



## Narrative Analysis

### [WETLANDS OUTCOME – NOVEMBER 10, 2022]

---

**ABSTRACT:** The Wetlands Outcome is off course from meeting its 2025 targets. Between 2010 and 2021, 16,000 acres of wetlands were established, rehabilitated or reestablished. While this outcome includes a target to restore 85,000 acres of tidal and non-tidal wetlands in the watershed, 83,000 of these restored acres should take place primarily on agricultural lands. The wetlands restored between 2010 and 2021 mark an 18.8% achievement of the 83,000-acre goal. Additional progress updates have been hindered by incomplete tracking information. The achievement of Wetlands Outcome is uncertain. Significant Wetlands acreage gains from restoration and creation are not occurring in the watershed. Wetland acreage data are inconsistently reported and inaccurate for assessing progress toward this outcome. Work is underway to identify a consistent means for collecting data by maximizing existing data reporting processes. Small cumulative gains in tidal wetlands not accounted for. Work is underway to identify a consistent means for collecting data by maximizing existing data reporting processes. Additionally, progress in achieving outcome action goals is being slowed or halted altogether due to reduced staffing capacity, which is in part a result of not lacking a HGIT staffer since April 2022.

- 
1. Are we, as a partnership, making progress at a rate that is necessary to achieve this outcome? Would you define your outlook as on course, off course, uncertain, or completed? Upon what basis are you forecasting this outlook? How would you summarize your recent progress toward achieving your outcome (since your last QPM)? If you don't have an indicator, would you characterize this progress as an increase, decrease, no change, or completed? If you have an indicator and it was updated since your last QPM, use your answer to question 16 from your Analysis and Methods document. Explain any gap(s) between our actual progress and our outcome.

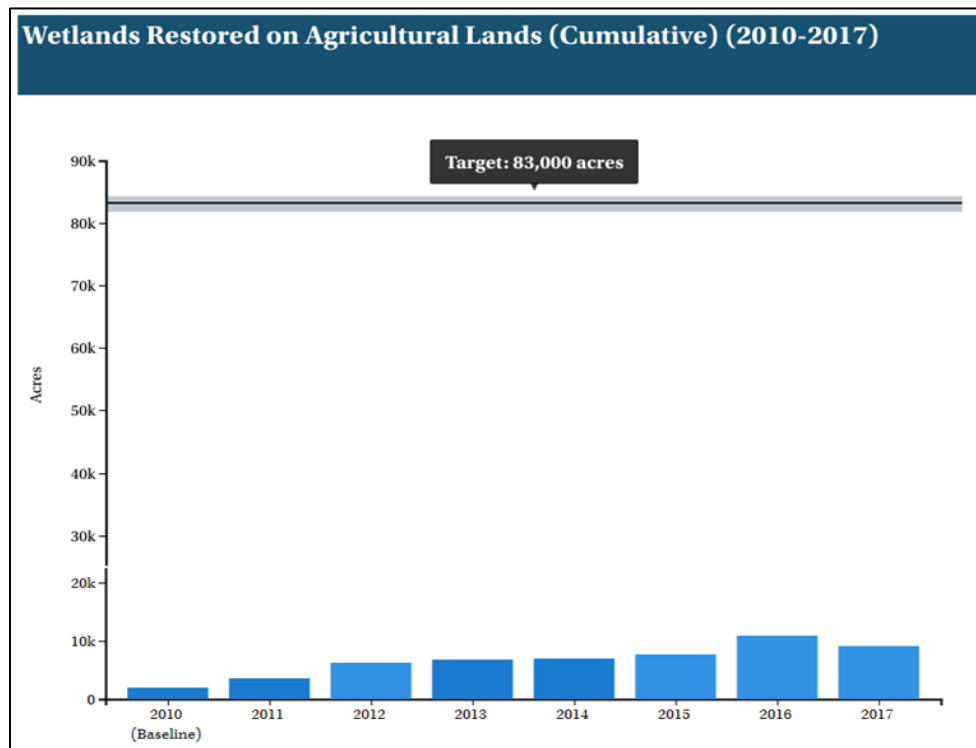
Additional progress updates have been hindered by incomplete or unavailable tracking information and tracking processes.

