

Advancing the Protection, Restoration, Enhancement, and Creation of Tidal and Non-tidal Wetlands in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed

Presentation to the FLC-D
October 07, 2024



Wetlands line the Pamunkey
River in King William County.
(Photo by Will Parson
Chesapeake Bay Program)

Vital Habitats Goal Wetlands Outcome

From the 2014 Agreement:

"Continually increase the capacity of wetlands to provide water quality and habitat benefits throughout the watershed. Create or reestablish 85,000 acres of tidal and non-tidal wetlands and enhance function of an additional 150,000 acres of degraded wetlands by 2025."



Wetlands Status

as of January 2024

Created or Restored

4,310 acres reported

85,000 acres goal

Enhanced

59,735 acres reported

150,000 acres goal

Source:

<https://www.chesapeakeprogress.com/>



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Why is the Outcome not being met?

Wetlands Action
Plan January 2023

It's Complicated! Some suggestions from the action plan

1. Bay Program paradigm is based on "no net loss" and **does not consider climate change** and other stressors.
2. **No one agency Federal is responsible** for voluntary wetlands program. It is a shared responsibility.
3. Most **wetlands are on private lands** and landowner willingness is limited.
4. **No dedicated funding sources** for voluntary wetlands restoration - general lack of capacity to do restoration.



Executive Council charge to Principal's Staff Committee

The EC recommends a critical path forward that prioritizes and outlines the next steps for meeting the goals and outcomes of the Watershed Agreement leading up to and beyond 2025.



USFWS has agreed to be the Federal Champion for wetlands



8 Principles

- Passion for wetlands and actively engaged in efforts to protect, restore, create, and enhance this critical living resource.
- Well-positioned to make a demonstrable difference – particularly in directing staff and funding towards wetlands work.
- Influences actions and discussions within the partnership, including Principals' Staff Committee, the Management Board, and wetlands technical workgroups.
- Leads federal agencies as part of a coordinated Chesapeake response in advancing wetlands.
- Technical expertise is available and ready to assist in raising the awareness of wetlands and in pursuing opportunities.
- Promote and coordinate resources as necessary to help achieve the wetlands outcome.
- Serves as a bridging entity and point of contact for the CBP wetlands projects.
- Able to design and implement wetland restoration and conservation projects.

Wetlands Strategy for the Chesapeake Bay Program

Actions

- Identify sustainable funding.
- Support amending the wetlands outcome under the 2014 Chesapeake Watershed Agreement.
- Foster and expand private-public partnerships.
- Provide resources (e.g., technical and financial) to advance wetland protection.
- Support science needs of the Wetland Workgroup, and other goal teams/workgroups (e.g., Climate, Healthy Watershed, Water Quality) with wetland related outcomes.



Wetlands Workgroup

Change is good!

- Wetlands Workgroup was **restructured**.
- **Chair** remains focused on the overall outcome for wetlands.
- **Vice-Chair, Tidal Wetlands** focuses on tidal wetlands creation, restoration and enhancement. **Vice-Chair, Non-Tidal Wetlands** focuses on non-tidal wetlands.
- **Black Duck Action Team** was folded into the Wetlands Workgroup.



Chesapeake Bay Program - Wetlands Schematic



schematic created by
Chris Guy and Sophia Seufert
USFWS, 2024

PLANNING

Wetlands Action
Plan (finalized
January 2023)

Wetlands Strategy for the Chesapeake Bay Program
(proposed to the Management Board October 10, 2024)

division into tidal &
non-tidal subgroups

Wetlands Work Group (Restructured 2023)

WORK GROUP STRUCTURE

Tidal Wetlands Team

Chesapeake Bay Trust
facilitating creation of
Strategic Plan
(to be completed
December 2025)

Black Duck Action Team
(from original bay program structure)

Implementation Tools

Black Duck Tool
developed by Black Duck
Joint Venture adopted to
the Bay watershed

Non-Tidal Wetlands Team

Utilize Northeast Partners
for Fish and Wildlife Plan,
State Action Plans, etc.
Step down to Chesapeake
Bay watershed

TOOLS

Implementation Tools

50+ tools currently identified
e.g., Marshes for Tomorrow

Habitat Tracker Data Base (2023)

Implementation Tools

Commonly used tools to be
inventoried and compiled

OUTPUTS

2-year milestones shared on Chesapeake Progress (last update January 2024)

Implementation: Tools and Programs

Examples of tools that are contributing:

