Protected Lands Workgroup
July 1, 2025
2:00 - 4:00pm

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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.

2:00 PM   Welcome/ Introductions

2:10 PM   Update on B25, Protected Lands Outcome, and Public Comment Period

Daniel Koval: The biggest update on B25 and Management Board requests is the opening of the Public Feedback Period, which starts today and will go until September 1st. The Protected Lands Workgroup will be meeting once a month until October to accommodate for discussing any potential comments submitted regarding our outcome language and targets.

Chris Guy: Important to note that the language can change at any time at the purview of the workgroup for the targets specifically. The outcome language cannot be changed without the approval of the PSC.

Sophie Waterman: We will be meeting this month, in August, and in September to work through the public feedback.

2:25 PM   GSAT (Geospatial Science and Applications Team) Update on 2024 Data Call and Protected Lands Indicator

Sophie Waterman: Right now, we have made it to the 2 million additional acres! This is preliminary data that is subject to change, but things are looking good! Breaking it out to all lands in the watershed, the ratio is 77% unprotected, and 23% protected. Jurisdictional breakdown will also be posted with the data on Chesapeake Progress. We are currently working with a few jurisdictions to make sure numbers are right before posting official data.

Next steps: We will do final jurisdictional review to wrap up loose ends and ensure data is correct. We will release the indicator for Chesapeake Progress where you can find the data and the Analysis and Methods Document. We will also have to do some data evaluation: the date

of establishment is a missing piece to the protected lands story. Right now, we cannot compare over time, each one is just a snapshot. So the date of establishment project is moving forward with NFWF funding to better understand land data with the Land Trust Alliance. That will take place over fall and winter to see what we need to change in how we track our data to be consistent with PADUS (Protected Areas Database - US). Once that is out, we can share it!

Ben Alexandro: Can we start getting ready? I want to start with my comm's folks to prepare.

Sophie Waterman: Yes, of course. But there are no big announcements yet, we want to wait until all data is official and confirmed.

Chris Guy: Rachel Felver will also be doing press releases for all of these, and that can be used for comms folks on everyone's teams. This is for all indicators being updated.

2:35 PM   Protected Lands Outcome Targets Overview and Action Items

Sophie Waterman: Next are some updates on the targets. First, we are not requiring additional work for reporting the sub targets from the jurisdictions. We will be tracking these sub targets over space and time, utilizing spatial overlays and using 1M Land Use / Land Cover and the protected lands datasets to track what is happening. This will not require more reporting on the jurisdiction's side. The targets just need to be clearly defined and trackable.
When framing the targets, they should be seen as a lasagna, not a pie. The pieces are layered together; taking one piece does not take away from the other and they go hand in hand.

Protected Lands:
- Need to decide if the total target acreage should be 1.5 million or 2 million acres. We have heard from most jurisdictions, and the majority have chosen 1.5 million.

Forests:
- We will consult with the forestry workgroup, do a baseline study to find out where we are currently with forests in the watershed; what is currently protected, and how much is in riparian areas? Once we have the current numbers, we can have discussions on acreage goals. This will happen over the course of July.
- The other thing suggested to us is to add "forested wetlands" to the target language so it complements the wetlands language, which is more focused on tidal wetlands.

Katie Brownson: We are tracking forested wetlands; they roll up into forests so it wouldn't change anything as we are currently tracking

Pam Mason, from chat: wetlands language does not focus on tidal…

Chris Guy: Wetlands does call it out as a target for protected wetlands. It's not specific forested wetlands

Wetlands:
- Need to decide if we add 'tidal' to the language, and determine the extent to which buffer zones are currently protected.

Sophie Waterman: The wetlands component is focused on the tidal side / buffer zones that Peter has been working on. One way to meet both needs is adding the forested wetland component in the forest target to cover the nontidal piece, while then calling out tidal wetlands within the wetlands target.

