

Stakeholders' Members Present Remotely: John Dawes, Andrew Der, Matt Ehrhart, Doug Faulkner, Bill Fink, Verna Harrison, Bobby Hughes, Ann Jurczyk, Julie Patton Lawson, David Lillard, Patrick McDonnell, Bill Noftsinger, Abel Olivo (Chair), Kate Patton, Daphne Pee, Alisonya Poole, Sara Ramotnik, Tim Rupli, BeKura Shabazz, Mary Sketch and Staff Jess Blackburn & Alex LoCurto

Speakers/Guests Present: Kate Fritz, Amy Van Blarcom-Lackey, Amy Handen, Kathy Stecker, Sabine Miller, Rachel Felver, Marisa Baldine, Lucinda Power, Doug Bell, Khesha Reed, Kelly Hitz, Melissa Fagan, Katie Brownson, Peter Marx, Laura Cattell Noll, Meg Cole

Meeting presentations and materials are located at:

[Stakeholders' Advisory Committee Quarterly Meeting \(September 2025\) | Chesapeake Bay Program](#)

Thursday, September 18, 2025

The Stakeholders' Advisory Committee Chair, Abel Olivo, called the meeting to order at 9:30 AM. The meeting objectives are (1) Briefing from the EPA on the CBP budget including funding for the Advisory Committees; (2) Conversation with Region 3 EPA Administrator, Amy Van Blarcom-Lackett; (3) Briefing on the Chesapeake Bay Program's Beyond 2025 efforts: (a) streamlining and reorganization, and (b) public feedback on the draft revised *2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement* and briefing on the CBP governance and restructure; (4) Subcommittee break-out sessions to articulate actionable annual recommendations.

Business Meeting

- The May 2025 Quarterly Meeting minutes were approved as submitted.
- Bill Fink, Chair of the Agriculture Advisory Committee (AAC), shared updates from the group's first in-person meeting.
 - AAC members participated in learning sessions to understand the agriculture sector's role in the Bay watershed, how BMPs are tracked, and where data gaps remain.
 - The AAC reviewed the revised draft *Watershed Agreement* and noted that the expectation for agriculture to deliver more than 50% of the remaining pollution reductions was not adequately reflected.
 - The AAC submitted comments stressing that clean water and economically viable farms must be treated as co-equal goals.
 - Soil health emerged as a priority topic for further discussion.
 - The AAC formed three subcommittees: Technical Guidance (coordinate with the Agriculture Workgroup on new BMPs), Communication (convey agricultural needs to meet goals), and Governance (establish AAC operational standards).

Coordinator's Report

Members agreed to the proposed 2026 quarterly meeting schedule:

- Virtual: February 19 or 20
- Hybrid: May 20-21 in Lancaster, PA (overlapping with the Choose Clean Water Coalition conference)
- Hybrid: September 16-17 (MD or VA)
- Virtual: December 11

Jess provided a brief overview of activities from the past year, particularly highlighting the Stakeholders' Committee's participation in the public feedback period for the draft *Watershed Agreement* that resulted in a very thorough and thoughtful letter. Looking ahead, the Stakeholders' Executive Committee will finalize the annual

recommendations to the Executive Council (EC) by November 10th. Abel will present them at the December 2nd EC meeting in Baltimore. Members were informed they should also prepare for officer elections at the December quarterly meeting at NCTC in Sheperdstown, WV.

Chesapeake Bay Program Updates

Khesha Reed, Deputy Director, CBP EPA Office

Khesha Reed shared details on the Chesapeake Bay Program's FY25 budget. Because EPA received the budget so late, not all funds could be spent by the end of the fiscal year. Over 90% of the budget supports grants, contracts, and interagency agreements for jurisdictions, partners, and grantees. Additional funding from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) has supported monitoring, modeling, and jurisdictional projects, however FY26 will be the final year for that funding source. While FY25 appropriations remained unchanged, rising costs effectively reduced available funds for the program. Looking ahead to FY26, there are anticipated decreases in EPA's budget that may impact the CBP. Updates will be provided as information becomes available. Khesha reaffirmed EPA's commitment to supporting the advisory committees, but noted that cost-saving measures will be necessary post-IIJA in conjunction with a potentially narrowed budget.

