



## PUBLIC ACCESS SITE DEVELOPMENT MARCH 2024 QUARTERLY PROGRESS MEETING

### LOOKING BACK: LEARNING FROM THE LAST TWO YEARS

#### Celebrate Our Accomplishments & Best Practices

1. Since your last QPM, what key successes would you like to highlight to the Management Board?
  - The Public Access workgroup updated its membership list and has a new workgroup Chair who is a long-standing member and able to share the work group's history.
  - The workgroup's annual data collection continues to reflect progress towards achieving the 2025 public access goal.
  - The workgroup completed a Benefits and Barriers study to help identify factors that may be keeping people from using public access sites.

#### Evaluate Our Progress

2. Are we, as a partnership, making progress at a rate that is necessary to achieve this outcome? Would you define our outlook as on course, off course, uncertain, or completed? Upon what basis are you forecasting this outlook?
  - The Public Access workgroup is on course. The long-term average number of sites has remained above the target needed to reach the 300-site goal.
3. How would you summarize your recent progress toward achieving your outcome (since your last QPM)? Would you characterize this progress as an increase, decrease, no change, or completed?
  - Overall, progress toward the public access goal has resulted in a steady increase in the number of sites. Maryland, Virginia and Pennsylvania have seen the biggest increases in access sites over the past ten years.
  - The addition of 11 new sites in 2022 is the fewest number of sites since the data calls began in 2011, but still marks an increase in recent progress for the outcome because we are currently averaging enough sites added to meet the goal. All states have experienced budget reductions and capacity constraints which have made it difficult to maintain current public access sites while focusing on building new access sites. A small number of sites have closed throughout the watershed. In future years closures will be considered as part of future inventory and data collection.

#### Lessons Learned

4. If our outlook is off course, what has been the most critical influencing factor or gap that needs to be addressed to accelerate progress?
  - N/A

5. Consider and reflect on the actions you intended to take during the past cycle. For actions that have not begun, or which have encountered a serious barrier, what is preventing us from taking action? Are these actions still needed?
- The EJ screen mapping tool (Action 3.2) was identified as “red” but should be recast “yellow”. The workgroup’s Benefits and Barriers study, officially completed in 2023, provided some insight related to why certain populations were not taking advantage of public water access opportunities and suggested some approaches to address those issues. Action is still needed, however, this action is universal to all Bay goals and requires funding and other resources that are beyond what the workgroup members currently have access to.
  - Actions 9.2 and 9.3, related to citizen stewardship, remain “red” because workgroup members have not had the resources (i.e., staff and funding) needed to create programs that would advance these actions.
6. What have we learned over the past two years that we’ll need to consider in the coming two years?
- During the Covid pandemic, there was a marked increase in demand for, and visitation to, public water access sites. This increase resulted in overuse and/or damage at many existing sites and highlighted the need for increased funding and resources for operations, management and access for all.
  - Funding for operations and maintenance of existing public access sites is limited and most federal and state grant programs require matching funds, which smaller jurisdictions struggle to secure.
  - Inflation and supply chain issues caused the cost of materials and labor to rise and delayed construction of new sites.
  - Many existing water access sites have been negatively impacted by delayed maintenance and environmental impacts.
  - The Public Access Workgroup has limited influence over funding strategies and programs that fund public access and struggle to keep funding for public water access a priority in our respective jurisdictions.

## ASSESSING OUR EFFORTS AND GAPS

### Factors

7. Summarize here any newly identified influencing factors, and why they were added to your Management Strategy. If any factors have been deleted, are they the result of our actions, and what have we learned as a result?
- Some factors that are influencing the management strategy include:
    - Capacity of local, regional, state and federal agencies
      - Government agencies at all levels have reported cuts to their operational and capital budgets. These cuts impact development and maintenance of public access as they result in reductions to land acquisition and planning, capital improvements, staffing and ongoing maintenance.
    - Funding
      - The lack of dedicated funding sources for public access limit development of new sites and create a maintenance backlog. The inability to maintain existing sites makes it more difficult to justify development of new sites. In addition, there is particular concern regarding continued reductions in federal funding for the maintenance of shallow water

navigation channels, gas tax revenues, and aids to navigation. These are critical to the maintenance and operations of waterway infrastructure.