- USGS UVRP –marsh life span model
- Bay Program – Marsh Adaptation Project Mapper
- TNC Marsh Management Decision Support Tool
- Black Duck Decision Support Tool
- Marshes for Tomorrow (Audubon/USFWS partnership)

Examples of Programs:

- Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (NRCS CREP)
- Wetlands Reserve Easements (NRCS WRE)
- Partners for Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
- Coastal Program (USFWS)

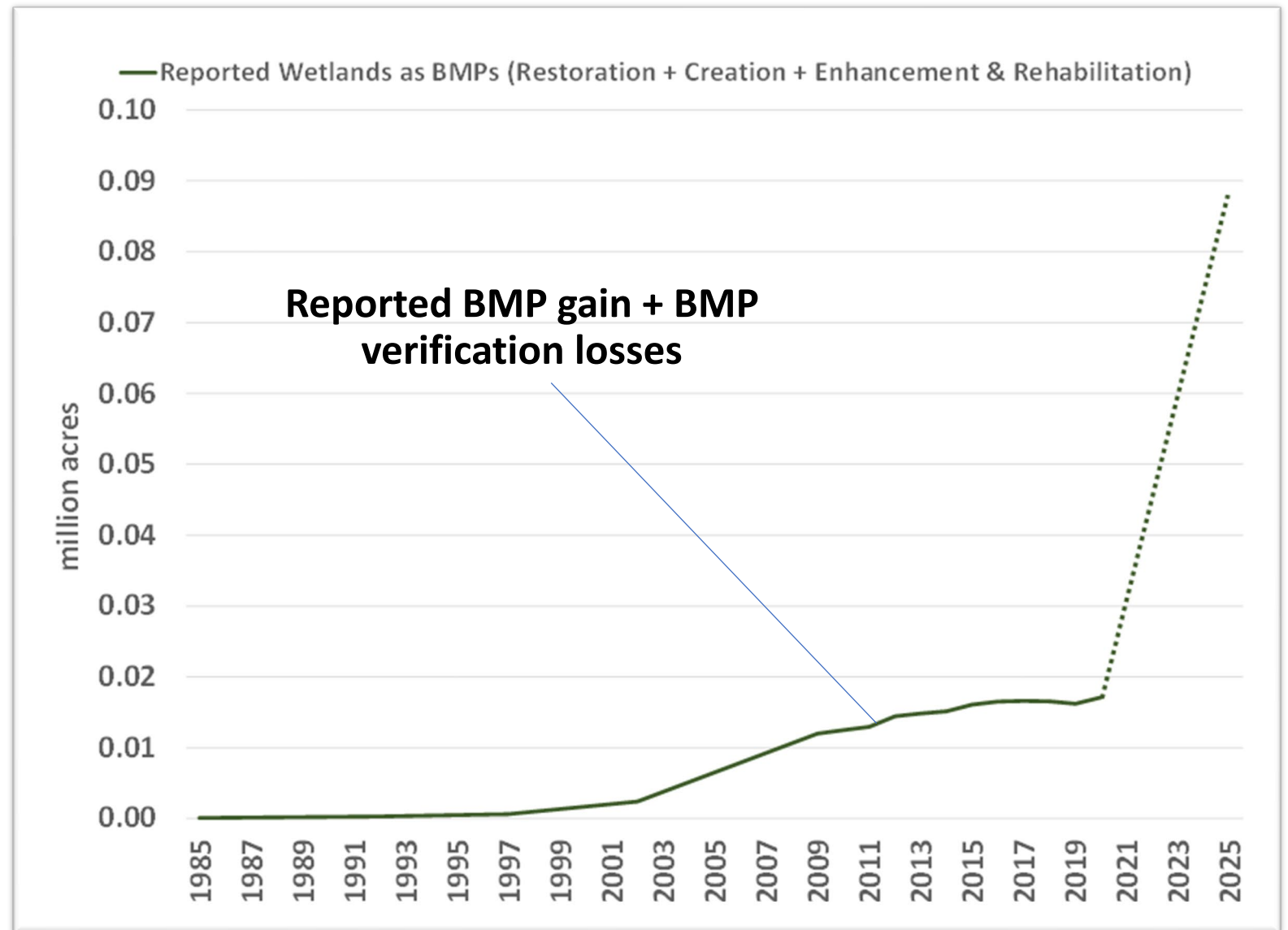


Habitat Tracker Data Base Key Points

- **Purpose:** Developed by the Bay Program to track wetlands for a diverse network of practitioners.
- Able to accurately track black duck outcome.
- Brook Trout Workgroup will begin this year to use Habitat Tracker.
- Habitat Tracker has only been used for one year.
- Next round of wetlands data expected in December 2024.



