

CHARTING A COURSE TO 2025

WETLANDS WORKGROUP SEPTEMBER 26, 2023

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL CHARGE

"The PSC is to report back to the Executive Council at our 2023 annual meeting with recommendations on how to best address and integrate new science and restoration strategies leading up to 2025."

- Identify new and emerging scientific data and studies which could modify our progress reporting and adaptive management approach, as well as the goals and outcomes under the Watershed Agreement.
- Enhance our monitoring and reporting capabilities to improve our understanding of existing conditions and trends.
- Define the existing and emerging challenges (e.g., climate change conditions, increasing growth, diversity, equity, inclusion and justice considerations) to accomplishing the partnership's work under the *Watershed Agreement*, and how addressing those challenges might alter our collective restoration priorities, including the possibility of extending the target date for completing restoration of water quality beyond 2025.
- Identify opportunities to leverage action across multiple goals and outcomes of the Watershed Agreement.
- Provide snapshots of outcome attainability under the Agreement (e.g., which outcomes are likely to be met by the date(s) set by the partnership, which won't, and why) and options for communicating these snapshots to demonstrate progress in achieving our outcomes and the remaining work to be done, including gaps to be addressed.

REACHING 2025 PROCESS



Steering Committee formed by the Management Board in early 2023.



Small subset of the steering committee formed the Drafting Team, including the CBP Indicators Coordinator and Communications Director.



Sean Corson, former NOAA Chesapeake Bay Director, chaired the drafting team and set the outline for the report.

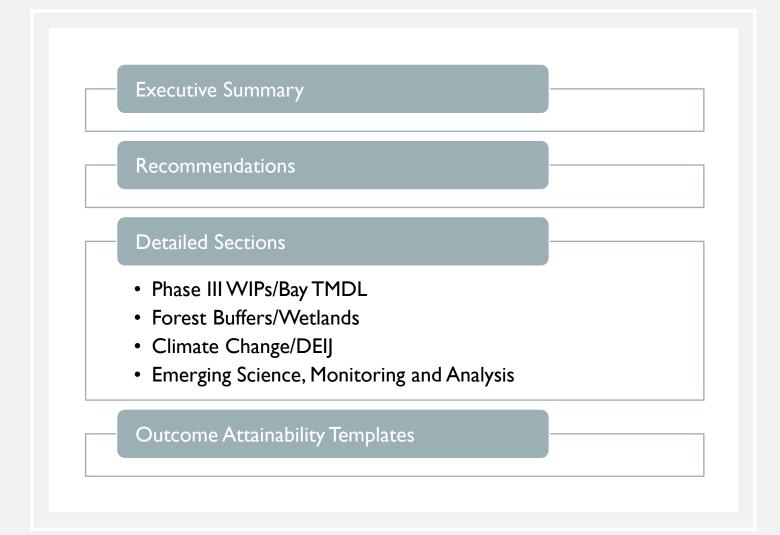


The Drafting Team created an updated outcome attainability template, pre-populated with information from each outcome's narrative analysis from their Strategy Review System review and each outcome lead was asked to edit and review.



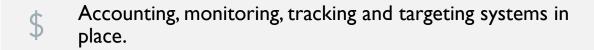
Steering Committee Chair set the outline of the report and subject matter experts helped to inform the content.

REACHING 2025 OUTLINE



OUTCOME ATTAINAB ILITY STATUS

Implementation Team	Outcomes On-Course	Outcomes Off-Course	Outcomes Uncertain
inable Fisheries	 Blue Crab Abundance Blue Crab Management (completed) Fish Habitat Forage Fish Oysters 		
abitat	Fish PassageStream Health	 Black Duck Brook Trout Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Wetlands 	
Water Quality	 2017 WIPs (Completed) Toxic Contaminants Research Water Quality Standards Assessment & Monitoring 	 2025 WIPs Forest Buffers Toxic Contaminants Policy & Prevention Tree Canopy 	
Maintain Healthy Watersheds	Land Use Methods and MetricsLand Use Options Evaluation		Healthy Watersheds
Fostering Chesapeake Stewardship	 Environmental Literacy Planning Protected Lands Public Access Sustainable Schools 	DiversityStudent	 Stewardship
Enhance Partnering, Leadership and Management	Local Leadership		
Scientific, Technical Assessment and Reporting	Climate Monitoring & Assessment	Climate Adaptation	





Has a champion.