While Chesapeake Progress demonstrates that there has been an increase in wetlands acreage (**figure 1**), wetlands across the watershed are decreasing due to subsidence and climate change, along with the increasing pressures of development and continuing struggle with water quality. The rate at which wetlands are disappearing in the watershed is not currently known, but the general consensus is that it is occurring at a rate that far exceeds that which we are creating/restoring wetlands on the landscape. There is no recorded amount of enhanced wetlands acreage, which is largely because the Bay Program has yet to identify a comprehensive definition of enhancement and how it differs from restoration. Additionally, the current recording system for progress—the National Environmental Information Exchange Network, or NEIN—does not recognize enhancement as a best management practice (BMP). To date, the Wetlands Outcome has been unable to accurately track loss or gains in wetlands across the watershed. In fact, the NEIEN database instead tracks a loss in wetlands due to the inability of voluntary wetlands restoration projects to verify their existence on a five-year basis (**figure 2**).

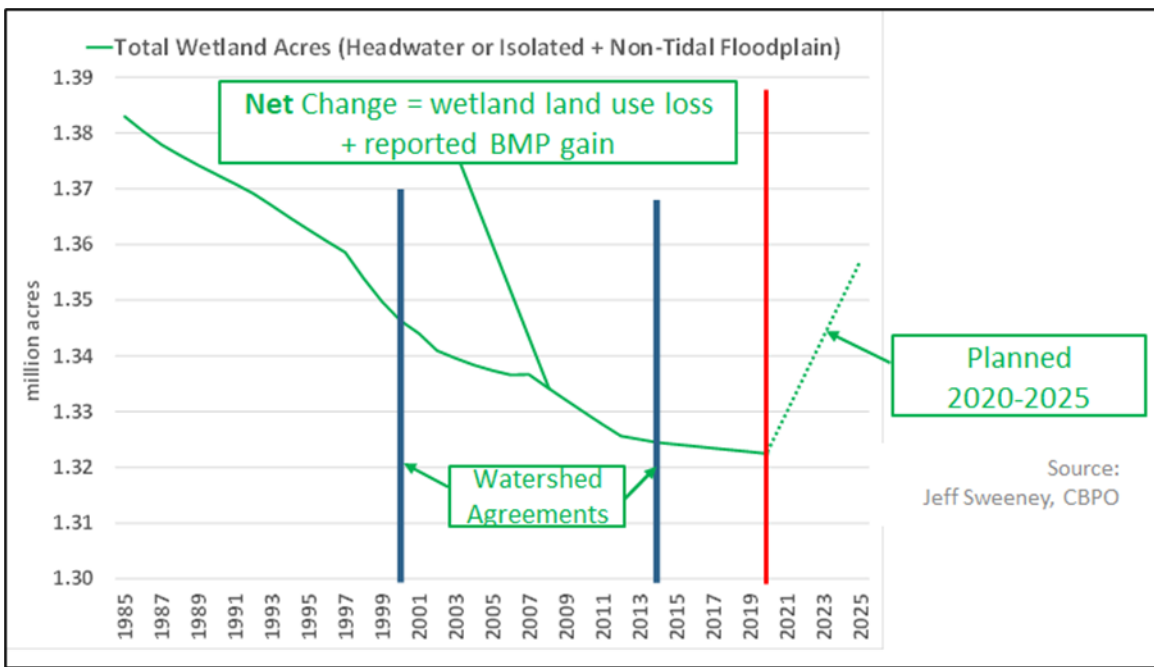
#### RECENT EFFORTS:

- **Data & Reporting:**
  - Contract with Devereux Consulting for new wetlands accounting system

