



HEALTHY FORESTS AND TREES

WATER QUALITY GIT/ FORESTRY WORKGROUP

CHESAPEAKE BAY WATERSHED AGREEMENT OUTCOME LANGUAGE

PROPOSED DRAFT OUTCOME LANGUAGE:

Conserve and restore forests and tree cover to maximize benefits for water quality, habitat and people throughout the watershed, with a particular focus on riparian areas and communities.

EXISTING 2014 OUTCOME LANGUAGE:

Note the new outcome is consolidating and replacing two outcomes in the 2014 Watershed Agreement.

Tree Canopy: Continually increase urban tree canopy capacity to provide air quality, water quality and habitat benefits throughout the watershed. Expand urban tree canopy by 2,400 acres by 2025.

Forest Buffers: Continually increase the capacity of forest buffers to provide water quality and habitat benefits throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Restore 900 miles of riparian forest buffers per year and conserve existing buffers until at least 70 percent of riparian areas in the watershed are forested.

PROPOSED TARGET	New Target / Update of Existing Target	Date estimate for target being developed
Tree Canopy: Working toward a net gain in canopy, reduce the loss of existing canopy and plant and maintain 35,000 acres of community trees by 2035.	Update of existing	Ready
Forest Buffers: Working toward having 75% of riparian areas forested throughout the watershed, plant and maintain 7,500 acres of forest buffers annually. Reduce the loss of existing buffers to achieve no less than 71% of riparian areas forested by 2035.	Update of existing	Ready
Forest Conservation: Working toward a net gain in forests across the watershed, reduce the loss of forests to development and plant and maintain ## acres of new forests by 2035.	New	Summer 2025. Aiming to include in 2025 update of the agreement
Forest Stewardship: Under Construction	New	2026?

*Detailed activities will be included in an updated work plan

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Rationale and context for proposed draft outcome language:

The high-level outcome language communicates the intent to conserve and restore forest and tree cover throughout the watershed, provides a justification for why this work is important and highlights a focus on targeting efforts within riparian areas and communities. The new consolidated outcome

includes language from the original forestry outcomes (Forest Buffers and Tree Canopy) with modifications developed by the workgroup to reflect the priorities outlined in the 2024 Executive Council charge and the Phase 1 report. These include:

- Highlighting the benefits of forest restoration and conservation to people
- Replacing “urban” with “community” to reflect the intent of increasing tree canopy in all communities (not just highly urbanized communities)
- Adding a focus on conservation and maintenance in addition to restoration
- Making the outcome easier to understand

The updated outcome targets for Forest Buffers and Tree Canopy set both long-term goals and more attainable, but still ambitious goals for the next ten years (to 2035). For Tree Canopy, the Workgroup is proposing to add a planting target, since planting is such a big focus for Workgroup members. We reviewed recent planting data to identify realistic planting targets for both the Tree Canopy and Forest Buffers (see linked presentations below for more detail).

For Forest Buffers, the previous outcome target established a “floor” for the minimum amount of riparian forest cover needed to support ecosystem health. We utilized the stream health data in the Chesapeake Healthy Watersheds Assessment tool to determine whether a more ambitious long-term goal would be appropriate to support ecosystem health. Based on this analysis, we are proposing a long-term goal of achieving 75% riparian forest cover watershed-wide to support stream health.

To reflect the broader focus of the new Healthy Forests and Trees outcome, the Workgroup is proposing a new “Forest Conservation” target that would enable a more holistic consideration of actions needed to reduce the loss of forests across the watershed. The target would also provide additional accounting of reforestation efforts happening throughout the watershed. The initial focus would be on reducing the loss of forests to development as the Workgroup considers additional approaches needed to conserve forests over the long term. This will include addressing threats to forest health and resilience, which will be the focus of an upcoming STAC workshop.

There is also interest in collaborating with the Stewardship workgroup to establish a new Forest Stewardship target to better incentivize the management actions needed to sustain healthy forests and tree canopy. However, this target will likely take longer to develop and is unlikely to be ready to include in the 2025 update of the Watershed Agreement.

Topics/challenges for Management Board guidance (Optional):

- Do the numeric targets established achieve the right balance of being ambitious enough to support our ultimate ecosystem restoration objectives while also being realistic?
- Any input/guidance on the new proposed Forest Conservation target?

Methodology for data collection and tracking of each Target (Optional):

Each target would be tracked using a combination of state-reported BMP data (through the annual progress reporting process) and the high-res land use data. Indicators have already been developed for [Tree Canopy](#) and [Forest Buffers](#), and the methods for tracking those indicators likely will not change substantially. The new Forest Conservation target could be evaluated using similar methods, which will be developed and refined by the Forestry Workgroup.

Links to documentation that provide Target justification/context and/or rationale (Optional):

- [Presentation to the Forestry Workgroup on updating the Tree Canopy Outcome](#)
- [Presentation to the Forestry Workgroup on updating the Forest Buffer Outcome](#)