



## Maintain Healthy Watersheds GIT & Protected Lands Workgroup Meeting Minutes

October 21st, 2024

11:00am - 1:00pm (ET)

[Meeting Materials](#)

Alanna Crowley, MD DNR  
Alison Santoro, MD DNR  
Andrew Szwak, Land Trust Alliance  
Angel Valdez, MDE  
Anne Hairston-Strang, MD FS  
Anthony Jr. Bobo, BLM  
Arianna Johns, VA DEQ  
Ashley Hullinger, PA DEP  
Ashley Rebert, PA DCNR  
Aurelia Gracia, NPS  
Bailey Bosley, USGS  
Ben Alexandro, CC  
Bonnie Bick, Mattawoman Watershed Society  
Britt Slattery, NPS  
Cassandra Davis, NYS DEC  
Catherine Brady, USEPA  
Coral Howe, USGS  
Daniel Koval, CRC  
Deborah Herr Cornwell, MDP  
Elizabeth Mckercher, VA DEQ  
George Doumit, DE DNREC  
Jeffrey Lerner, USEPA

John Wolf, USGS  
Joseph Schell, DE DNREC  
Kara Kemmerer, MDE  
Katherine Brownson, USFS  
Kelly Maloney, USGS  
Kevin Du Bois, DoD CBP  
Kristin Saunders, UMCES  
Lori Maloney, Canaan Valley Institute  
Marilyn Yang, CRC  
Mark Southerland, Tetra Tech  
Melissa Harrison, PA DEP  
Mindy Neil, WV DEP  
Peter Claggett, USGS  
Rick Mittler, ACB  
Sarah Brezezinski, USEPA  
Scott Heidel, PA DEP  
Sean Emmons, USGS  
Sophie Waterman, USGS  
Todd Janeski, VA DCR  
Wendy O'Sullivan, NPS  
William Harbold, MD DNR

**11:00 Welcome** – *Jeff Lerner (HWGIT Chair, EPA) and Anthony Bobo Jr. (PLWG Chair, BLM)*

### Announcements

- The HWGIT has updated their Management Strategy and Workplan. The documents are viewable from the [CBP Healthy Watersheds Outcomes page](#).
- Due to time restraints, Jason Dubow is stepping down from the HWGIT Vice-Chair position. *At the end of today's meeting, we will review the received nominations and vote for a new HWGIT Vice-Chair.*

**11:10** [Introduction to the Protected Lands Workgroup](#) – Anthony Bobo Jr. (PLWG Chair, BLM), Aurelia Gracia (PLWG Coordinator, NPS), Daniel Koval (PLWG Staffer, CRC), John Wolf (USGS), and Sophie Waterman (USGS)

Anthony, Aurelia, and Daniel introduced the PLWG by providing an overview of the workgroup's scope and purpose. In summary:

- The PLWG goal is to conserve landscapes treasured by communities in order to maintain water quality and healthy habitats to sustain working forests, farms and maritime communities, and to conserve indigenous and community values.
- The PLWG outcome is to protect an additional 2 million acres of high-conservation priority lands across the watershed by 2025, as identified at the federal, state, and local levels. This includes two sub-goals: conserving 225,000 acres of wetlands and 695,000 acres of forest land that are critical for maintaining water quality.
- Their membership is organized into three main bodies: the jurisdictions within the watersheds (six states plus D.C.), the lead federal agency representatives (including the Park Service, USGS, and others), and the Chesapeake Conservation Partnership.
- Their current Workplan focuses on four key areas: improving communications through people-centered materials (including raising awareness of the CCP Narrative Toolkit); facilitating collaborative partnerships; conserving green spaces in under-resourced communities with an emphasis on DEI; and providing data and analysis to identify conservation priorities and maximize benefits.

John and Sophie provided an overview of the data and protection status tracking for the PLWG. In summary:

- John highlighted the importance of the protected lands indicator, which tracks progress in land conservation and assesses the workgroup's efforts. He noted that, as of 2022, nearly 1.64 million acres in the Chesapeake Bay watershed have been permanently protected since 2010, representing 82% of the watershed, with 365,533 acres remaining. At the current rate, they are on track to meet the 2025 goal.
- Sophie also addressed nuanced challenges in the data including missing "date of establishment" information for 62% of the 2022 records, leaving 97 million acres with unknown dates, and discussed strategies to improve data completeness moving forward.