- STAC Workshop: Evaluating an Improved Systems Approach to Crediting: Consideration of Wetland Ecosystem Services → report in progress.
- **GIT Funded Projects:**
  - FY2020: Marsh Migration. *The Final Report was completed and submitted to the Chesapeake Bay Trust in September 2022.*
  - FY2021: Marsh Mowing, *GIT Funded project stalled due to lack of bids on this scope of work*
  - FY2022: the following projects proposals were submitted for consideration, and it is not yet known if they have been selected for funding.
    - Monitoring Vegetation Condition throughout the DelMarVa Peninsula. *This project was joint proposed between the Black Duck, Wetlands, and Forest Buffers Outcomes*
    - Mapping Non-tidal Wetlands in Areas with Outdated Wetlands Maps. *This project was joint proposed between the Wetlands and Forest Buffers Outcomes*
- **Communications → decision-makers:**
  - Wetland Co-Benefits Factsheet for Virginia Planners



**Figure 1.** Cumulative wetlands restoration on agricultural lands from 2010-2017. Figure pulled from Chesapeake Progress 2022; blue indicates acres of wetlands restored.



**Figure 2.** Changes in Chesapeake Bay Watershed wetland acreage from 1985-2020 and 2025. This graph only reflects wetlands creations recorded as BMPs in the NEIEN system and is not a reflection of loss or gains in total wetlands, as these are not currently tracked.

- Looking back over the last two or more years, describe any scientific (including the impacts of climate change), fiscal, and policy-related developments that impacted your progress or may influence your work over the next two years. Have these resulted in revised needs (e.g., less, more) to achieve the outcome?

**SCIENTIFIC DEVELOPMENTS:**

- There has been new research on the connectivity of tidal shores and their resilience benefits. The workgroup has also discussed the concept of co-benefits at length and would like to bring the discussion to a large Bay Program audience through a STAC workshop (for example, the water quality benefits that wetlands provide help the WIP, but wetlands also provide numerous co-benefits such as wildlife habitat and flood protection – these co-benefits should be promoted and counted in some way).

**POLICY DEVELOPMENTS:**

- Virginia has a new living shorelines law that may be helpful in promoting and accelerating living shorelines implementation in the state.
- WOTUS & the Clean Water Act:** The new Waters of the United States (WOTUS) rule that has been implemented may exclude some wetlands from federal jurisdiction which were federally regulated prior to the Rule under §404 of the Clean Water Act. Many headwater and isolated wetlands may lose their current federal jurisdictional status, which means that states without their own non-tidal wetland acts (like Delaware) may be losing wetlands acres that they have previously been protected.
- 2022 Restoring Wetlands of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Workshop & Action Plan:** The CBP Management Board tasked the Bay Program with bringing key people together to overcome barriers to ensure wetlands outcomes, identify innovative approaches, and develop an action plan. This workshop was hosted in early August 2022 and the meeting minutes have been posted to the [CBP website](#). Presently, we are working to put together the Action Plan, which will

include chapters from each Bay Watershed Jurisdiction on their own wetlands-specific action plan moving forward. These action plans will be oriented around four themes: strategic planning, capacity building, outreach (landowner/community engagement) and sustainable funding to support. The completed Action Plan will be presented to the Chesapeake Bay Program's Management Board in December and to the Principals' Staff Committee in early 2023

- **Large-scale Landscape Wetlands Workshop:** This workshop was sponsored by Maryland Sea Grant and held in October 2022 and meeting materials can be found on the [Maryland Sea Grant website](#). This one-day workshop invited participants from a variety of communities, including coastal resilience scientists, managers, planners, and funders, and focused on discussing ways in which to plan for and collaborate on large-scale marsh conservation and restoration projects in the Chesapeake Bay.
- **2022 STAC Workshop:** The STAC Workshop "[Evaluating an Improved Systems Approach to Crediting: Consideration of Wetland Ecosystem Services](#)" (formerly known as "Evaluating a Systems Approach to BMP Crediting") was hosted in March 2022. This two-day workshop explored specific management actions for improvements to the current NEIEN system to better account for habitat-based data and co-benefits, and for incorporation of landscape consideration and application of a systems approach to maximizing benefits from multi-habitat projects to improve restoration outcomes.
- **Climate Resiliency & Wetlands Combined Workgroup Meetings:** In December 2021, the Climate Resiliency and Wetlands Workgroups hosted a joint meeting to exchange information on living shoreline projects involving threshold setting, targeting criteria, and social behavior. Additionally, participants discussed projects in the context of potential application to assist with assessing shoreline vulnerability, resilience, and promoting restoration action. Presentation materials and the meeting minutes can be found on the [CBP website](#).

