

Protected Lands Workgroup

April 16, 2025

3:00 - 4:00 pm



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Protected Lands Outcome: By 2025, protect an additional two million acres of lands throughout the watershed—currently identified as high conservation priorities at the federal, state or local level—including 225,000 acres of wetlands and 695,000 acres of forest land of highest value for maintaining water quality.

Attendees:

Aurelia Gracia (NPS), Britt Slattery (NPS), Anthony Bobo (BLM), Sara Coleman (MD DNR), Cassie Davis (NY DEC), Ethan Strickler (PA DCNR, sitting in for Ashley Rebert), Sophie Waterman (USGS), Coral Howe (USGS), Peter Claggett (USGS), Ben Alexandro (CCP), Chase Douglas (CCP), Kaelyn Kobosko (CCCC / CCP), Katie Lautar (Baltimore GreenSpace), Kristin Saunders (UMCES), Emily Heller (CBP Grants), Daniel Koval (Protected Lands Staffer), Adrienne Kotula (CBC), Anne Coates

3:00 PM **Welcome/ Introductions**

3:10 PM **Review of Draft Protected Lands Outcome Language**

Aurelia: We put together this meeting to go over the drafted outcome language for the Protected Lands Outcome which is due to the Management Board on April 25th.

Britt Slattery: To be submitted is the proposed outcome language, some rationale/context for that language, and underneath that some draft targets. The outcome statement does not have to have the numerical targets in the sentence specifically, but rather nested under it as proposed targets (previously called outputs). If those numbers are not 100% solid yet, and many won't be, we can say 'x acres of....' and give them a date of when we might have that numeric metric to provide. In that document, we can also indicate if we have some challenges.

Aurelia Gracia: We are focusing now on the outcome language. My goal for today's meeting is to review the outcome language and get everybody feeling comfortable about the narrative of

the language. There are lots of blanks right now for the numeric targets. Most feedback on the timeline was 10-15 years, so we are going ahead with 2040 right now.

Reviewing Draft Language Document: [2025 Outcome Evaluation: Protected Lands WG - Google Docs](#)

- Regarding our current outcome language, we mostly focused on the 2 million acres. There was not much report out on the sub targets for watersheds and forests, as there were issues with tracking the data.

To get feedback on this, we have hosted meetings, sent out forms, worked with CCP, and hosted office hours. Through all of that, we have developed the draft language in this document. The structure includes a narrative sentence language in the outcome, which has no numeric metrics; instead, the metrics are provided as bullet points below.

3:20 PM Discussion

Katie Lautar: I'm surprised not to see Urban Lands definitely with all the conversation that is going on about how it is not prioritized. It seems to me to be an equity issue, and that should be given a different level of priority.

Aurelia Gracia: Conversations I've had about urban lands is that it is important, but we don't know where to capture it in the structure, whether we include it in the language or we don't but still report on it. It could also fit with public access - Ben with CCP has been working with TPL to work on Public Access 10-minute walk data.

Katie Lautar: if you're not setting measures to protect land in urban areas, then there is no incentive to do so. Conservation is not a priority of public access, so that doesn't satisfy protection. While urban lands provide public access, having a measure about how much land needs to be protected related to them seems to be also important. Are you measuring land protection in access?

Aurelia Gracia: We talked about doing a baseline in the Public Access new outcome language as we add greenspace.

Sara Coleman: I feel like this is a little bit confusing - for these output metrics, do these all fall under protected lands? Each acreage counts towards that? Or is it additive?

Aurelia Gracia: There would be a total acreage for protected lands, and each output metric would be a part of the pie slice. There will be some overlap going into the protected lands overall goal, but that is okay.

Sara Coleman: I would advocate for the removal of watershed health, as every land is in a watershed.

Aurelia Gracia: For Wetlands, Chris Guy is supposed to get us language from the wetlands group next week.

Ben Alexandro: I agree with what Katie Lautar was saying. Even if there was a piece in public access, that would be focused on how many folks have access rather than the amount of land protected. It makes sense to have a section for urban land as well. I think you can have it in both places and it makes sense in both places.