Wetland Creation, Restoration, and Enhancement (Before Habitat Tracker)



* 0 acres of enhancement reported

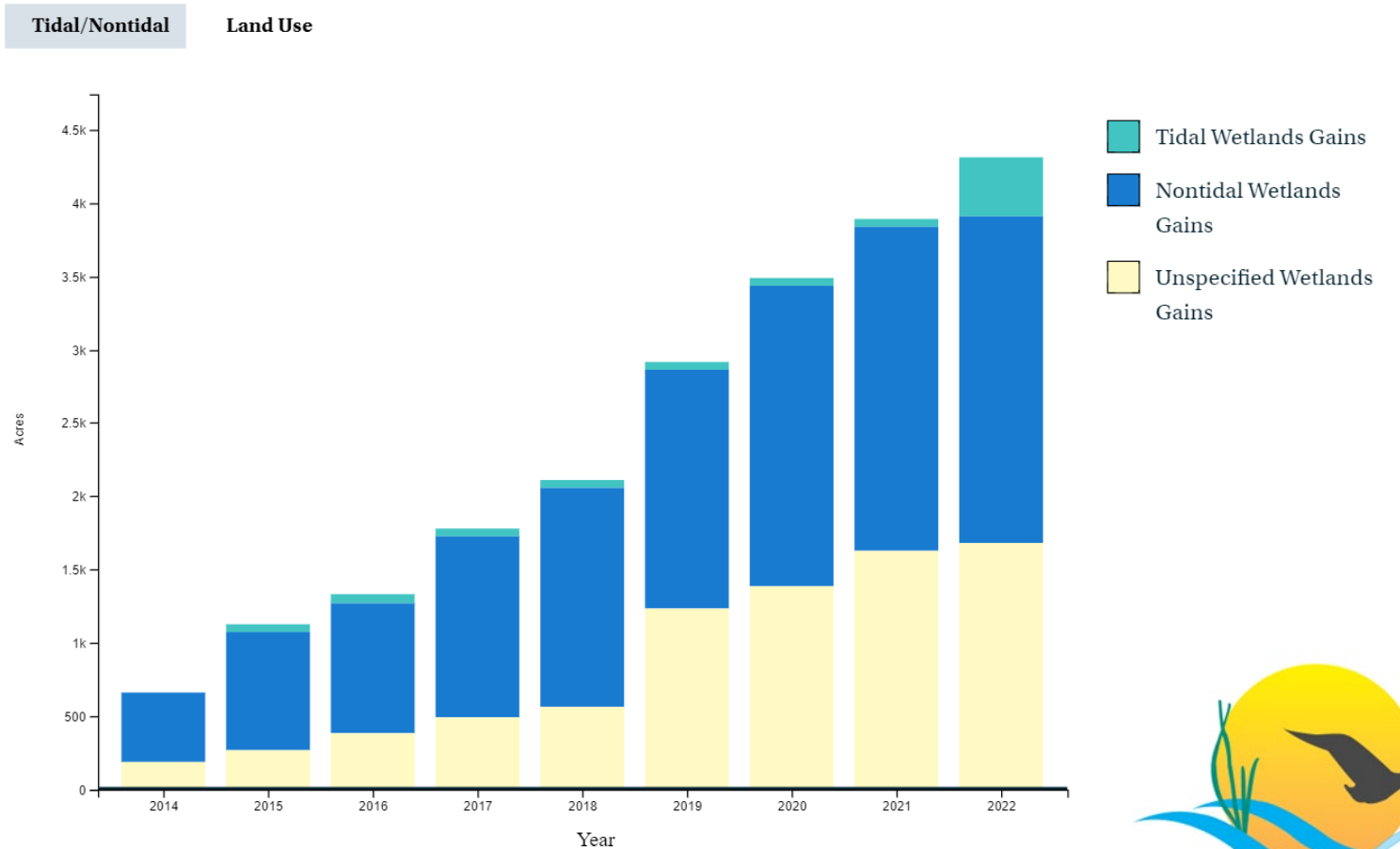
Creation/ Restoration Chesapeake Progress (using Habitat Tracker)

Wetlands Gains, Cumulative

Wetlands gained are measured against the target to create or reestablish 85,000 acres of wetlands.