Pam Mason: I want to be careful about the terms we are using. The Wetlands workgroup does not specify just tidal or just non tidal in terms of protections against stressors. We have tidal and non tidal separate for the purposes of recreating / restoring / enhancing. But for buffers, our holding spot is all wetlands at large. Additionally, there can be nontidal wetlands that are not forested. So I would want to be careful about just using the term forested wetlands. You can say tidal and nontidal generically. We have not focused on parsing out wetlands; the wetlands workgroup is happy to have just a target. Our outcome language does not say tidal, it just says "wetlands".
Now Peter's work focuses on tidal wetlands. We would have liked to see some effort looking at NWI ([National Wetlands Inventory](#)) to figure out where those areas are.

Ben Alexandro: With the data on chesapeake progress, it had some things on wetlands, and I didn't think those were tidal wetlands. If they could track the others, why does this have to be tidal wetlands? Some of our partners work with non tidal wetlands.

Peter Claggett: The tidal component is more straightforward for many reasons. It's well mapped, all the states have updated their NWI maps. It's well defined; water on one side and land on the other side and you are buffering the landward side. When it comes to nontidal wetlands, the majority of the watershed data is from 1980s/1990s vintage NWI; states like PA have told us they have more nontidal wetlands in the state than what is tracked in the NWI. Where we have nontidal wetlands, we know where NWI is, but we know it's outdated and may not fully capture stuff in some states, like PA. We have a very lopsided, out of date nontidal wetland layer that makes it hard to use for a lot of things, though it is all that we have. We could come up with an estimate, but it is nothing like the quality of data that we have for the tidal area.

Ben Alexandro: Thank you, and I want what we have to be trackable. So I hear that. But, when things are protected, do they know on the protected acres if there is a wetland there? Is that data collected?

Faren Wolter, in chat: @Katie B...are high elevation wetlands included in the protected forestland total?
- **Pam Mason, in chat:** @Faren what is a High elevation wetland? Do you mean higher in the watershed?

- **Katie Brownson, in chat:** @Faren- not sure about high elevation wetlands- Peter may have a better sense of the extent to which those are being captured as forested wetlands
- **Faren Wolter, in chat:** Thanks...thinking about the connection with cold water seeps and trout recovery, protecting the critical forest cover in those areas
- **Peter Claggett, in chat:** The vast majority of non-tidal wetlands are either forested or ponds

Chris Guy: There is not a centralized database of easements collected by any federal or state level entity. It is usually done at the county level. Looking at the action plan, one major problem is that it is a very diffused network with no centralized data. It would have to go county by county and need a place to distribute them and bring them into the bay program, and that does not exist right now. The process needs to be updated and is done ad hoc and grant by grant. But if we are using the data and calling it out, that could bring funding. We have a way of getting it, but it is not accurate. I think that's an important thing to put in to create a placeholder and let it be challenged to let it become accurate.

Sophie Waterman:
Watershed Health:
- PLWG is awaiting input from the Healthy Watersheds GIT regarding the definition of 'good stream health'; once we get that, a study will be conducted to compare the number of acres currently protected

Tribal Lands:
- Working with ICC (Indigenous Conservation Council) to establish tracking methods for the protection status and co management agreements of tribal homelands

Agricultural Lands:
- Similar to forests, we need to understand where we are at currently. Once we have that, we can hold a discussion on acreage.

Kevin Du Bois: With regard to ag lands, I'm assuming you're talking about protecting ag from development but not necessarily protecting ag from restoring prior ag lands to wetlands or other migration to occur. If that's true, maybe be more specific about protecting ag land from development. Also going in the reverse is even better than the bay.

Sophie Waterman: Thank you, that's good to note!