- Land Use and Ownership
  - Land use and ownership directly impact public access. Private, commercial and residential development along waterfronts has increased and can often edge out existing and potential public access to the water. Public agencies should be encouraged to expand acquisition of waterfront properties and fully explore the potential for creating access to appropriate waterfront areas that they already manage.
- Universal Accessibility
  - All managers of public lands must comply with the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504, as amended) and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (as amended). Ensuring compliance when planning, evaluating, retrofitting or developing access sites is a top priority and also requires additional resources.
- User conflict
  - User conflict can develop due to crowding, misuse, or a sense of entitlement among user groups. Conflicts over public access sites can also occur if local residents are concerned about or experience increased traffic, noise, littering or trespassing.
- Railroads
  - Railroads limit access to many of the watershed's waterways. Railroads are often opposed to at-grade vehicle or pedestrian crossings over rail lines due to liability concerns. Railroad crossings are costly to construct, maintain and operate which makes access sites which require them prohibitively expensive.
- Climate Change
  - Public water access sites are located where land meets water and this is also an area that is extremely vulnerable to impacts from coastal storms, sea level rise and seasonal flooding. While progress has been made to adapt the design of water access facilities to address these impacts, new approaches must be explored and funding for implementation must be secured.

8. Prioritize and summarize here the factors best tackled as a Partnership (or GIT/workgroup), that have the greatest impact to achieve our outcome.

- Capacity of local, regional, state and federal agencies: the workgroup consists of local representatives from each of the jurisdictions and would be best suited for effective communications, facilitation of management actions and participation in the development of strategic planning.
- Climate Change: the workgroup can help facilitate and encourage communities and local governments to develop designs and address sea level rise (coastal adaptation studies).
- Land Use: work with protected lands and land use workgroup to target areas of waterfront parcels for acquisition and increased public access.

## Gaps

9. For those high priority factors summarized above, what is getting in the way of addressing them or what gaps continue to exist despite the current efforts to address those factors?

- Capacity of local, regional, state and federal agencies: involves high turnover rates and changing policies and priorities. It becomes difficult to maintain relationships and continue with efforts/programs lasting longer than 1-2 years.
- Climate Change: across the globe many have experienced the effects of climate change and there are several challenges with understanding the patterns, improvement designs while addressing issues of capacity, community loss, and funding. Some states and local governments are focusing on maintenance of and upgrades to existing sites. COVID-19, age of infra-structure, climate change and budgets were all cited as the basis for this focus.
- Land Use: lack of collaboration and work with protected lands and land use workgroup to target areas of water front parcels for acquisition and increased public access.

## FOCUSING ON THE NEXT TWO YEARS

### Actions And Needed Support

10. Describe any scientific, environmental, fiscal, or policy-related developments that have already or may influence your work over the next two years.
  - Policy-related efforts at State and Federal levels have been made recently including those listed below. These efforts should get full support from CBP workgroups and partners in order to achieve results and further goals related to public access.
    - All jurisdictions should pursue and fully explore programmatic changes and improvements to existing Federal Funding programs (e.g., Recreational Trails, Sport Fish Restoration Fund, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund) that fund public access projects.
    - New Statewide legislative initiatives that impact public access have passed recently. Jurisdictions can share the processes and successes that resulted in new statutes and/or tools that impact planning and implementation related to public access.
    - Several jurisdictions in the watershed have hired staff or created offices dedicated to DEIJ, Outdoor Recreation and/or Sustainability and Climate. Research and data from these new sources should be utilized to inform and support public access efforts.
    - The Bureau of Land Management's Public Lands Rule would establish a framework to ensure healthy landscapes, wildlife habitat, clean water, and balanced decision making on public lands.
11. Based on these developments and the learning discussed in the previous sections, summarize any new actions you are planning to address these gaps over the next two years.
  - Improve the quality and accuracy of data collected annually. Jurisdictions that have gaps in access or have been unable to make meaningful progress will be an area of focus.
  - Explore and pursue efforts to improve existing State and Federal programs that fund public access.
  - Look for opportunities to coordinate with other GIT 5 workgroups and expand partnerships among goal teams within the Bay Program.
12. Have you identified new needs, or have previously unmet needs, that are beyond the ability of your group to meet and, therefore, you need the assistance of the Management Board to achieve?
  - N/A

13. What steps are you continuing, or can you take, to ensure your actions and work will be equitably distributed and focused in geographic areas and communities that have been underserved in the past?

- Efforts will be made to improve the quality and accuracy of the annual data collection. Jurisdictions that have gaps in access or have been unable to make meaningful progress will be an area of focus.
- The workgroup continues to focus on serving all communities within the Chesapeake Watershed and incorporating DEIJ efforts as well as recommendations from management plans and strategies.