Plays a role in economic and ecological successes.



Enjoys public support and contributes to their well-being.



Important for equity and inclusion.



Contributes to the success of other outcomes.



Recognized as a success outside of the partnership.

WHAT SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES HAVE IN COMMON

COMMON CHALLENGES IMPEDING OUTCOME SUCCESS

Qualitative
outcomes often do
not have concrete
milestones or
progress measures
to evaluate
effectiveness.

Roles, responsibilities and coordination is not defined.

Ambitious
outcomes are
established without
an understanding
of costs,
commitments and
responsibility.

Community engagement networks not in place/needs expansion.

- Establish clear geographic and numeric targets, measures of success, accounting systems and monitoring protocols for tidal wetland restoration.
- Ensure conservation of existing and new forest buffers and wetlands to protect the investments being made in restoring these critical habitats.
- Utilize federal, state and local investments and resources to conserve areas that have hydrology and proximity to become wetlands.
- Support effective, flexible buffer and wetland programs to limit out-ofpocket costs for landowners, provide maintenance, fund practices on a rolling basis and limit eligibility requirements.
- Develop more strategic approaches and increase capacity for outreach and engagement. These could include:
 - Encourage time and effort to cultivate relationships with private landowners to understand their barriers to wetlands and forest buffers. Develop targeted communications materials for different audiences (e.g., landowners, policymakers, agricultural technical service providers) that emphasize the value and co-benefits of forest buffers and wetlands using case studies and success stories.
 - Ensure messages are in easily understood terms, spread frequently and through a variety of communications mediums to ensure all audiences are being reached.



FOREST BUFFERS AND WETLANDS RECOMMENDATIONS

- Build and retain professional staff capacity to scale-up implementation of both buffers and wetlands and offer high-quality technical and maintenance services.
- Align new and existing funding mechanisms specifically for capacity building, to aid communities and organizations on the ground to help accelerate implementation efforts, prioritizing efforts to build a diverse workforce.
- Cultivate partnerships to support sustained funding and to coordinate outreach and technical assistance efforts.
- Expand tracking and reporting to ensure all forest buffers and wetlands are appropriately accounted for and verified. Develop a strategy to conduct outreach to nonprofits, state agencies, local governments and other entities to ensure they know how to report their work to the new wetlands tracking tool that will be available in fall 2023. Additionally, review current tracking systems to make sure everything is working normally and being reported accurately. Consider use of the high-resolution land use and land cover data to track gains and losses in forest buffers.
- Explore additional funding options to enhance data collection and ensure the wetlands tracker remains upgraded.
- Watershed jurisdictions should require that a portion of any type of on-theground grant funding go toward the maintenance of forest buffers and wetlands for at least three years. It is noted that wetland restoration efforts often require federal permits, which already require mandatory maintenance and inspection requirements.
- Increase champions to contribute and advocate for catalyzing funding, staff and resources to increase the rate of forest buffer and wetlands implementation.
- Management Board representatives should meet formally with all agencies within their jurisdiction once a year to discuss progress and ensure barriers are removed and remain out of the way to increase the potential of meeting the Wetlands outcome. Evaluate the benefits of creating jurisdiction-based Wetlands Workgroups that are responsible for engaging agencies, organizations and landowners in a collective effort to advance Wetland Action Plans.