Member Questions & Discussion

- ❖ *Budget cut impacts on in-person meetings and field trips:* Khesha acknowledged the importance of in-person meetings and site tour visits, which provide members with valuable experiences that informs their feedback to the Executive Council, but noted that budget constraints will likely reduce the number of in-person meetings and field trips. EPA will do its best to maintain those opportunities, recognizing their value in supporting meaningful member engagement.
- ❖ *Applying the FY26 budget to the revised Watershed Agreement:* EPA is carefully managing current fiscal resources while the *Watershed Agreement* is finalized. We acknowledge the vital roles that coordinators and staffers play in supporting workgroups, GITs, and at all levels of the partnership, although we have requested a temporary hold on new hires in order to avoid layoffs. Budget decisions will be finalized once the *Agreement's* streamlined structure is clear.
- ❖ *Available funding to streamline FieldDocs tool for documenting BMP implementation:* Khesha acknowledged that she had not heard the concern about complicated application of the tool. She committed to follow up with staff to better understand the issue and explore potential solutions, including in-house improvements or possible low cost contractor support.
- ❖ *What happens to the CBP in the event of a government shutdown:* In the event of a government shutdown, most federal staff will stop working and contractor work will be greatly reduced with only critical programs and websites continuing. During past shutdowns, EPA used limited carryover funds to briefly continue operations, however for this potential shutdown, specific guidance is still pending.

Update from the CEO of the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay

Kate Fritz, CEO, Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay

Kate shared that the Alliance is committed to continuing to support both the Stakeholders' and Local Government Advisory Committees, with a particular focus on ensuring that staff capacity remains strong. She noted that the Alliance has partnered with the Bay Program for over 40 years, and remains dedicated to creative and collaborative solutions as the partnership adapts to doing more with less. Kate committed to keeping members informed as changes unfold and welcomed one-on-one conversations for those who wish to connect. She closed by thanking members for their time, diverse expertise, and the thoughtful perspectives they bring to the Bay Program.

CBP Governance and Structure

Doug Bell, Senior Technical Advisor, EPA CBP Office

Doug Bell is a co-coordinator of the Governance and Accountability Team (GAT). The GAT formed in July 2025 to recommend ways to address the Executive Council (EC) charge of streamlining and refining the [Governance](#)

[and Management Framework for the Chesapeake Bay Program](#). The two interrelated, prioritized challenges for immediate recommendation are: (1) Priority Setting, Decision Making, and Resources and (2) Role Definition and Logistics. The GAT will finalize the draft recommendations in time for review at the Management Board retreat Sept 30 - October 2. Key recommendations include:

- 1) Executive Council: Simplify and clarify functions, emphasize overarching commitment to achieving the *Watershed Agreement* and its Vision, serving as the public face of the CBP, and noting that any amendment to the Outcomes are at the PSC's discretion.
- 2) Principals' Staff Committee: Strengthen strategy, priority setting, executive-level decision-making, and resource mobilization. As well as considering a chair/vice-chair framework for succession planning.
 - a) The top recommendation is for the PSC to establish a priority setting framework and should include robust engagement with the Advisory Committees and relevant public interest groups, ensure transparency in resource availability and allocation for each priority, and identify implementation gaps (including staffing or technical needs) related to achieving *Agreement* Outcomes.
- 3) Management Board: Emphasize oversight and execution of PSC priorities, operational decision-making, and staff coordination.
 - a) Membership should include appropriate authority and expertise to make decisions relevant to the GITs.
- 4) Advisory Committees: Update language for role clarity, enhance targeted engagement, recommend the Advisory Committees gather on an annual basis.

They also recommended clearly defining Federal membership and coordination at each level of the governance framework. Four additional challenges for future deliberations include: structure; transparency; accountability & adaptive management; and communication.

