

Public Access Workgroup

Spring 2025 Meeting

Tuesday, April 22 | 10:00 am – 11:30 am

Google Meet joining info

Video call link: <https://meet.google.com/vby-ummz-ysb>

Or dial: (US) +1 609-483-6096 PIN: 763 985 886#

More phone numbers: <https://tel.meet/vby-ummz-ysb?pin=2484999197956>



Public Access Outcome: By 2025, add 300 new public access sites, with a strong emphasis on providing opportunities for boating, swimming and fishing, where feasible.

Attendees: Aurelia Gracia (NPS), Britt Slattery (NPS), Daniel Koval (staffer), Kelly Rossiter (PA, sitting in for Vallie Edenbo), Mark McLaughlin (PA Fish and Boat Commission), Erik Zlokovitz (MD DNR), Brent Peterson (DC), Adrienne Kotula (CBC - VA Director), Kristal McKelvey (VA DCR), Jillian Seagraves (MD DNR), Kevin DuBois (DOD), Andy Fitch (CBP)

Meeting Minutes

10:00 am **Welcome / Introductions**

10:15 am **Review of draft Outcome Language: [2025 Outcome Evaluation: Public Access WG - Google Docs](#)**

Aurelia Gracia: Following a meeting with the MB, we were given more instruction on drafting the language for the updated outcome. Public Access is on course right now for 2025; we are expected to surpass our 300 new access sites by 2025. Today, I want to go over some draft language for the public access outcome and discuss what the future metrics would look like. The language you see on that doc has been compiled from the office hours and feedback that Public Access Workgroup has given so far. We have to submit draft language by April 25th, so hopefully this discussion will help clean up the document a little bit.

Kelly Rossiter: In PA, we are working with Fish and Boat to help our partners to come up with strategies to improve access on waterways, and we are focusing on mitigating barriers.

Those include true physical accessibility to those sites, but also the social/psychological barriers. If they don't have programming for it, they need someone to go with them, they don't know how to swim or something - that could be a good goal for this group. We have all these access sites, but let's work on getting as many people as possible to these access sites. The second outcome language option gets more to that, but could address more the less tangible access barriers. Not sure if the group agrees, but that's what PA is working on and it could be great to get groups in the whole Bay to work on together.

Aurelia Gracia: That's a good point! Where we got from this document was discussing if we want to just do another 300 access sites, but a lot of folks said they can't maintain what they already have. It doesn't make sense to just add more when they can't maintain current ones, so we took an approach to focus on improving, updating, and maintaining sites. We also discussed access to green spaces. So there is definitely space to address the intangible barriers, either in the narrative language or find a spot in the output metrics to put it in there.

Adrienne Kotula: I support option 2, it goes more in detail about the specific things trying to target. I also agree with Kelly about the barriers and how we can address those barriers, whether through tweaking the language or the metrics. Also about urban lands that came up on the protected lands call: the geographic spread piece of the language can speak to that as well, making sure there are access sites throughout the watershed.

Britt Slattery: The education workgroup has always had focus on providing access sites to schools because it has always been a struggle to get money/ school approval / etc. I have put it out of my head after working on it for years and years, but now maybe we could plant that seed of connection with schools. I know PA State Parks does a ton with schools.

Aurelia Gracia: The only part I struggle with is that within the outcome language, the output metrics seem to be the place to put some sort of numeric target. You could put in the 2 year action plan that you want to work with schools, but it is hard to decide if these things go in the output metric target, or save it for the Action Plan.

Adrienne Kotula: I'm also conflicted about breaking all of these things out and having all these different numbers. I'm hoping that lots of that will be discussed in the MB retreat on May 7th and 8th and the workgroups will have to go back and work on it from there. I like the way that you have been approaching it in this group and the Protected Lands

workgroups, by putting it all out there and seeing what you get back. I think that's the best way to go.

Kevin DuBois, from chat: I know we often think of public access for active recreation (boating, fishing, etc) but I think we need to keep in mind that we need public access points for passive recreation too. For some people, without previous access, they will need to ease into active recreation. So at the start maybe just going to be able to visually experience the access point will serve as a gateway to future active recreation.

I'm in favor of 2 also.

Aurelia Gracia: agree, Kevin

Aurelia Gracia: So I think everyone agreed with option 2 for the outcome language. So the approach is to have this narrative language, and then drop into these output metrics. From feedback received, folks still want to focus on new access sites, which is the first point. The second point speaks to ADA/ABA Accessibility. The third captures the maintenance and improvement to current sites. The 4th is the addition of recreation types; ex: one site only focuses on trails but has a body of water, and they add a kayak launch. We would update our count log to say this site added a new recreation type. I didn't put a numeric target just yet, and we can talk about if we want to add that, or if we just want to report it out on our own but not get held to a number. The last bullet point is adding access to green space. Working with Protected Lands, they would capture the parcels and geographic mapping of green space in an urban setting, and this group would focus on getting people to access those green spaces. So it appears in both groups, but with different actions.