Community Lands:
- Need to define greenspace and community
    - Establish clear parameters for what constitutes greenspace
    - Establish clear parameters for what we mean by community
    - Explore how different jurisdictions define greenspace to ensure consistency and applicability across the watershed

- Establish the current acreage of greenspace within the watershed
- This will also be done in collaboration with Public Access Workgroup:
    - Potential change to: By 2040, permanently protect a total of XX acres of **publicly accessible urban** and community greenspace

Peter Claggett, in chat: Using our high-res LULC data for 2021/22, forested wetlands represent 33% of tidal wetlands and 85% of non-tidal wetlands. Non-tidal "land" wetlands- excluding ponds

Kevin Du Bois, in chat: How could there be forested tidal wetlands? tidal wetland buffers, yes, but not tidal wetlands themselves.
- **Peter Claggett, in chat:** @Kevin As part of NWI, there are forested tidal wetlands- some of these are ghost forests- because the trees can't tolerate the salinity and others are tidal fresh forests. Pam can probably answer this more thoroughly.
- **Kevin Du Bois, in chat:** @Peter, I think we should huddle to clarify naming conventions. Ghost forests are not forests, because the trees are dead and that's just a plain wetland. I'm not sure if tidally influenced freshwater wetlands are considered tidal (saltwater) wetlands or non-tidal wetlands.
- **Peter Claggett, in chat:** @Kevin, I'll look at the data more closely to provide some examples of where those forested tidal wetlands are located and why they might be labeled that way. I do not think we should reclassify NWI tidal/non-tidal distinctions because that's not part of our mapping protocol (or expertise).
- **Pam Mason, in chat:** I agree with Kevin on "ghost" forest. That is a wetland. And from a distribution perspective, there is a lot more forest than wetland. Also, without tidal wetland migration into forest, we won't have much tidal wetlands
- **Pam Mason, in chat:** We should not take on the NWI classification. But we should be smart about limits and gaps in the mapping (location/extent) and the classification

Faren Wolter, in chat: Does this mean 'public access' will not include boating/water, trail and/or outdoor recreation access sites? Not a criticism, just trying to understand what is being counted.
- **Daniel Koval, in chat:** @Faren, the public access workgroup already tracks water access sites, but they are looking to expand their tracking to include land access sites as well. So in addition to, not instead of

Ben Alexandro: could you send that data out to this workgroup?
- **Daniel Koval, in chat:** @ben, yes I will make a note to do that!

Michelle Katoski: We can track census places (4 million acres in watershed) and census urban areas (3.5 million acres). The union of the two has about 10% coverage of protected areas
- **Katie Latuar:** It looks like based on that metric, 'urban' is resulting in less conservation. It seems there is a lag and a need for incentive in an urban area more so than in the census places designation.

- **Michelle Katoski:** I agree, that's a good point Katie.

Pam Mason, in chat: Tidal freshwater "swamps" are tidal forested. I would be shocked if it was a third, but maybe. There are also seasonally tidal that likely include forest. We know NWI sucks in this categorization

Decisions Needed from PLWG in July:
- Determine total acreage for Protected Lands: 1.5 or 2 million acres
- Reconsider the need for acreage targets for all but the Forest Target
- Support to incorporate "forested wetlands" into the Forest Target and "tidal" into the Wetlands Target"
- Define 'permanently protect'
    - Will this definition be consistently applied across all targets under the Protected Lands Outcome?
- Define 'greenspace'

Timeline: just fill in from the timeline slide.

In August, we will need to dig down deeper on the acreage conversation.
In September, we will need to complete our language to send off to the management board.

Jeff Lerner: For watershed health, we see estimates saying 60-85% of landscape should be kept in some kind of natural cover to maintain good water quality. That may be unrealistic to think about but we are interested in trying to come up with something workable. Another piece of this regarding how we meet the needs of communities is looking at source water needs that are out there. Communities see watershed health as their water supply being protected as well, and that is something we hope to see incorporated into this work as well.

Ben Alexandro: CCP's action teams have been thinking through the urban pieces and thinking about what a reasonable amount and goal looks like. One we are thinking through is protection of 10% of urban lands; this will be in line for average protection across the nation in similar areas. What would a good number look like and is there any analysis on what is average?