- In 2022, the Chesapeake Riparian Forest Buffer Leadership Workshop and Restoring Wetlands of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Workshop, convened professionals from across the watershed to strategize on how to accelerate progress toward these outcomes.
 - Chesapeake Riparian Forest Buffer 2022 Leadership Workshop Summary and Next Steps
 - Restoring Wetlands of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Workshop Action Plan
- As an outcome of the Chesapeake Riparian Forest Buffer Leadership Workshop, each of the jurisdictions developed their own <u>riparian forest buffer action</u> <u>strategies</u> to identify ways in which they can uniquely progress buffer implementation over the next 5-10 years.
- A reorganization of the Wetlands Workgroup recently occurred, to focus efforts on both non-tidal and tidal wetland restoration and enhancement. Even though the outcome as currently written doesn't reflect non-tidal and tidal wetlands individually, this shift allows workgroup members to prepare for how they would like to address changes in the outcome post-2025.
- Both outcomes have worked across other Chesapeake Bay Program GITs, workgroups and advisory committees to fill information and data gaps. Some of this work includes recent Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) reports like, <u>Rising Watershed and Bay Water Temperatures</u>—<u>Ecological Implications and Management Responses</u> and workshops, <u>Evaluating an Improved Systems Approach to Crediting: Consideration of Wetland Ecosystem Services</u>.
- A growing momentum to expand existing flexible and effective buffer programs to complement current CREP funding.
- GIT-funded projects, like <u>Maintaining Riparian Forests in Stream Corridor Restoration</u>, emphasize the important role that forest buffers play in overall stream ecosystem health, and the in-progress, <u>Mapping Non-Tidal Wetlands in Areas with Outdated Wetlands Maps</u>, develops a new approach to costeffectively model the location of non-tidal vegetated wetlands.

FOREST BUFFERS/WETLANDS CHALLENGES



HIGH-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS



Accelerate Investments.

Increase speed and scale—IIJA/IRA, state investments.

Target funding toward lagging outcomes.



Integrate Emerging Science and Monitoring.

Geographic targeting.
Shallow waters.

Social science.

Climate and rising temperatures.

Robust monitoring network.



Fast-Track Implementation of Action Plans.

Forest Buffers.

Wetlands.

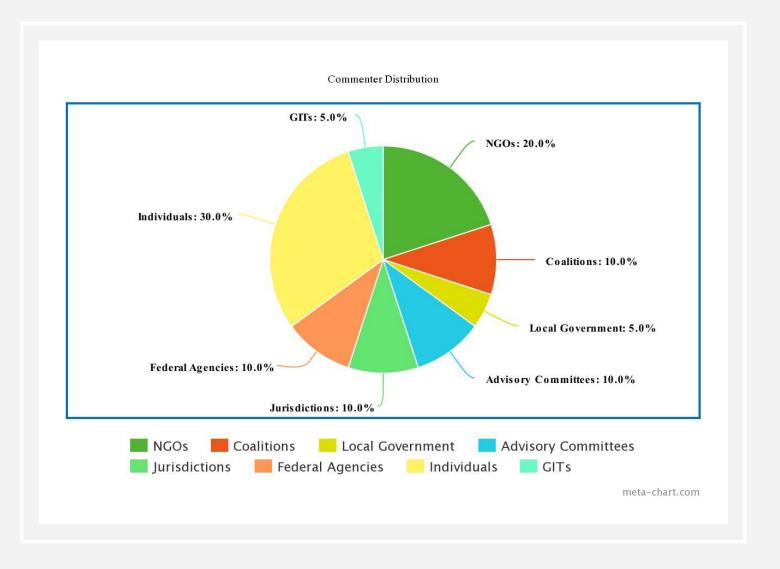
Phase III WIPs.

DEIJ.

Climate.

COMMENTS

- Public comment period opened on July 21 for 30 days.
- Received 391 comments from 20 different organizations.



- Comments were divided into five categories:
 - Grammatical edits to be made in the next version of the report.
 - Refer comments to subject matter experts for their response.
 - No response required.
 - Refer comments to Beyond 2025 steering committee.
 - General comments that applied to the entire report.



These general comments were reviewed by a subsection of the Reaching 2025 steering committee, who recommended actions to be taken in addressing them.

WETLANDS-SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Include land conversion as an emerging threat.

Align new funding opportunities with wetland needs.

Engage with community groups to foster on-the-ground restoration work.

Dedicated funding should be allocated to the maintenance of wetlands.

Push for larger systems-change at the local government level in regard to restoration opportunities.

Consider more focus on social science to encourage restoration.



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