



Watershed Actions: Elevate Conservation and Stewardship as key guiding pillars for the Chesapeake Bay Program (Recommendation 4)

A more holistic approach to watershed health requires more explicit recognition of the critical role that land conservation and stewardship play in maintaining watershed health. Land conservation and stewardship provide ecosystem services, ensure the durability of water quality investments, promote the long-term resiliency of critical habitats to climate change, and directly benefit underserved communities. Protection and planning are much cheaper than restoration on a per acre basis and can help address critical nonpoint source pollution challenges and local needs for flood control, sourcewater protection, and public recreation, among other benefits.

Impact to how we work: Broadening the scope of the partnership’s work to integrate conservation and stewardship as key strategies for improving watershed health would be a fundamental shift that would ultimately include reconsidering how resources are allocated.

- Leverage knowledge of local, state, and federal programs to conserve 30% of the land by 2030, achieve longer-term goals, and build an interconnected network of conserved landscapes. Couple land protection with restoration to restore ecosystem function, promote species resiliency, and provide ecosystem services to communities.
- On a local scale, use a “network of networks” approach to build local capacity and support green infrastructure practices including: land protection, restoration, wildlife conservation and the maintenance of community tree canopy and other nature-based solutions.
- Prioritize and improve coordination of efforts to manage and steward protected and restored areas. The long-term stewardship needed to protect investments in restoration and conservation includes the management of public (federal, state and local) and private lands that provide critical wildlife habitat, public access, and watershed health benefits.
- Expand and enhance publicly accessible natural lands through the creation, stewardship and improvement of more parks and trail networks. This will enhance the livability and land values for local communities, particularly underserved communities.

Impact on Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement: Without changing the Agreement, Conservation and Stewardship could be elevated as key guiding pillars for the Program (alongside science, restoration, and partnership). Watershed Agreement goals and outcomes could be modified where appropriate to explicitly address the importance of conserving and stewarding all watersheds, expanding the focus beyond state-identified healthy watersheds.

General Level of Effort: Moderate/High. Moderate efforts would be required to implement the “How to” Strategies in Phase 2. However, significant additional investments of time and resources would be required to fully integrate conservation and stewardship into the Program.

How to Strategies (Phase 2 Actions):

- Identify the Watershed Agreement outcomes that would benefit from revision to incorporate a more explicit focus on conservation and/or stewardship.
- Investigate local, state, and federal conservation and stewardship programs, mapping and data sources, and stakeholders that could be better engaged to facilitate the effective integration of conservation and stewardship into the partnership. Determine the appropriate pathways for engagement in the current (or improved) partnership structure.