Sara Ramotnik, representing the Stakeholders' Advisory Committee on the GAT, shared an overview of the feedback she received from other committee members. The GAT emphasized that structural updates should not impose uniform requirements on the Advisory Committees, given their varying structures, and aimed to avoid setting unrealistic time expectations for volunteer members.

Member Questions & Discussion

- ❖ *How CBP can improve accountability, communication, and transparency in decision making:* The Bay Program's structure is based on the strategic plan of the *Watershed Agreement*, with work organized around Outcomes and Goals. Revising the Partnership's structure will continue to be a challenge until jurisdictional participation in *Agreement* Outcomes is decided.

Conversation with EPA Region 3 Administrator

Amy Van Blarcom-Lackey, Region 3 Administrator, EPA

Administrator Van Blarcom-Lackey introduced herself by sharing some of her personal background of growing up on a 50-cow dairy farm in Bradford County, PA. She also noted her personal relationship with Mike Lovegreen, a former member of the Stakeholders' Advisory Committee, whom she views as an important mentor and who played an important role in the Bradford County Soil and Water Conservation District becoming a leader in agriculture BMP development. Inspired by Mike's mentorship, Amy, as a 14-year-old, created a county-wide conservation group called Teens United to Conserve which engaged in projects such as stream health monitoring and riparian buffer work.

Amy highlighted her commitment to "boots-on-the-ground" conservation and translating taxpayer resources into measurable environmental impact. She explained that, while her background is in agriculture, she chose to work at EPA rather than USDA to maximize her environmental impact. Amy closed by expressing gratitude for the opportunity to speak with the Stakeholders' Committee and emphasized her interest in hearing members' input and ideas.

Member Questions & Discussion

- ❖ *What role does EPA Region 3 have in the Partnership:* Amy explained that EPA Region 3 has three “hats”: (1) managing funding, (2) ensuring accountability as a regulatory agency, and (3) overseeing the Chesapeake Bay Program office. She emphasized that the EPA’s role in the CBP is highly collaborative, with EPA serving as an equal partner alongside other federal and non-federal stakeholders. She highlighted the importance of coordinated communication among the “federal family” before meetings to support effective partnership engagement.
- ❖ *EPA’s Role in Balancing Innovation and Farm Viability in Nutrient Management:* The Chesapeake Bay is a complex estuary, and there isn’t a one-size-fits-all solution. When targeting environmental improvements, whether reducing nitrogen, sediment, or other impacts, we need to carefully consider where actions and funding will be most effective. At the same time, we balance environmental goals with economic considerations, agriculture, tourism, and the livelihoods of farmers and watermen, as well as ecosystem health. Through EPA’s three roles, funding, enforcement, and Bay Program management, we can prioritize resources, target enforcement where needed, and support holistic ecosystem outcomes.
- ❖ *Exploring a greater emphasis on private sector involvement in the CBP:* Amy noted she is still new in her role as the Region 3 Administrator, and not yet able to fully assess the levels of public-private sector involvement in the partnership. She emphasized the importance of learning from the recent public comment period and hearing from state partners and the Chesapeake Bay Commission, as the partnership relies on all these perspectives.
- ❖ *Maintaining momentum in supporting technical assistance for the Agriculture Sector:* Amy emphasized that the key to maintaining momentum is directing resources to areas where they will have the greatest environmental impact. She noted the importance of keeping the agriculture community involved in discussions to be a part of the solution for improved water quality.

Public Feedback on the Draft Revised Watershed Agreement

Rachel Felver, Communications Director, Chesapeake Bay Program

Feedback on the draft revised *Watershed Agreement* was open from July 1st - September 1st and offered to the public a streamlined *Agreement* with 4 Goals and 21 Outcomes with SMART targets. Many comments called for more specific details that will be addressed in the forthcoming Management Strategies to be developed in 2026. Some overarching concerns across multiple outcomes in the *Agreement* included: establishing a consistent timeframe for all outcomes and targets (considering either 2035 and 2040); removing placeholders that lack numeric targets; revising with plain language; and better reflecting accountability throughout the *Agreement*. Overarching themes of public feedback for each goal are as follows:

