

# EPA Expectations for Near-Term Milestones

## 2026 – 2027

### Purpose

The Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) partnership is committed to continuing to make progress toward meeting the nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment Interim Targets<sup>1</sup> while the partnership is updating its [modeling tools](#) and the [2014 Chesapeake Bay Agreement](#). During this transition period, the CBP partnership agreed to use the two-year milestones to maintain continuity and accountability toward meeting the partner-developed Phase III Watershed Implementation Plans (WIPs) and the Interim Targets for nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment.

### Background

In January 2025, the Principals' Staff Committee (PSC) approved recommendations related to “near-term” milestones and requested that expectations be developed for these milestones.<sup>2</sup> The milestone duration period will remain two years and cover January 1 of an even numbered year through December 31 of an odd numbered year. The near-term milestones will cover, at minimum, the timeframe of January 1, 2026-December 31, 2027 and may continue beyond 2027, if the CBP partnership has not yet agreed to a revised set of water quality planning targets or other changes to the milestones format and/or duration.

For the 2026-2027 milestones, Chesapeake Bay watershed jurisdictions, the Conowingo WIP Steering Committee, and federal agencies (collectively referred to as Milestone Partners) will each develop a 1–3-page document that identifies the high-level programmatic actions<sup>3</sup> planned to be implemented during the milestone period. At the end of the milestone period, Milestone Partners will develop a progress summary that outlines

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<sup>1</sup> Interim Targets are the Phase 3 Planning Targets factoring in 2025 changing environmental conditions and Unaccounted Additional Loads (UALs). In [September 2023](#), the Principals' Staff Committee (PSC) agreed to use these targets until the Phase 7 modeling tools were developed and new planning targets set.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.chesapeakebay.net/what/event/principals-staff-committee-meeting---january-2025>

<sup>3</sup> The term “programmatic milestones” is explained in the [2011 Milestones Guide](#) and may include new legislation, regulations, programs, and/or capacity-building actions to increase the resources needed to support or accelerate the implementation of pollutant load reduction measures. These specific actions, such as rulemakings and additional resources to reduce nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment loads, will be needed in order to achieve the pollutant load reductions identified in the Phase III WIP, the current two-year milestones, or in future two-year periods.

successes, barriers and actions to overcome barriers to meet programmatic initiatives and implementation.

- Milestone Partners are encouraged to identify innovative actions to maintain and accelerate the pace of implementation, in addition to actions to implement the Phase III WIP and meet Interim Targets. Innovative actions will be recognized but not evaluated based on their outcomes.
- Milestone Partners have the option to continue to develop more detailed programmatic milestones in addition to the high-level milestone commitments.
- Milestone Partners also have the option to include numeric milestone commitments or BMP projections as part of the milestones.

The following EPA Expectations provide additional detail for the Milestone Partners regarding the establishment and evaluation of the 2026-2027 milestones for water quality. An updated detailed schedule is included in Appendix A.

## EPA Expectations for the 2026-2027 Milestones

### Development

Each Milestone Partner is expected to submit draft two-year milestones to EPA by February 13, 2026 (date contingent on PSC approval of the schedule) that include the following:

- Identify and commit to implement high-level pollutant reduction actions anticipated to occur in the 2026-2027 milestone period.
  - Examples of milestone actions include enhancements to existing water quality programs; establishment of new programs or initiatives; capacity-building actions; development or improvement of tools or datasets; and adoption of modified or new regulations, legislation, or policies.
- Include a common set of milestone attributes to ensure consistency, accountability and ease of communications within/across Milestone Partners.
  - Trackable, reportable and related to the Interim Targets for nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment. Where feasible, milestone descriptions should identify the measurable outcomes expected from implementing an action. Examples include: % pollutant reduced; pounds of pollutant reduced; % necessary program(s) implemented; % closure in funding gaps; and number of segments delisted.
  - Include a date for completion and identify a deliverable for the time period.
  - Identify the relevant source sector(s) and lead agencies.
  - Continue using the partnership's existing progress reporting mechanisms.

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- Make a connection to the Milestone Partner's priorities that would maintain or accelerate the rate of implementation to achieve the Interim Targets for nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment.

Considerations when developing the 2026-2027 milestones:

- Milestones should be streamlined to reduce the complexity from the current set (2024-2025) of milestones.
- Implementation or programmatic efforts may span a longer timeframe, but the milestones should identify which actions or outcomes are anticipated to occur during the two-year time period.
- Develop milestones that are stretch goals but still attainable.
- Milestones may include new programs and activities as well as leverage existing program activities that reduce nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment (e.g., permitting program, nonpoint source program, etc.).
- Milestones could encompass more than water quality commitments. However, EPA will only evaluate commitments related to water quality and it will be the Milestone Partners' responsibility to track and assess progress for those commitments beyond water quality.
- EPA will develop a milestone template and share it with the Milestone Partners. Use of the templates will be optional, and it can be modified by the Milestone Partners, as long as the milestones clearly identify the source sector(s), action, date for completion, and deliverable(s).
  - [\*Current optional template\*](#)

## Progress Reporting

Each Milestone Partner will develop a progress summary (i.e., progress report) for the 2026-2027 programmatic milestones and submit the progress summary to EPA by February 14, 2028. Milestone Partners are not expected to submit *interim year* (i.e., in 2027) progress summaries for the 2026-2027 near-term milestone period.

The EPA expects the 2026-2027 programmatic milestone progress summaries to include the following to ensure consistency, accountability and ease of communication within/across Milestone Partners:

- Describe the status of milestones actions (i.e., completed, not completed, adapted/revised) and the successes, barriers, and actions to overcome barriers in meeting programmatic initiatives and implementation.

- For incomplete or revised actions, indicate the remaining steps to achieve desired deliverables and the expected completion dates.

Considerations when developing the 2026-2027 milestone fact sheets:

- Where feasible, milestone fact sheets should identify the measurable outcome(s) achieved by implementing an action.
- EPA will develop a template for use by Milestone Partners to ensure progress summaries are easy to use and understand, contain consistent information, reduce duplicative communication efforts, and can serve as public communications documents. The template may be modified or enhanced by Milestone Partners as long as the progress summaries clearly identify the above attributes.

## EPA's Assessment of Progress

Every even-numbered year, EPA will conduct an evaluation of the progress made by the Milestone Partners during the prior milestone period (e.g., 2024-2025). EPA will provide that evaluation to the Milestone Partners and the public in accordance with its oversight role and responsibility under the CBP partnership's accountability framework. These evaluations will include an assessment of progress toward meeting sector-specific programmatic commitments for the milestone period and a numeric assessment<sup>4</sup> of progress toward attaining nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment targets at the state and state-basin level. The evaluation also will provide the status of the relevant water quality monitoring trends.

For each sector-specific programmatic section, EPA will provide an evaluation of milestones and identify strengths and areas for improvement. EPA will be seeking the connection between what was accomplished in the two-year milestone period and how that connects to the bigger goal of meeting the nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment targets.

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<sup>4</sup> EPA will continue to conduct annual assessments of progress toward numeric targets. This is reported annually as part of the Measured Load Reduction Indicator (MLRI) found on [Chesapeake Progress](#). This indicator reflects nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment pollutant load estimates generated using the latest version of the Chesapeake Assessment and Scenario Tool (CAST), which is part of the Phase 6 suite of modeling tools, wastewater discharge data reported by jurisdictions and calibrated using monitoring data. This information is used to assess progress toward the water quality targets and will inform the numeric assessment of progress. The MLRI is a separate activity from the milestone evaluations, but the information will be used to inform the biennial evaluations