Aurelia finished the presentation by discussing future collaboration opportunities with the HWGIT, from the PLWG's perspective: In summary:

- Coordinate learning opportunities among each workgroup and at partner events
- Create a map and/or language outlining ecosystem services throughout the watershed
- CCP Narrative Toolkit: tools for communicating conservation messaging
- Using high res data to separate out wetland conservation from non-wetland forested conservation to update information related to PLWG sub-goals

### **Discussion:**

**Ben Alexandra:** At Aurelia's request, he provided an in-depth overview of the CCP Narrative Toolkit. The CCP Narrative Toolkit is intended to unite and support land conservation efforts across the Chesapeake Bay watershed by providing tools and resources for partners to tailor their messaging to their target audiences. The toolkit features a messaging box with templates, a "spiel" worksheet for crafting pitches, and various visual tools. A workshop will be hosted to walk through these resources.

Ben asked the group various questions to gather feedback as they plan the workgroup, including: *What are the biggest messaging and communications challenges that you have?*

**Anne Hairston-Strang:** Cited challenges with including working lands in conservation messaging, noting that people often don't understand or know how to explain this, especially when addressing the general public. She highlighted the difficulty of balancing society's needs with ecological attributes.

**Jeff Lerner:** Mentioned the [TELE Program](#), a set of tools for effective engagement with private landowners, which addresses how to move people along the "ladder of engagement" to take action on their properties. Suggested that reviewing this toolkit could be beneficial.

**Kristin Saunders:** Referenced the CCP's recent behind-the-scenes work in B2025 to elevate conversations about conservation and restoration. However, local leaders had an emphatic reaction, possibly misunderstanding the goal, thinking it was about preventing development. She emphasized the need to refine the message to convey a balance between conservation, affordable housing, and economic development, while promoting conservation as a preventive measure.

Kristin also mentioned that there will be a focus on non-point source programs in B2025 and STAC's work. She discussed the potential to combine restoration with long-term conservation on agricultural lands, creating financial incentives while incentivizing durable conservation practices. This could be a significant opportunity to make non-point source programs more effective.

**Kevin Du Bois from chat:** Are there messages that convey the economic value of open space to communities and/or private landowners? Hedonic Pricing Index, etc?

**Wendy O'Sullivan from chat:** Need: Communicating the alignment and shared benefits of conservation, outdoor industries and local economic development.

**Andrew Szwak from chat:** Our market research found the connection between fresh, local food and working lands protection polled strongly. We embedded some related messaging into the Gaining Ground Comms Toolkit we use with land trusts nationally. Some of that may be relevant for this more gov't-focused audience too.

[gaining-ground-communications-toolkit\\_october-2023-campaign\\_10-3-231.pdf \(storyblok.com\)](#)

**Kristin Saunders from chat:** Per Anne's comment, agriculture is going to be front and center as the program deals with trying to create more effective non-point source programs. Given that focus, we have an opportunity to really connect long term conservation to restoration practices and build additional supportive financial incentives and technical assistance.

**Ben Alexandro:** Asked the group another question: *What is an ideal outcome for a training session on the toolkit - what would you learn or walk away with?*

**Jeff Lerner:** Examples within the Bay of where this engagement has worked for real protection work. Also thinking about different types of working lands (forested, agricultural, grazing, etc). Suggested talking about different types and contexts.

**Peter Claggett:** The value of coupling restoration and conservation is a critical message for the CBP Partners as well as for landowners.

**Wendy O'Sullivan from chat:** NPS Chesapeake Gateways is developing interpretation programming around food, foodways and cultural working lands connections. As we move along, we will circle in with CBP and CCP efforts.

**11:30 PM** [Introduction to the Healthy Watersheds Goal Team](#) – Jeff Lerner (HWGIT Chair, EPA) and Peter Claggett (HWGIT Coordinator, USGS)

Peter and Jeff introduced the HWGIT by providing an overview of goals and outcomes and reviewing the updated Management Strategy and Work Plan. In addition, Peter shared HWGIT tools and resources, while discussing the importance that land protection plays in maintaining stream and watershed health. In summary:

- The HWGIT is one of the Bay Program's six goal teams, focused on maintaining the health of local watersheds. What makes the HWGIT unique is that it does not have its own workgroups, but there is significant overlap with other goal teams and workgroups, which emphasizes the importance of collaborative meetings like this one.
- The HWGIT goal is to sustain healthy waters and watersheds recognized for their high quality and/or high ecological value, with the outcome of keeping 100% of healthy waters and watersheds healthy
- The new Management Strategy and Workplan aims to take a more holistic approach by looking at healthy watersheds more widely rather than just “state identified” healthy watersheds
- Peter gave a demonstration using the Chesapeake Healthy Watershed Assessment ([CHWA](#)) 2.0 tool, a predictive model that evaluates watershed and stream health using 60 metrics and can be used to prioritize areas for protection and restoration.

