforts collectively. **By fostering network development, regional coordination, and best practice sharing, the CBP can replicate and expand successful programs and significantly increase their impact.** The Program's ability to bridge organizational and jurisdictional gaps and break down silos enhances its value in promoting effective, cooperative stewardship across the watershed. CBP's provision of technical support, cutting-edge data, and funding further supports these efforts.

**SMART Updates and an Incremental Timescale:** The Stewardship Outcome should be updated to be more SMART, using lessons learned from the adaptive management process. A quantitative target was not initially established for the Outcome, making it complicated to identify and track progress. There is now a specific measurement in place (see details in [Chesapeake Progress](#)), because an indicator was later developed using a robust survey of individual stewardship values and attitudes, to inform effective design of programs that align with needs and improve progress measurement. Lessons drawn about individual and collective motivations can better inform social science integration for multiple outcomes under the Agreement.

Changing societal attitudes and actions around stewardship occurs at a generational timescale. Therefore, the Outcome should be updated to drive progress towards incremental, shorter-term milestones as we strive to achieve sequential outputs and ultimately the long-term goal. Progress should be assessed in increments of 3-5 years, with medium-term checkpoints at 10-15-year intervals.

**Risks of Removal:** Removal of stewardship as a primary objective of the Partnership's efforts would lead to a **decline in public commitment to watershed conservation and restoration.** Stewardship initiatives provide vital educational and civic engagement opportunities that build a population who understands, cares about, and strives to protect the watershed. Without this, public and financial support for conservation efforts can severely decline and disappear. Additionally, losing CBP emphasis on stewardship programs, may lead to a decline in environmental career development experiences, conservation job opportunities, and citizen science data collection, thereby causing adverse economic and academic effects.

Stewardship programs enlist paid and voluntary assistance in maintaining habitat projects, managing invasive species, removing litter, planting trees, etc. Losing these efforts would further degrade the lands, waters, habitats, and living resources that benefit from management. For example, [data](#) demonstrates that forests with active stewards are healthier and have less invasive species; forests with less active stewards or no stewards show decline.

**Challenges and Opportunities:** Despite its importance, public engagement in stewardship remains limited relative to the watershed's population. Many individuals face barriers to participation, such as lack of transportation, time, or financial resources. A solution lies in enlisting expertise in social science and communications to help make stewardship more relevant, understood as a benefit to all, and practiced as a more common norm throughout the watershed. The [2023 social science report](#) provides recommendations for integration of social science across the partnership and is an example of the ways CBP can build partner capacity to implement community-scale stewardship in addition to promoting individual actions. Future work should focus on community engagement, education, outreach, leadership, and incentive programs. The Stewardship Outcome and its indicators should be updated to better support conservation and long-term land care, generate accessible incentives for landowners, and align with existing water quality-focused programs (e.g., WIPs). It is important for the Bay Program to build partnerships with schools, community organizations, local/ municipal governments, and local businesses, and to build on the strengths of existing local and state programs to increase the efficiency and efficacy of engaging all watershed residents as stewards to improve water quality, conservation, and environmental health.

References:

- [Chesapeake Behavior Change – Survey Trends](#)
- [Enhancing Chesapeake Bay Partnership Activities by Integrating Social Science – Final Report \(2023\)](#)
- [Chesapeake Bay Program Beyond 2025 Evaluation \(2024\)](#)
- [Achieving Water Quality Goals in the Chesapeake Bay: A Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response \(2023\)](#)
- [Chesapeake Progress - Stewardship](#)
- Baltimore Green Space – [Leadership Learning Communities, Scientific Sustenance, and Adventures in Inspiration Feedback Loops in Baltimore, Maryland \(2020\)](#)