Discussion on New Sites Output

So for the new sites, one possibility is by 2040, adding 100 new public access sites with a strong emphasis on providing recreation opportunities where feasible. I don't know if this is too broad, as it does not specific water-focused recreation. I would also like to know thoughts on the number 100: is that too much, too little?

Kelly Rossiter: I like that it says just general recreation. I think if we are focused on green space, which isn't always connecting into the water but adjacent to the water, maybe that's a way to, it allows those green space areas to count to those metrics. I don't know if putting the word 'connection' would help broaden it, but I do like the word recreation.

Britt Slattery, from chat: I like that the new sites language is broad, not specific to water or green space.

Aurelia Gracia: The reason why there was this water emphasis for the current goal was because of the way we count. On Chesapeake progress, the sites are counted by its connection to a water feature, which is easier for the workgroup to track. To expand to green space, we would have to set boundaries to how we would count them for metrics and reporting.

Kristal McKelvey, from chat: "including but not limited to..."

Kelly Rossiter, from chat: true--"connecting" is hard to count and a bit subjective

Andy Fitch: For tracking, we currently track by specific access type. We could always add a new type if they don't offer one of the four existing types that we currently track by.

Discussion on Improving ADA/ABA Accessibility Output

Aurelia Gracia: Comments I saw were why don't we get credit for or at least track accessibility. The draft language here says by 2040 to improve 10 existing sites by adding ADA/ABA accessibility features to meet the needs of communities. 10 might be too low, and I'm not sure how often states are updating current sites and how feasible it would be to accomplish. Is 10 appropriate, or should we bump that up to 50 or another number? Britt added 'provide technical assistance and guidance to encourage widespread planning for accessibility in future new and improved sites'. Should this language be mixed with the output, or put in the 2 year action plan?

Britt Slattery: I think I put that because the 10 sites seems low from a public perspective (though ADA is expensive, I get) so I was trying to add forward thinking language to imply that more of that would happen.

Brent Peterson, from chat: Perhaps instead of a hard number target perhaps a % of sites?
*that is in relation to the ADA conversation

Britt Slattery: There is a general understanding that not everything that is done is a number, or a measurable, so it is okay to have some parts that are not like that. If there's something

you want to include that has no numbers.

Discussion on Improving Existing Site Grounds and Structures Output

Aurelia Gracia: People were saying lots of current sites are in disrepair or need maintenance. This draft language says by 2040 to improve 50 existing sites to the site's structures/grounds, etc, including signage, parking, seating, and public facilities. Is 50 an appropriate number?

Kristal McKelvey: For our LWCF program we are trying to encourage funding to go towards maintenance. When it comes to localities doing it, how do we avoid letting things slip through the cracks? Within our state agencies I can find a way to track it, but if localities / local parks are doing it, it may be hard to count theirs. But, if we can get those counts, that would be reasonable.

Kelly Rossiter, from chat: I think 50 is very reasonable. PA funds a handful of site updates every year (DCNR and PFBC) in addition to our state lands being updated.

Aurelia Gracia: Would bumping it up to 100 be too much for the states?

Kristal McKelvey: What about evidence? How do we document that these are improved ; is it before/after pics, a narrative it has happened?

Aurelia Gracia: We do data calls by reaching out to the states and ask them to gather the inventory of new public access sites. If we were to add this, I assume we would go to the states and ask them to grab their inventory of any known improvements, which would mean those local parks would need to communicate that to the state rep. Maybe there's a form we're able to create to fill out location, what the update was, and the date? When we do our call each year, we go based on that form.

Kristal McKelvey: Thank you.

Mark McLaughlin, from chat: Agree that 50 is doable (from chat)

Kevin DuBois, from chat: Similarly, to Kelly's point, perhaps we should reduce some of these targets for hard improvements to add a goal for removing access barriers to get more

people to these sites. For example, I know of a local initiative to build sidewalks and street crossings to connect residential neighborhoods with pedestrian access to existing parks.

Kelly Rossiter, from chat: can we "track" this similar to the new sites spreadsheet? where, what was improved etc?

Aurelia Gracia: Yes, this could be tracked through the data call and we can add that as a spot. This could help parks be better able to communicate their changes. We can see how it goes and always adjust as needed.

Discussion on Addition of Recreation Types Output

Aurelia Gracia: Volpe is doing a report on access sites in the watershed and the spread of amenity types and locations. It would be nice to continue to track that and encourage sites to expand their recreation types based on community assessments or user needs. This could be coupled with the research done from this workgroup previously, the Benefits and Barriers Research. This research found that many people don't have interest in getting in the water, but actually just looking at it, or having park benches near it. Yet Volpe found that Boating access has the highest frequency among the parks compared to other amenities but most people don't necessarily care for it. So for this bullet point, we could just gather that information of expanding recreation types, but don't give a number to necessarily work for.

Kristal McKelvey, from chat: Can you provide that acronym or link to the FHWA information?

Kevin DuBois, from chat: At least in VA, fishing license money goes towards constructing boat access sites. That's why you see them - they have a funding source.