Jeff provided an overview of the Healthy Watershed recommendations submitted to the Beyond 2025 Steering Committee. In summary:

- Develop and implement tools for consistent watershed monitoring
- Prioritize land conservation, restoration, and stewardship
- Support local engagement
- Quantify ecosystem services and integrate these considerations into conservation/restoration decision making processes

Peter finished the presentation by discussing future collaboration opportunities with the PLWG, from the HWGIT's perspective: In summary:

- Set future conservation goals, by utilizing HWGIT tools to support PLWG in identifying and targeting areas for protection related to watershed health
- Monitor the status of healthy watersheds by tracking protected lands
- Creating a tool where states can generate fact sheets to inform their protection efforts
- Align land use planning with conservation goals
- Increase local and state capacity in healthy watershed areas (often rural)
- Attribute PL data with metrics relevant to climate resiliency and DEIJ
- Work with PLWG on HW Beyond 2025 recommendations

**11:50 PM Time for Questions and Open Discussion – Aurelia Gracia (PLWG Coordinator, NPS) and Peter Claggett (HWGIT Coordinator, USGS)**

Aurelia and Peter facilitated an open discussion with both groups, using the [final slide in the presentation](#) organized by HWGIT staffer, Marilyn Yang. The final slide combined the collaboration opportunities presented by the PLWG and HWGIT into three overarching categories: Coordinating Tools and Resources for Conservation, Setting Future Land Conservation Goals, and Increase Coordination and Communication.

Peter and Aurelia kicked off the discussion by asking members to share their thoughts on the proposed collaboration opportunities, encouraging feedback and insights from the group.

**Discussion:**

**Anne Hairston-Strang** mentioned "Clear Tracking" is essential. She emphasized the importance of narrowing down what is being tracked, how it's communicated, and how it fits into restoration goals. She also raised concerns about how to effectively engage local governments, as it's unrealistic to expect many of them to attend meetings. She questioned how to make information review-ready and ensure it's received positively, noting that while people want to live in communities with green space, local governments often lack clear information about which resources are most sensitive to development.

**Jeff Lerner** explained that he had shared recommendations with the Local Government Advisory Committee and received a positive response. Local government officials indicated that if we could provide the right information, it could help them with planning. He suggested that there may be opportunities to work within Bay Program networks to connect with planners.

**Peter Claggett;** Agreed that some actions can be done directly, like presenting at conferences and

planning organizations. However, communication of data at the local level will need assistance from others. He suggested finding a middle person or group to present at local planning meetings and engage the community.

**Katie Brownson:** Discussed pushback from planning/government officials, who are often concerned about competing land interests, economic development, and housing policies. She mentioned that local governments did not respond well to the original idea in the Beyond 2025 report about protecting lands from development, so that language was deleted. To make the case for conservation, she suggested focusing on climate resilience and DEIJ in messaging and creating specific pathways for local governments. She recommended using tailored presentations, fact sheets, and other information that addresses local priorities and values.

**Ben Alexandro:** Agreed that tracking is important. He added that local governments are often just looking for clear guidelines on what they need to do. He asked if there are resources or grants available to help them with conservation efforts. He cited Maryland's approach with MS4 permits, which is starting to explore forest conservation for crediting.

**Kevin Du Bois:** Explained for folks that don't know, the way the DOD primarily engages in land conservation is through protection of buffers around military bases. He mentioned the REPI (readiness and environmental protection integration) which is the funding source for DOD to collaborate with outside orgs to preserve land. Within REPI there is a layer called "REPI opportunity areas" which are areas that DOD has determined are of interest to preserve and protect as buffers to military installations. Suggested this could be a potential source of funding for further protected lands practices.

**Kevin Du Bois sent in chat:**

The REPI Interactive Map is available at <https://repi.osd.mil/map/>. The purpose of this tool is to provide partners with GIS locations of all military installations with completed REPI transactions, along with relevant information and resources for these projects. As a user, you can:

- View military installations with REPI projects and query them based on set criteria.
- Access REPI-specific funding and acreage information.
- Link to REPI project fact sheets.
- REPI Partnership Opportunity Areas,
- Navigate to state policy options for supporting military installations and ranges.
- Research and customize REPI data for multiple installations at the local-, state-, and regional-level.
- Zoom in to view boundaries of REPI installations and other DOD (non-REPI) installations.