Sophie Waterman: We have not dug into those numbers, as we are waiting on those 2024 timestamps. We will share them with the group once we get them. I appreciate you noting that the Chesapeake region is behind compared to other areas for protection.

Kevin Du Bois: One of the reasons why I'm excited about focusing on urban areas is that we've been talking over last couple years about making the bay program people centric and getting a greater buy in by the public - if you're talking about maximizing the impact where people live, those are urban cores. We could get more people on the side of the bay program in urban areas with these activities.

Nancy Schumm: One of the challenges with urban protection strategies is there is a ton of push back (esp in the state of MD right now) for developing affordable housing. In all the empty spaces / retrofitting old spaces / jam in as much as possible, with significantly less focus on natural resources. It's something that city planners aren't necessarily looking at forests (they're looking at pocket parks maybe), but it is a challenge that urban areas are facing.

Sophie Waterman: Thank you, that's a good note to bring forward.

Peter Claggett: I appreciate that comment, and for the land use decisions outcome, when we think about how planners can use our land use data more effectively, being cognizant of the need to focus as much as possible on infill and redevelopment vs. developing the last remaining open space and green space areas is something we could try to formally incorporate into the bay program.

Pam Mason, in chat: https://cmap22.vims.edu/WetCAT/

Nancy Schumm: In the city of Gaithersburg, we try to form it about health / quality of life. But the pressure has to come from someone else. If it's not mandated, nobody thinks they have to do it even though it would obviously improve the quality of life of the residents.

Jeff Lerner: This whole issue could be an opportunity to think about taxes / revenues associated with taxes. We've been exploring how infill decisions could be better for a community in terms of it generating revenue and providing services. Many years ago, there was analysis on the cost of sprawl - could be valuable to look back on that. I was also thinking that this idea of what we do in urban areas lends itself to a larger perspective of how we plan within urban communities for green infrastructure. That could be connected to land use decision support ideas that we have. Even though right now we are talking about lands we would permanently protect, land use planning as a tool could be a method for protection.

Kevin Du Bois, in chat: Great point Jeff - hedonic pricing index. Properties are more valuable with greenspace (so higher tax revenue)

Sophie Waterman: Jeff, That's a great idea and we can put that into our management strategies.

Katie Lautar: The urban forest map viewer has been a method performed across the US in many cities; extending that methodology across urban spaces and funding the expansion of that would help folks see where these spaces are; I was at smart growth conference last year, and there were no recommendations for minimum percentage of green space required for development. There are some cities that have that. It could be helpful to consolidate research and analyses for this benefit of speaking to public health elements might also be worthy.

Sophie Waterman: If you could share that link for forest patches, this could be cool to look at!
  -    **Katie Lautar, in chat:** Urban Patch Forest Viewer App; That's the forest patch viewer

- **Katie Brownson, in chat:** Hot off the press- a new review of the research on urban trees and cooling! https://auf.isa-arbor.com/content/early/2025/06/12/jauf.2025.023
- **Katie Brownson, in chat**: On the topic of the forest patch viewer, the conservancy is currently doing a fragmentation analysis watershed-wide that will help us identify urban (and non-urban) forest patches - stay tuned for more on that in the coming months
- **Katie Lautar, in chat:** @katherine Brownson I hope they are building from the expertise of the team that developed the forest patch viewer methodology. It came after several iterations and had a ground truthing component.
- **Katie Brownson, in chat:** @katie- yes they consulted extensively with Matt Baker and Nancy Sonti but unfortunately there will not be a ground truthing component (but will build off what they learned through their ground truthing in Baltimore)
- **Katie Lautar, in chat:** that's great news. There was some ground truthing of the NYC data too by partners there.

Ben Alexandro, in chat: Maryland forest conservation act and ordinances do have afforestation requirements for development (in many cases)

Faren Wolter, in chat: There are some good social science papers re: correlation/connections between urban forests/greenspaces and mental health, crime, etc. in urban settings.

