

ADVANCING THE PROTECTION, RESTORATION, ENHANCEMENT, AND CREATION OF TIDAL AND NONTIDAL WETLANDS IN THE CHESAPEAKE BAY WATERSHED



Photo by Chesapeake Bay Program

Wetlands play a vital role in sustaining aquatic life, providing habitat and sanctuary for numerous iconic Chesapeake Bay wildlife species, and serve as natural pollutant filters. However, climate change, land development, and other environmental and anthropogenic pressures threaten tidal and nontidal wetlands throughout the Bay watershed.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- Identify sustainable funding and regulatory tools to advance tidal and nontidal wetland creation, protection, enhancement, and restoration.
- Amend the Wetlands Outcome under the *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement* to reflect current scientific understanding and future conditions.
- Foster and expand private-public partnerships and networks to increase wetland acreage.
- Increase internal and external partner coordination on tidal and nontidal wetlands and integrate efforts where appropriate.
- Provide resources to better understand the impacts of climate change on tidal and nontidal wetlands.
- Continue to support efforts underway that are intended to advance wetland protection and restoration.

KEY CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

- There is a need for increased coordination, in addition to tracking and reporting mechanisms, to address the gap in the comprehensive accounting of tidal and nontidal wetlands.
- The recent Supreme Court decision on *Sackett v. EPA* has raised concerns that fewer wetlands are protected by federal law, which could result in significant impacts to habitat and water quality.
- Further research is needed on the climate resilience of wetlands, where wetland loss is more likely due to climate impacts, the best locations for wetland migration corridors, and restoration and creation activities to enable marsh migration.
- There is no sustainable funding to support the protection and restoration of tidal and nontidal wetlands.
- Wetland restoration is often considered a “co-benefit” and therefore there are concerns that wetlands are not being prioritized for protection and restoration.



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RECOMMENDED ACTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

EXPLORE SUSTAINABLE FUNDING OPTIONS AND INTEGRATED APPROACHES WITH PARTNERS

- Utilize and fund wetlands as a nature-based solution to flooding that can better withstand the effects of climate change.
- Embrace and adopt an integrated approach to wetland restoration with federal partners.
- Explore funding an additional Chesapeake Bay Program Liaison position to help increase capacity in the field for wetland restoration and protection.
- Increase capacity for wetland restoration by expanding technical assistance.
- Work with state agencies, federal agencies, and nonprofits to pursue wetland creation, restoration, and preservation as means of improving habitat for migrating birds, using state and federal funding.
- Explore adopting a watershed-wide approach for implementing grants to identify how and where best to leverage limited resources to maximize wetlands protection, restoration, and creation.

CONTINUE TO SUPPORT AND PRIORITIZE IMPLEMENTATION OF EPA'S GRANT WITH THE CHESAPEAKE BAY TRUST

- Fully fund the agreement through the lifetime of the grant and determine whether additional funding is needed to support the design and implementation of the Pocomoke Sound demonstration project.
- Explore opportunities to partner with states and the EPA Wetland Program Development Grants.

PROVIDE STRATEGIC SUPPORT TO THE CBP'S WETLANDS WORKGROUP

- Build in more accountability by working with each of the jurisdictions to identify applicable accountability mechanisms, and how progress toward goals/ targets will be effectively tracked over time.
- Support and fund the use of Artificial Intelligence for the identification and location of wetlands in the watershed and use predictive models on where wetland creation and restoration should occur.
- Direct resources towards climate research to help inform the siting of wetlands, and to understand the vulnerability of existing wetlands in more climate-risk geographies.
- Direct resources to the Wetlands Workgroup to revisit the Wetlands Outcome that considers where wetlands were historically in the watershed, where they have been lost, and where it is possible to restore wetlands considering the effects of climate change.

ENHANCE COLLABORATION BETWEEN FEDERAL AGENCIES AND THE CBP PARTNERSHIP

- Leverage existing regulatory tools to protect and/or restore tidal and nontidal wetlands within the Chesapeake Bay watershed.
- Explore and cultivate innovative public/private partnerships and promote landowner participation in voluntary stewardship of wetlands.
- Address and resolve concerns with shallow water use conflicts (e.g., living shoreline permitting projects and loss of SAV beds).
- Determine the utility of incorporating common terminology for wetland restoration and enhancement techniques into wetland restoration, protection, and enhancement efforts and associate guidance.



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