Aurelia Gracia: In Public Access, we could add an approach of land protection within

Kristin Saunders: I can see why people would have strong reactions to this, having tracked this conversation for a number of years. Under Goal Language: There could be value of not just access, but the conservation of the spaces that allow for that access, which could be nested here. That is something we have struggled to get included in the past, because the past focus has been on large-scale landscapes, which does not suit well in a more urban environment. I understand why it could make sense to leave the urban piece with the public access in the new construct, but I also wonder if there's a way to incorporate it into both so that when you're talking about the public access piece, you're really focused on proximity to people / ability to visit / distance, etc. The conservation of those spaces for the community and habitat value does have a tie to the land conservation outcome as well. I don't know how this MB and PSC is going to land on a question when a metric shows up in two places for instance. If we have a piece of the urban that lives in the public access outcome and a piece in the land conservation outcome, I'm not sure if that would be problematic or not. Both would be counted a little differently, but there is overlap. It is worth thinking about, potentially having a home for it in these two places until we better understand the implications and consequences of that. If they use the output metrics to structure a goal-team/workgroup in the future, we may rethink it. But I don't know if you need to pick one scenario right now.

Britt Slattery, from chat: I agree with what Katie and Ben have said here, taking back what I said in a meeting earlier today. There could be parts related to urban areas in both Protected Lands and Public Access, we just need to keep the language clear enough that we are measuring different things under the two outcomes.

Aurelia Gracia; maybe urban areas could have an acreage part, and also look at visitation in access.

Katie Lautar: That makes sense for it to live in both. This incentivizes the actual conservation of land. Also, how do you deal with metric overlap? Here's a link to a paper about ownership types of forests in cities:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0169204625000817?via%3Dihub>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0169204625000817?dgcid=coauthor>

There is more forested land than people expect in cities.

Aurelia Gracia: does everyone feel okay with the topics you see?

Sara Coleman: I may be being too critical. But anything we conserve is in a watershed.

Sophie Waterman: Watershed Health would be focused on specifically maintaining and improving the health of healthy watersheds (which will be defined). This will look at headwater protection, or source protection, etc. This is an opportunity to highlight one of those; it is not as broad as just watershed. I am advocating for the source water protection approach.

Kristin Saunders, from chat: The other thing I forgot to mention was related to watershed health. It is true that all the lands are within a watershed. But we do know there are unprotected areas that are healthy watershed areas worthy of protection, and those may or may not show up in other categories for protection. Relates to Sarah's comment. Maybe Peter can add

Sara Coleman, from chat: I would agree, something more specific!

Ben Alexandro: I'm having a hard time to wrap my head around exactly how watershed health would be tracked. How can we connect that back to here so we can have a better understanding?

Peter Claggett: Part is under construction. We may want to say something like by 2040, maintain the health of xx % of watersheds, etc. We don't want to say healthy watersheds, because that has specific meaning to each state. Watershed health is a continuum - land protection helps prevent the conversion of land to the potential detriment of stream condition. For areas where we have good streams, We want to keep as much of it forested or wetland as possible. Protecting for habitat is different from protecting for stream health.

Ben Alexandro: I love that in theory, but in the old language it says 'highest value for maintaining water quality' and I was told that was unmeasurable. How do we make sure it doesn't get to the same situation where it's not measurable?

Aurelia Gracia: in the past, the data could not separate what was forestland and what was wetland.

Peter Claggett: Correct, that was one aspect. Water quality tends to be just one angle. Stream health needs to be looked at from multiple dimensions. The draft language is a placeholder until we define how watershed health will be tracked.

Cassie Davis: All the states have different definitions of healthy watersheds. We could say that in the metric when we define healthy watersheds.

Discussion on the Overall Acreage Number:

Aurelia Gracia: I have heard in previous meetings that realistically the numeric goal may be less than the current goal of 2 million acres. Some groups have suggested higher. Ashley Rebert from PA commented that she recommends 1 million or 1.5 by 2040.