Ben Alexandro: The urban conservation action team of CCP has landed on not just an acreage goal, but also a percentage of population within a 10 minute walk as an additional metric. It got stuck between whether that should be in the public access workgroup or protected lands workgroup. I would love to see if that could be incorporated into this; it could also get the public on board.

2:50 PM   Presentation on Numeric Acreage Metrics - Peter Claggett, USGS
I want to challenge all of us: Do we need/want numeric acreage targets? Or maybe we need them, but not right away?

    Pros:
- Greater accountability towards strategic conservation
- Could provide rationale for increased investment in particular target areas

    Cons:
- Lack of data to justify most numeric targets, especially today.
- Values and benefits not proportional to acreages (e.g., small urban parks)
  - 20 small urban parks scattered around Baltimore cannot be compared to a 5 acre land area.

Hypothetical ways to establish numeric targets:
1. Relative to past levels of effort or investment

a. Double the previous decade's percentage of total conserved lands within watersheds supporting good stream health
　　　b. This is difficult to do at the moment with our data.
　2. Relative to the extent of the resource or opportunity
　　　a. Increase the population within a 10 minute walk to urban and community greenspace by 10%
　3. Absolute Count
　　　a. Protect 70% of natural lands in 10 unprotected watersheds supporting good stream health.

We may not have to do this, at least not yet. Time is short and people are not as numerous; it is challenging to get these numbers in a short time frame.

Some alternatives to numeric sub-targets:
　1. By 2040, permanently protect an additional 1.5M-2.0M acres of lands emphasizing the conservation of forests, wetlands, farmland, tribal lands, community greenspace,and watersheds supporting healthy streams.
　2. By 2040, permanently protect an additional 1.5M-2.0M acres of lands, 70% of which should be forests or forested wetlands. Protection efforts should also focus on the conservation of farmland, tribal lands, urban and community greenspace, lands adjacent to tidal wetlands, and natural lands within watersheds supporting healthy streams.
　3. By 2040, permanently protect an additional 1.5M-2.0M acres of lands, 70% of which should be forests or forested wetlands. By 2027, explore the development of numeric protection targets for tidal wetland buffers, farmland, tribal lands, community greenspace, and watersheds supporting healthy streams.
　　　a. Peter thinks this could be the best way right now - a compromise between 1 and 2. This gives us a year or two to clean up the protected lands data so we can see what has been protected over the last decade, where it has been protected, and the benefits it's providing, then work with the workgroups for each and analyze the data. Then come up with sensible, informed numeric targets

By emphasizing different areas of protection and the different benefits, we are aiming to produce a portfolio of conservation for the bay watershed. By 2027 or 2028, we can have this portfolio to really show the breakdown of the conservation in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. These numbers of course don't add to 100% (it is a lasagna, not a pie)

When we have that data in 2027 or whatever year, we can then look at where we are, and find the action items of what land areas need more focus and improvement, and make our targets from there.

Kevin Du Bois, in chat: Would numeric targets come under fire as a result of the recent "Gold Standard Science" federal executive order?
https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/05/restoring-gold-standard-science/

Sophie Waterman: Opening the floor to discussion on Peter's presentation!

Kevin Du Bois: I want to thank Peter for that, and I like his perspective for number 3. I think if we tried to come up with a number right away, that could run afoul with a federal executive order that is based on models and science / assumptions. Peter's approach avoids some of that mess.

Ben Alexandro, in chat: I think the total acreage goal should be 2 million at the least (I personally would love higher)- otherwise it looks like we are planning to slow down practice.

Katie Brownson: In other outcomes, there was language like 'continually increase the amount'. Is that something we can consider?
- **Peter Claggett:** I think that is fine; directional targets were recommended by STAC as well.

Katie Lautar: Question about metrics as it relates to community land and urban land: it sounded to me that you were saying 10% is already protected.

Peter Claggett: No, that was all hypothetical!