[VIEW CHART](#)

[VIEW TABLE](#)



Chesapeake Bay Program

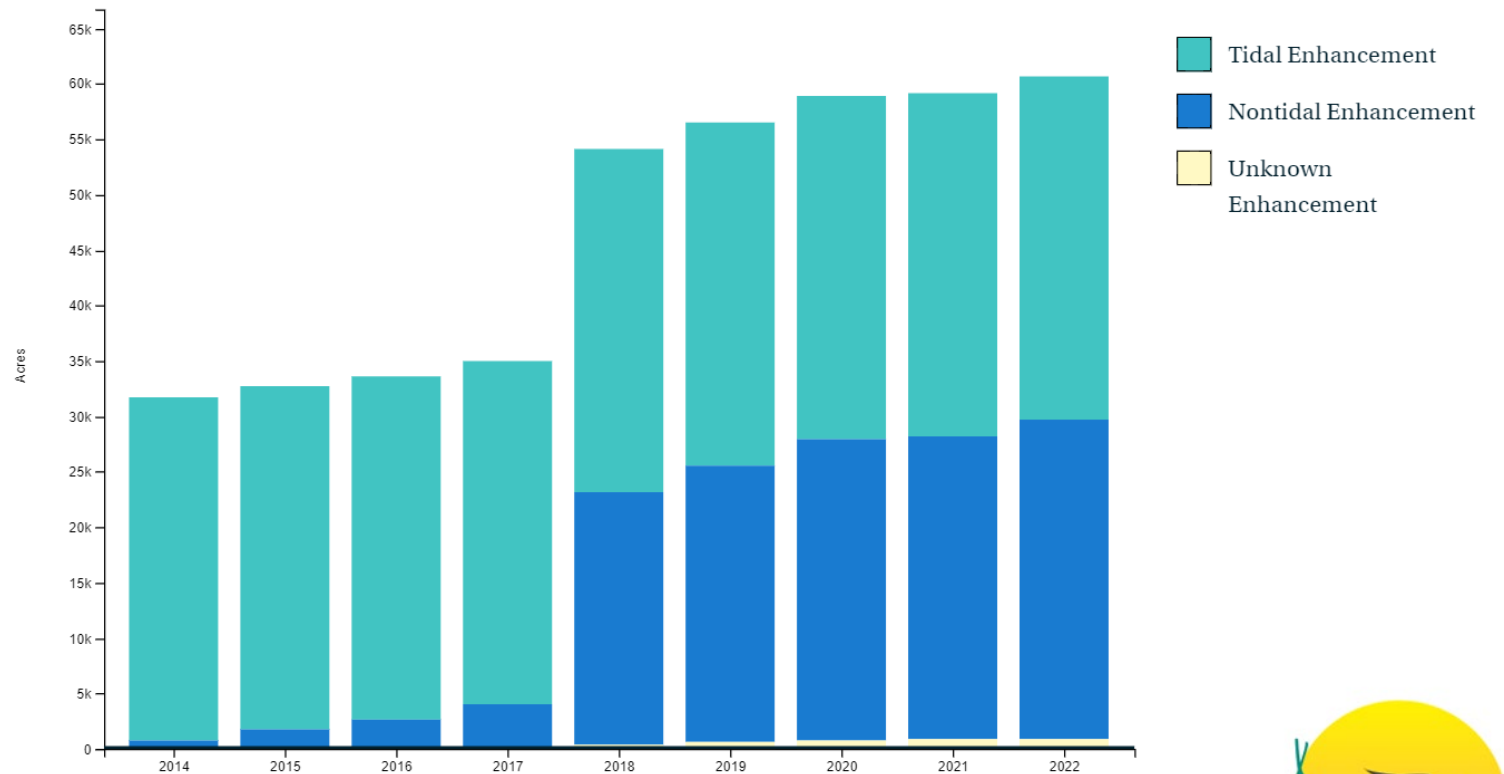
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Enhancement Chesapeake Progress (using Habitat Tracker)

[VIEW CHART](#)[VIEW TABLE](#)

Tidal/Nontidal

Land Use

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Conclusion

- Achieving the wetlands outcome by 2025 is not possible. The EC empowered the Wetlands Workgroup to create an effective strategy for achieving the outcome post 2025.
- Habitat Tracker allows us to understand where we are and how far we must go to reach the outcome.
- The Wetlands Workgroup has been working for 4 years on strategies and structural changes to implement Phase 2 of Beyond 2025.
- We see a path forward that takes the wetlands outcome from one of the least successful outcomes of the 2014 agreement, to a complete success post 2025.



American black duck & other waterfowl at Mason
Neck National Wildlife Refuge in Fairfax County, Va.
(Photo by Will Parson/Chesapeake Bay Program)

Questions?