Cassie Davis: If we were to meet a 30x30, what would that acreage look like? That's our target in New York right now.

Ben Alexandro: That is about 3 million extra acres by 2030 if we meet the 2025 goal.

Ethan Strickler: How has the overall goal established for 2 million acres between 2010 and 2025 been met?

Aurelia Gracia: We are currently working on our 2024 data, but based on most recent data from 2022 we are considered on course to meet the 2025 2 million goal. But, the rate of protection from the 2022 data has been steadily decreasing. It still maintains above the minimum that we need to be on track, but is still decreasing.

Ben Alexandro, from chat: They had far less data then they did now when they made a 2025 goal. Even a 3 million acre goal would be far less than the 40x40 goal that MD has.

Ethan Strickler: the funding landscape in PA has not changed a ton, but that is subject to change based on the current climate. I'd be interested in hearing how other states are feeling.

Sara Coleman: Last year, MD reached the target of 30 by 30 for Maryland. The number for 40x40 was 600,000 additional acres for MD specifically. I think less than 2 million makes sense because the rate has slowed, and there is now less out there that we are able to go after now. I would say 1.5 million.

Cassie Davis: In NY, we have not met our 30x30 goal, and are pretty low on watershed area protection.

Sophie Waterman: I agree with the comments on being realistic of the current funding uncertainty. We don't know what priorities may or may not change between now and 2040. Being realistic and setting us up for success while also being ambitious, but we need to be cautious that funding is subject to shift.

Chase Douglas: I want to throw out that it does sometimes benefit to look at how pushing higher on the goal could lead to opportunities for funding to be more available.

Ben Alexandro: Also remember that this is a 15 year goal, not a 4 year goal. I know the nonprofit and land trust community is interested in more ambitious goals.

Kristin Saunders: When we set the original 2 million acre goal, there was no thorough method to reach that number. It was more of a review of 'what do we think the states can do

realistically given the timeframe and current situation with funding, etc?'. I know we have gotten a lot of questions over the years of how did you arrive at that goal? People assumed there was a lot more science in it, and there just wasn't. Yes, there was mapping done and a look across the watershed to see how many acres we were talking about, but because the states themselves did not want to have an allocation assigned to them for a specific number of acres within each jurisdiction, we just went with the 2 million number. My suggestion to this group is whatever methodology you use to come up with the total acres, be able to justify in a way that is easy to understand. Taking a look at available land in their portfolios already and their financing and the rate of projects they do over a year period, carried over a number of years, etc. Whether this is a stretch number or a realistic number or both. Chase's suggestion gets to what the CCP SC has grappled with in terms of 'do we want to set a really audacious goal to aim for' and the thing that keeps bouncing around in my mind is if we are able to say that based on the rate of land conservation happening in each state and the amount of money they have that XX million acres is realistic given those circumstances, but with additional resources of X we could do this many more. Sometimes leaders are looking for that as a way to garner excitement around something. The EC might be able to rally around a stretch goal to find new sources of funding. Overall, be able to explain whatever methodology you use.

Aurelia Gracia: I agree. In a conversation with Chris Guy with Wetlands, he told me the math they used, which is a net gain - net loss difference, and that is what they are striving for. We could look at what's available and what's protected, and look at what acreage comes out of that?

Ethan Strickler: in terms of MD and Open Space - there are risks to funding at the state level. Has the fact that md been so successful in meeting their goal decrease the appetite for conservation, or not?

Sara Coleman: I haven't heard that but it could make sense.

Kristin, from chat: I don't think the General Assembly would have funded any of program Open Space if they felt satisfied at meeting the 30% goal. The reduction happened due to serious budget deficits and the fact that land conservation was funded at the level it was speaks to the commitment still being strong in Maryland (in my humble opinion).

Aurelia Gracia: I'm curious to see if other states who could not attend have opinions on the total acreage. Thank you to everyone who came today and provided input.

3:55 PM Wrap Up and Next Steps