Aurelia: Would this be of interest for the workgroup to count?

Kristal McKelvey: I think it would be notable if it's only a kayak launch and then also expands to be a motor boat launch, for example, because that's a big jump in what type of water access it is. But then, expanding the types of people and levels of comfort with water activities is important. Expanding amenities along the water on the site is hard to count, so I don't want a number there. So maybe instead of increasing the number, we increase the variation of recreation types, putting that in the language.

Erik Zlokovitz: I think our kayak sites are hard to expand into something else. They are often small beaches with a path in and out to bring the kayak. I don't see those being expanded into a larger power boat site. This is outside the box thinking for me, but I'm more on the fishing side for things (shore access for fishing). Not opposed, but I'm a bit limited in what I can do.

Aurelia Gracia: That's good feedback Erik, thank you.

Kevin DuBois, from chat: Maybe say "...increase the number of active or passive recreation types to meet the needs of local communities, including..."

kayak launches could be expanded to include a bench for bird watching or just nature appreciation... I've seen reports where bird watching is the #1 form of outdoor recreation.

Britt Slattery, from chat: Hearing Erik - his job is focused on certain aspects of this work. I think this applies to others in the WG. However, all are in agencies with other staff who do other work (e.g., land- or park-based vs waterways). We should be thinking about who else we can work with or bring into this work to achieve the things that are needed

Aurelia Gracia: From the chat that Britt sent, we are looking at adding in other representatives who work on land-specific access as we expand beyond just water access.

Discussion on Expanding Access to Green Space Output

Aurelia: We have talked about expanding access to urban lands/ green spaces, and we are trying to capture the spaces/acres in communities, with an original focus on getting underserved communities to access sites because lots of folks don't live by the water. I've tried to capture that feedback. In Protected Lands, it's a huge interest, and they would count and track the parcel. In Public Access, we would want to focus on access to those parcels. What we have possibly settled on is Protected Lands would have a metric that would capture the acreage, and then Public Access would have a metric on getting people to access those green space areas. I know we haven't explored this yet as a workgroup, and I want to caution everyone that we would need a baseline study to be done to capture all of the urban greenspace acres in the watershed, and also how to capture the access to them. This is something I am still wrestling with, but want to capture people's thoughts on it.

Kevin, from chat: From the Google:

Americans' favorite outdoor recreation activities include gathering with family and friends, and going to the pool

Ashburn, Va. (July 2, 2019) — The vast majority (91 percent) of Americans will participate in an outdoor recreation activity hosted by their local park and recreation agency this summer, according to a recent poll conducted by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). Americans' top three outdoor recreation activities include: Gathering with family and friends at the park for games, picnics or barbecues (58 percent), Going to the pool (48 percent), and Walking or hiking along a local trail (45 percent)

Kristal McKelvey: Not all protected lands have public access.

Aurelia Gracia: Yes, and that's something I was mentioning in Protected Lands as well. Do some protected lands truly provide public access?

Kristal McKelvey: Or does the reporting have to go the other way? There would definitely need to be communication between the workgroups.

Britt Slattery: Could we turn it into a percentage of land protected including public access as a target? The connection with protecting parcels of land and adding in some forward-looking prominent thing that says look for those sites that will provide access for the public; I don't know if that's a need or if it's logical but...

Aurelia Gracia: That's something I was struggling with at the protected lands meeting ; I get the interest of making sure folks have access to green space, but the question is how do we know if it is truly accessible, or what kinds of access it would provide. If it's just a field, would people go? Does it need an amenity on it to be considered an access site? I do like the percentage approach; Whatever the total amount of acres of protected lands identified in urban areas, we could strive for a certain percentage of those being publicly accessible.

Britt Slattery: it might be a question to ask folks in CCP like Mark Platts in PA

Andy Fitch: In the past, there was a requirement that sides had to be on a 5th order stream or larger; is that still required?

Aurelia Gracia: the 5th order stream is the requirement that the public access workgroup made when it first started , because the outcome language had that water focus. Now that we are expanding it to include recreation types and accessibility and green space, we haven't established any criteria for that. But 5th order stream is still that requirement for the water piece

Britt Slattery: It kinda depends because in western MD/VA that have fly fishing, are those also 5th order streams?

Andy Fitch: I think in the past there has been some flexibility with that. Like if a site wasn't on one but gave access to a 5th order stream through a short tributary, it was counted.

Britt Slattery: I think it's not just a need in urban areas, so maybe don't say urban.

Daniel Koval, in chat: Sophie Waterman mentioned calling it 'community lands' instead of urban lands to follow the same language of how her team tracks it I believe

Aurelia Gracia: That's a good idea

Kevin Du Bois, DoD: Like that too.

Adrienne Kotula: Yeah, I like that terminology.

Britt Slattery: I like that

Aurelia Gracia: I will try to clean up this document to get something to submit to the Management Board by the 24th. We will inform this group as we move along. I assume there will be some sort of session following the Management Board's review to figure out how to move forward. Is there anything left that we haven't captured here that we should?

11:30 am Adjourn