- Thriving Habitats and Wildlife Goal: concerns about lower targets than those in the previous *Agreement*; a call for a stronger emphasis on invasive species; and strong support for the Brook Trout and Fish Passage outcomes.
- Clean Water Goal: calls for better integration of the Bay TMDL, Phase III WIPs and MS4 permits into the *Agreement*; stronger emphasis on agriculture and non-point sources; additional monitored parameters such as toxins and weather; and specificity and actionable items for the toxic contamination outcome.
- Healthy Landscapes Goal: Protected Lands targets lower than in the previous *Agreement*; unclear terminology; the need to better articulate the role of local governments; and more emphasis on changing environmental conditions, such as sea level rise and rising temperatures.
- Engaged Communities Goal: support for the Workforce Outcome, but with requests for clearer metrics and baselines; plain language in the Environmental Literacy Outcome; more measurable targets for Stewardship Outcome; increases for new sites in Public Access Outcome; and requests to revise the local leadership target to make it more specific and measurable.

Rachel shared a new draft *Agreement* Vision statement and the timeline for completing the revision of the *Watershed Agreement*. The updated draft will be posted on ChesapeakeBay.net on 9/23 and will be reviewed at the October Management Board retreat. Final consensus on the revised *Watershed Agreement* is expected during the October 28th Principals’ Staff Committee meeting.

Members discussed draft recommendations in their subcommittee break-out groups.

Subcommittees' Reports: Proposed Recommendations

- ❖ *Conservation and Land Use Subcommittee*: Due to several members not being present, the subcommittee will reconvene for a virtual meeting in October to finalize their recommendation. Discussions during the breakout session raised concerns about land use being primarily a local government responsibility and whether it should remain within the subcommittee's scope.
- ❖ *Water Quality Subcommittee*: The subcommittee discussed topics for future meetings including: the Conowingo Dam; acid mine drainage; toxins in waterways; and stream delisting. The subcommittee emphasized accountability during their discussion, highlighting the importance of state commitment to environmental funds and enforcement. Their draft recommendation is to fully fund or increase funding for state environmental enforcement agencies to meet the goals of the *Watershed Agreement*. Members agreed to draft and circulate recommendation language for review and did not see a need for another virtual meeting in October.
- ❖ *Stewardship and Engagement Subcommittee*: The subcommittee focused on the Workforce Development Outcome and recommended that the governors engage their labor departments to better understand state and local workforce needs. Some suggestions for actionable steps included conducting a workforce study, developing tools to track workforce development, and securing funding to support these efforts. The group emphasized their desire to keep the recommendation actionable while leaving room for further information gathering on additional workforce-related initiatives.

Committee Discussion

The Committee members reflected positively on the one-day virtual meeting format, noting it is easier to schedule, though in-person meetings remain the preferred format for relationship-building and more robust conversations. Members acknowledged the difficulty of making policy recommendations that exclude marginalized populations, the deletion of the Bay Program's diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, and emphasized the importance of recognizing past and ongoing inequities in order to progress forward. The Committee wants to explore designating member liaisons for each state in addition to the Committee liaison with EPA Bay Program Office.

Action Items:

- Set-up subcommittee meeting for CLU to gather final information to complete recommendation language
- Send draft recommendation language to subcommittees for final review
 - ◆ Due October 31st
- Executive Committee to review and finalize the letter of recommendations
 - ◆ Due November 10th
- Set-up and optional virtual meeting with the Nominations Chair
 - ◆ Share more details about the Officer position description and responsibilities
- Send out final revisions to the Stakeholders' Member Expectations and Guidance Document
- Send the track-changes "redlined" *Watershed Agreement* slated for discussion at the MB Retreat
- Connect Bobby Hughes with Brook Trout workgroup
- Connect Tim Rupli with NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office
- Collect feedback the on virtual quarterly meeting format via a post-meeting survey to collect

The next meeting is December 11-12 and will be hybrid with in-person attendance in Shepherdstown, WV at the National Conservation and Training Center. All in-person attendees must present a REAL ID to enter the federal facility.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:45PM.