



December 12, 2024

Director Shimkin and the CBP Management Board,

I would like to thank the members of the CBP's Management Board for providing me the opportunity to speak today. Public participation opportunities, such as this, are essential to a restored Chesapeake Bay watershed.

My name is Renee Reber and I am the Mid-Atlantic Climate & Clean Water Program Manager for the National Parks Conservation Association, or NPCA, which is a national, nonpartisan nonprofit organization with 1.6 million members across the country. For decades we've worked at the community level across the Mid-Atlantic region to protect and enhance the watershed's incredible national parks. We are members of the Choose Clean Water Coalition and the Chesapeake Conservation Partnership.

I would like to highlight the importance of the public access, land conservation, and climate change goals in the updated Chesapeake Bay Agreement and their important roles in improving water quality.

Public access

Public access provides many benefits to meeting water quality goals and public health. People won't protect and support things they don't understand or have a connection to. It is critical to ensure ample public access to waterways and green spaces for all to enjoy and benefit from.

Additionally, public access has a high return on investment. It spurs an important part of the Chesapeake Bay watershed's outdoor economy, which contributes over \$60 billion in annual economic benefits and supports nearly 1 million jobs. A week ago, the Shapiro Administration announced a 10% increase in Pennsylvania's outdoor recreation sector, which contributes \$19 billion to the state's economy and supports 168,000 jobs. Pennsylvania recently legislated historic investments to state park and forest infrastructure funding, established a dedicated office of outdoor recreation, and launched a new program to engage outdoor businesses through its 'Elevate' initiative.

The National Park Service plays an important role across the watershed in increasing public access by providing technical and financial assistance through the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Watertrails Network, authorized by Congress in 1998. Since then, NPS has awarded approximately \$26 million in financial assistance funding nearly 400 projects. The most recent round of grants supported initiatives such as ones being led by Blacks of the Chesapeake Foundation, to create and implement a master plan for a new education center at Elktonia Heritage Park, in MD, which will provide access and tell historical and ecological stories for underrepresented communities.

While the public access goal is on target to be met, over the course of the following year, it is critical that the CBP and the Management Board include updates to this goal and ensure that all people across the watershed have access to our waterways and greenspaces. Having a connection to the watershed fosters care and stewardship of its resources, ultimately leading to improvements in water quality.

NATIONAL PARKS CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

777 6th Street NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20001 | 800.628.7275 | npca.org



Land conservation

Water quality is a direct reflection and indicator of what we do on the land. The watershed looks a lot different now than it did in 2014. Right now, our lands are rapidly being converted to large warehouses, data centers, solar farms, housing and commercial developments, and more. With such development pressures, it's important that we protect the natural and undeveloped places that we have.

Farmland across the watershed is under threat. Even in Pennsylvania, the state that leads the nation in the number of farms and acres permanently preserved for agricultural production. The American Farmland Trust ranked Pennsylvania's farmland as the nation's 12th most threatened state by development and Delaware as #10. Virginia lost 488,000 acres of farmland between the 2022 and 2017 USDA Census of Agriculture.

Lands adjacent to our national park sites are also under threat. In recent years, NPCA and our partners have worked diligently to protect national parks in northern Virginia from the harmful impacts of data centers. The significant air and water pollution from data centers harm the visitor experience for both tourism and outdoor recreation, as well as damage sensitive habitat for wildlife. Data centers are large warehouses that store computers and data, hosting our digital lives and security. They consume large amounts of energy and water and represent a newer type development that poses significant impacts water quality and quantity.

Even though the land conservation goal is on target to be met, more must be done. Updates to this goal must be included in the Agreement as development threatens water quality improvements and the model does not account for land taken out of protected status.

Climate change

In 2014, climate change seemed like a distant concept. Now, it's clear that we are experiencing the impacts of what climate change will bring. Our communities and waterways need to be prepared for what's ahead, including the direct impacts on water quality and quantity.

Intense precipitation events are happening more frequently, overwhelming streams, flooding roads, homes, and business, and carrying with it massive amounts of debris and pollutants. Problems also occur from not getting enough precipitation. In this year alone drought conditions affected various tributaries within the Chesapeake Bay watershed. By July, approximately 60% of Maryland and 90% of Virginia were experiencing moderate drought, with some areas reaching severe drought levels. Since November 1st, 35 counties in Pennsylvania are under drought conditions. Shenandoah National Park closed all streams and rivers to fishing due to extremely low water flows, which stressed native brook trout populations.

The impacts of climate change, such as extreme heat, flooding, and invasive species, impact all our national park sites across the watershed as well as our communities, the Bay and its tributaries. Not only is climate resilience planning critical for water quality, it is important that our communities are resilient and prepared. The Bay Agreement must include updates to the climate resilience goals to prepare and protect our waterways and communities for current and future challenges.

NATIONAL PARKS CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

777 6th Street NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20001 | 800.628.7275 | npca.org



The Bay Partnership formed over 40 years ago to work together on a common goal: a healthy Chesapeake Bay watershed, and since then much progress has been made. However, there is more work to do be done and our waterways and lands are under pressure from increasing population, development, and climate change. Updating the public access, land conservation, and climate change goals in the Bay Agreement helps to prioritize and bring funding, purpose, and momentum to these goals.

The Partnership must continue to work on these collective goals and include public input as it makes these decisions. Two days ago, the Executive Council reaffirmed the Bay Program's commitment to public participation in its directive by including in its charge that the Principals' Staff Committee be inclusive and transparent regarding updates to the Chesapeake Bay Agreement. I encourage the Management Board to hold a public forum dedicated solely to collecting public input on the future of the Bay Agreement's goals and outcomes.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

Renee Reber
Mid-Atlantic Climate & Clean Water Program Manager
National Parks Conservation Association



Dec 12, 2024

Comments to the Chesapeake Bay Program Management Board

Lindsey Walker, Senior Manager, Education & Community Conservation
Mid-Atlantic Regional Center

Thank you for the opportunity to share feedback this morning. My name is Lindsay Walker, and I am the Senior Manager for Education and Community Conservation for the National Wildlife Federation's Mid-Atlantic Region. I am also a member of the Chesapeake Bay Program's Education Workgroup and the Mid-Atlantic Environmental Literacy Network Advisory Team, and I coordinate the Mid-Atlantic Sustainable Schools Community of Practice.

National Wildlife Federation strongly supports the inclusion of the environmental literacy goal in the Chesapeake Bay Agreement, along with all of the engaged communities goals. These goals and outcomes bring federal dollars into each of the watershed states through programs like BWET, NOAA's Bay Watershed Education and Training grant program, that are not only critical for achieving broad environmental and sustainability outcomes, but also have co-benefits like improved student achievement. These co-benefits are well documented in research; students who are engaged in hands-on environmental literacy learning and action projects perform better across the curriculum. Without critical environmental literacy funding made possible through the Bay Agreement, the progress we've made over the last ten years will be lost.

Furthermore, compelling states to coordinate on environmental literacy and other community outcomes across the region is also critical: we learn how to do this work better together, and are more likely to be successful in achieving our goals as a coordinated, intentional, regional network. Finally, environmental literacy in schools, local stewardship, and public access are the only personal connection many residents and voters have to the Bay Program. The Communities goals create an engaged, environmentally aware, and vocal constituency that fights for the Bay. As such, engaged communities are critical to the long-term success of the Bay Agreement. Thank you for your time.