**Aurelia Gracia:** Mentioned the PLWG trying to shift towards being more people-centered, with an emphasis on education and community engagement. The aim is to ensure that land protection efforts are targeted, particularly in areas of green space and public access.

**Wendy O'Sullivan;** Discussed the CCP steering committee, which includes members from PLWG and watershed land trust leaders. They are planning for the future and developing a playbook to guide land

conservation efforts beyond the 2 million-acre target. This includes setting new goals and establishing collaborative strategies. Land conservation will always be opportunistic, but there's urgency in identifying remaining gaps in areas where people, nature, and water intersect, and working with states and local partners to address these needs.

**Anthony Bobo:** Emphasized the importance of the people component and to make sure we're sharing what we're doing with communities.

**Andrew Szwak:** Pointed out the need to connect land use planning and conservation goals with building capacity at the state and local levels. He also highlighted the significance of intergenerational land transfers, such as farmland passing from one generation to the next, which presents an opportunity to engage landowners in conservation and underscore the land's role in the bay's health. Effective communication and outreach are critical for this effort, and many land trusts are dedicating significant resources to these activities.

**Jeff Lerner:** Mentioned there are many existing resources and plans, such as forest and wildlife planning, that states and others have already implemented. We should look to these as we identify future protection priorities related to the Bay watershed.

**Anne Hairston-Strang;** Asked **Andrew Szwak** if wildlife was a strong priority for landowners, particularly in relation to hunting and other wildlife activities.

**Andrew Szwak:** Replied that wildlife interests have evolved, with both game and non-game species now being considered together in land conservation efforts.

**Ben Alexandro:** Inquired about the timeline for the goals beyond 2025? Specifically, how do the metrics and people-focused goals fit into this?

**Jeff Lerner:** Responded that we are quickly approaching the endpoint for many of the 2025 goals, but we need to start thinking about what comes next. There's not much time left to figure out what Phase 2 of the Beyond 2025 effort looks like. Conversations haven't really started yet, but we should begin having those discussions now.

**Wendy O'Sullivan:** Highlighted that the two workgroups will play a key role in influencing the next phase of the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership, especially in elevating conservation to the same level as science and technology. This is an exciting opportunity to collaborate.

**Jeff Lerner:** Agreed with Wendy's point and suggested that the groups meet soon to continue discussing collaboration approaches.

**Peter Claggett;** Shared that the HWGIT will meet with the land use and forestry groups in December and with the climate resilience and stream health groups in March. He suggested that communication doesn't always have to be through large meetings and could include targeted email exchanges or other more frequent forms of communication. The EC Meeting is also coming up soon.

**Post Meeting Update:** Following the meeting, the HWGIT and PLWG coordinators and staffers convened

to discuss next steps. They [reorganized the collaboration slide](#) into new categories and assessed the level of difficulty for each item. In a subsequent follow-up email to the HWGIT and PLWG, members were asked to [complete a survey](#) to help prioritize these items and identify the key people and resources needed to move forward.

#### **12:40 PM HWGIT Vice-Chair Nominations and Vote – Jeff Lerner (HWGIT Chair, EPA)**

The HWGIT began accepting nominations for a new Vice-Chair after Jason Dubow stepped down. The only nomination received was for Deborah Herr Cornwell, nominated by Jason Dubow. Her biography is as follows:

*As a licensed landscape architect, Debbie has worked in the private, nonprofit and government sectors over the past 30 years. Drawing on her experiences working in a multi-disciplinary design firm and as a sole practitioner, she has designed and constructed environmentally sensitive projects for private and government clients. Prior to coming to the Maryland Department of Planning in 2017, she worked for nine years at the county government level assisting citizens in navigating the development review and approval process, preserving agricultural lands and developing local policies. Debbie currently serves as Manager of the Natural and Working Lands Unit in the Research, Review and Policy Division of MDP.*

Jeff gave Deborah (known as Debbie) an opportunity to introduce herself, where she discussed more of her environmental and land-use planning background in depth, including her experience in shoreline and stream restoration in the Chesapeake Bay and Delaware River watersheds, in addition to various state and watershed planning efforts as the Assistant Director of Planning for Local County Government with MDP.

After Debbie's introduction, Jeff opened the floor for members to ask her any questions. Hearing none, Jeff asked Debbie to temporarily leave the call to allow the HWGIT members to discuss and vote on her nomination.

**Decision:** The HWGIT unanimously voted to approve Debbie's nomination for Vice-Chair.

Debbie was then reintroduced to the call, where Jeff congratulated her on the approval and informed the members that her nomination would be forwarded to the Management Board for final review and approval on November 7, 2024.

#### **1:00 PM Adjourn**