#### FISCAL DEVELOPMENTS:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has been impacting available funding for restoration projects and will likely continue to do so.
- Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) has created opportunities for wetlands funding

#### UNPLANNED TIME: Competing needs:

- The WWG, a small cohort of the WWG, and the Co-Chair spent a significant amount of time with the WQ BMP Verification Adhoc team. And the conversations and repeated asks highlight how poorly the CBP WQ sector understands wetlands systems and wetlands governance. And how much time was spent on a practice that is eligible for BMP credits, but we can't get anybody to actually do and the relative numbers are insignificant bay-wide. If only we had that much energy promoting wetlands projects!

---

### 3. Based on the red/yellow/green analysis of the actions described in your logic and action plan, summarize what you have learned over the past two years of implementation.

The Wetlands Workgroup has accomplished or is in the process of accomplishing many action items from the 2021-2022 Logic & Action Plan. However, one of the greatest limitations to accomplishing more action items is the lack of capacity in workgroup members, getting the partners to identify and commit wetlands planners, restoration experts and land conservationists from agencies other than wetlands regulatory and staff. Additionally, as a result of not having an HGIT staffer (this position has been vacant since April 2022), progress on action items like 2.3, 5.2, 5.4 and more have been halted entirely. If greater staffing support was provided to the workgroup, achievement of these action items will become more feasible.

- 
4. Based on what you have learned through this process and any new developments or considerations described in response to question #2, how will your work change over the next two years? If we need to accelerate progress towards achieving our outcome, what steps are needed and, in particular, what specific actions or needs are beyond the ability of your group to meet and, therefore, you need the assistance of the Management Board to achieve?

The wetlands workgroup will focus on the actions that are being summarized as part of the Wetlands Outcome Attainability Action Plan (a product of the August 2022 Restoring Wetlands of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Workshop) and on the themes identified and highlighted throughout this document. These themes include strategic planning, capacity building, outreach (landowner/community engagement) and sustainable funding to support.

The Wetlands Workgroup will work to refine the outcome to define creation vs restoration vs enhancement as it pertains to the outcome. The Wetlands workgroup will provide these definitions to the Management Board and Principals' Staff Committee for Chesapeake Bay Program partnership concurrence. Additionally, the Wetlands Workgroup will work with the Scientific, Technical Assessment, and Reporting (STAR) team and Climate Resiliency Workgroup (CRWG) to define historic wetlands loss across the watershed, identify opportunities to restore/conservate wetlands within this historic loss, and to identify creation/restoration in future climate change scenarios.

MANAGEMENT BOARD REQUESTS:

- Ensure that each jurisdiction has a representative on the Wetlands Workgroup that can speak to all programs in the jurisdiction that deal with wetlands.
- One of the greatest limitations to accomplishing more action items is the lack of capacity in workgroup members and staff. If greater staffing support was provided to the workgroup, specifically the hiring of an additional HGIT staffer, achievement of these action items will become more feasible.

- 
5. What steps are you taking, or do you recommend, to ensure your actions and work will be equitably distributed and focused in geographic areas and communities that have been underserved in the past?

The Habitat Goal Implementation Team is prioritizing incorporating Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ) considerations into the decision making in all of the GIT workgroups, including Wetlands. Moving forward on wetlands restoration planning and tool development, the WWG will incorporate relevant DEIJ data and seek engagement from under-represented communities in the WG membership and WG activities.