Michelle Katoski: The numbers I shared earlier were about percent of urban areas being protected.

Katie Lautar: Okay, if we are at 8% protected right now, then 10% as a target might be too low.

Sophie Waterman: Yes, we are still looking at the 2024 data to analyze.

Jeff Lerner: If you're going to present this, it is helpful to have additional context. I got confused thinking about how much of these different categories do we currently have in the watershed total? Regardless of whether or not they are protected? If we have 50% of forested lands within the watershed, but we want to protect 55%, that could be confusing ; we need to present it in a clear way.

Samuel Williams: I am the chairman of the Blacks of the Chesapeake, and am also Chairman of the Maryland Southern Christian Leadership Conference Economic Empowerment Committee. Listening to this information, one of the biggest things I'm hearing is the ability to collect data seems to have a great deal of silos. Peter Clagget made a good point about portfolio ; if you can co-lease the data involving all areas of the ecosystem itself, you would have a much sharper focus. I'd like to point out that I'm sharing all this data / strategies / certain degrees of accomplishments; but as far as individuals engaged in the whole Chesapeake system, the real question is how valuable is it to you personally? If it's not that valuable, I question your enthusiasm if you're trying to get people to say we need to clean up this region. When I met with Ben and Chase, the first meeting was about the 30 for 30 project. On a larger global note,

this runs totally into the 6th mass extinction that we are in the midst of. I have much more data about that, but this is a crucial region in terms of sustainability.

Sophie Waterman: Thank you for that, and that's a great point. We have to always come back to what is important to the people in the region, and how we communicate it to them.

Faren Wolter, in chat: Is there a substantial difference in terms of collective impact/benefit between 1.5 and 2 million acres? Sure, 500K more is better than not. I guess I'm struggling with whether the difference is meaningful.
- **Faren Wolter:** *meaningful to achieving stated goals/targets

Chase Douglas, in chat: I second Ben's comment about setting the total acreage goal at least at 2 million if not more to continue to encourage the great work that partners are already doing across the watershed.

Discussion / Mentimeter: https://www.menti.com/algstc2mmgvu

- Overall Acreage Number: 1.5 or 2 million acres

- Wetlands Target Language: Specifying 'Tidal' Wetlands

- Defining 'permanently protect'

- Defining 'greenspace' for the Community Lands Target

- Need for Specific Target Metrics (Besides Forests)

3:55 PM   Wrap Up and Next Steps

- Next Meeting: August 5th, 2-3pm
    - This meeting will focus on discussing numeric metrics for each target, if applicable.
    - Monthly meetings through October as we continue to develop targets.
- Public Comment Period
    - July 1 - August 30th
    - Get comments in early!

Attendees:

Sophie Waterman, USGS   Michelle Katoski, USGS

Daniel Koval, CBP Staffer   Cassandra Davis, NY DEC

Peter Claggett, USGS   Michelle Campbell, DC

Kerri Batrowny, DE

Becky Gwynn, VA

Ethan Strickler, PA

Lance Fimiani, PA

Maggie Woodward, CBC

Greg O'Connell, CBC

Katie Brownson, USFS/Ches WILD

Faren Wolter, FWS

Chris Guy, FWS

Kevin DuBois, DOD

Kaelyn Kobosko, Chesapeake Conservancy

Chase Douglas, Chesapeake Conservancy

Ben Alexandro, Chesapeake Conservancy

Katie Lautar, Baltimore Greenspace

Jeff Lerner, EPA

Emily Heller, CBP / EPA

Katie Ayers, CBP / EPA

Sarah Brzezinski, CBP / EPA

Bo Williams, CBP / EPA

Lucinda Power, CBP / EPA

Nancy Schumm, City of Gaithersburg

Pam Mason, VIMS

Tess Danielson, DC DOEE

Samuel Williams, Blacks of the Chesapeake

Marilyn Yang, CRC

Dede Lawal, CRC