

## **Tribes as a Formal and Enduring Partner in Chesapeake Bay Program Partnership**

At their 2025 meeting, the Chesapeake Executive Council will [charge](#) the Principals' Staff Committee to work with federally recognized tribal nations to develop recommendations by July 1, 2026, on how best to include tribes across the watershed in the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership.

In developing these recommendations, the Principals' Staff Committee will research relevant governance matters, including but not limited to partner responsibilities and expectations, pathways for designating and identifying partner representatives, and formal avenues for partnership, including signature on the *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*.

The Principals' Staff Committee will also explore opportunities to elevate and respect Indigenous guardianship and knowledge within watershed restoration planning and implementation.

### **Indigenous Conservation Council of the Chesapeake Bay**

Formed in 2022, the Indigenous Conservation Council of the Chesapeake Bay serves as a regional organized body for tribal nations to share knowledge, coordinate resources and reconnect with their ancestral landscapes. Representatives from each of the seven federally recognized tribes in the watershed, all based in the Commonwealth of Virginia, provide leadership and guidance to the Council.

On January 15, 2025, the Indigenous Conservation Council passed a resolution entitled [\*A Declaration of Tribal Nations as Sovereign Governments Committed to the Protection and Restoration of Ancestral Lands and Waters through the Chesapeake Bay Program Partnership\*](#). The declaration advances sovereignty, recognizes the unique political government-to-government relationships federally recognized tribes hold with the U.S. federal government and states, and outlines key opportunities to strengthen restoration and conservation efforts in the Bay region and with the Chesapeake Bay Program.

Notably, the resolution calls on the Chesapeake Executive Council to:

- Honor tribal nations as signatories in the revised *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*,
- Establish and fund an Indigenous Guardianship Program that would direct resources to the Indigenous Conservation Council to help tribal nations build capacity to protect and conserve land; and
- Create a new Tribal Nation Advisory Board within the Chesapeake Bay Program.

## Chesapeake Bay Program Response

At its 2024 meeting, the Chesapeake Executive Council [charged](#) the Principals' Staff Committee to revise the 2014 *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement* and recommend changes to streamline and simplify the partnership's structure and governance. In a response to the Indigenous Conservation Council's resolution, the Principals' Staff Committee noted that preparing an entirely new agreement for signature and expanded membership would fall outside of that charge.

The Principals' Staff Committee committed in their July [response](#) to working with the Indigenous Conservation Council to explore how tribal nations could be more fully integrated into the partnership and to develop recommendations for consideration by the Executive Council at its 2025 meeting.

Since then, members of the Principals' Staff Committee have worked with the Indigenous Conservation Council to develop the Executive Council's charge, with the understanding that carrying out this direction will occur alongside the implementation of the partnership's structure and governance changes.

## Chesapeake Bay Program

1750 Forest Drive, Suite 130

Annapolis, MD 21401

[chesapeakebay.net](https://chesapeakebay.net)