

Management Board Response to the Stakeholder Advisory Committee Recommendations

Mr. Charles Herrick
Chair, Stakeholder Advisory Committee
4504 Warren Street, NW
Washington, DC 20016

Dear Mr. Herrick:

On behalf of the Chesapeake Bay Program's Executive Council and as Chair of the Management Board, I want to thank you and the Stakeholder Advisory Committee (Stakeholders' Committee) for your recommendations (dated October 3, 2023) to the Executive Council at its October 19, 2023, annual meeting. These recommendations reflect the critical role of the Stakeholders' Committee in supporting the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) partnership and advancing its goals and outcomes toward greater Chesapeake Bay watershed restoration. We very much appreciate the opportunity to respond to these recommendations and stand ready to assist the Stakeholders' Committee in fulfilling its annual priorities.

The Chesapeake Bay Program partnership is committed to carrying out the Executive Council's 2020 statement in support of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice. Ensuring all people have the opportunity to be equitably engaged across the partnership is essential to success. We appreciate the dedicated work that a small group of CBP partners, including members of the Stakeholders' Committee, has invested over the past year to develop an honorarium program for the Stakeholders' Committee that supports and addresses a barrier to equitable and inclusive access by some members. **The Management Board is interested in moving forward with establishing a need-based honorarium to further support members of the committee and will strive to identify appropriate funding sources for this initiative.**

Please find as follows the Management Board's responses to each of the Stakeholders' Committee recommendations:

Recommendation: Relying on the work already completed by the Forest Buffer and Wetlands Actions Plans, charge the PSC to approve within six months the specific actionable items for each jurisdiction to accelerate the implementation and close the progress gaps for water quality restoration. This should include identifying champions in each jurisdiction responsible for leading the effort, outlining the short and longer-term funding needs, establishing ambitious yet reasonable expectations of progress by 2025, and incorporating stakeholder feedback.

Response: The Management Board recognizes the significant work that went into the 2022 action plans developed by the Wetland and Forestry workgroups. Both action plans advocated for more leadership at both the Management Board and Principals' Staff Committee to help shore up resources and programs identified in the state specific action strategies included in the action plans. The CBP partnership is committed to focusing on wetland and riparian forest buffer restoration as top priorities for the program. Over the next six months, the Management Board will identify members of the Principals' Staff Committee who will serve as partnership champions for wetlands, riparian forest buffers, and tree canopy.

For wetlands, the Wetlands Workgroup has identified representation from each jurisdiction since finalization of the 2022 action plan. As presented to the Management Board at the December 2022

living resources quarterly progress meeting, all jurisdictions have been actively participating in workgroup efforts over the past year. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service continues to fill an important leadership role in coordinating the workgroup and working with all jurisdictions to implement their respective strategies. The U.S. Forest Service has been coordinating the Forestry Workgroup since its inception in 1989 with active involvement from all jurisdictions in the watershed. As prioritized in the 2022 state Riparian Forest Buffer Action Strategies, multiple jurisdictions are working to develop or expand flexible riparian forest buffer programs to accelerate buffer planting in the watershed. Additional, dedicated sources of funding could further accelerate implementation through these programs.

In 2023, EPA and the U.S. Forest Service provided several grants funded by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act to advance efforts to restore wetlands, forest buffers, and urban tree canopy. In 2023, the U.S. Forest Service funded \$70.5 million in grants in the Chesapeake Bay watershed through their 2023 Urban and Community Forestry program. The EPA funded \$1 million in grants to Chesapeake Bay jurisdictions for projects that restore wetlands, forest buffers, and urban tree canopy. EPA also provided a 2023 grant to the Chesapeake Bay Trust for a wetland capacity building project to address recommendations identified in the 2022 Wetlands Action Plan. Objectives under the grant include strategic planning, sustainable funding, and landowner engagement. The grant will also include funding for a tidal wetland design project that will take into effect lessons learned from addressing the other project objectives. **Finally, in FY22 the NFWF Chesapeake small watershed grant and innovative nutrient and sediment reduction grant programs funded \$11,400,000 in projects that restored wetlands, riparian forest buffers, or both.**

Recommendation: We strongly recommend the continued and sustained funding for the high-resolution land-use and land-change data and analysis, so local governments can rely on complete assessments of existing and trending losses of tree canopy and wetlands for land-use decision-making.

Response: The Management Board intends to continue to work and support development of future high-resolution land use/land cover data sets. **Over the past six years, EPA has funded \$5.8 million to support high-resolution land use/land cover data sets. The agency aims to continue its support, depending on availability of funding.**

Recommendation: We encourage the Executive Council to work with the Chesapeake Watershed Congressional Delegation to ensure the next Farm Bill adequately supports Chesapeake Bay restoration and conservation Goals outlined in the 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement. Additionally, we encourage the Governors and DC Mayor to commit to preserving forests and wetlands by enhancing their conservation programs and identifying matching funds for potential Farm Bill conservation provisions.

Response: The Farm Bill is a key source of federal support for the jurisdictions in meeting their Chesapeake Bay restoration and conservation goals. According to the jurisdictions' watershed implementation plans, over eighty percent of remaining nitrogen load reductions are planned to come from the agriculture sector. From 2009 to 2019, USDA conservation programs contributed \$1.58 billion towards delivering cleaner water and healthier natural resources in the Chesapeake Bay **through programs like** the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, Conservation Reserve Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, and Environmental Quality Incentives Program, as well as technical assistance. As language for the next Farm Bill continues to be drafted and negotiated, the Chesapeake Bay Commission is working with the Chesapeake Watershed Congressional Delegation to ensure the

crucial link between Farm Bill programs and our regional water quality and watershed restoration goals is well understood so that these programs can be further enhanced. In addition, over the next year the Management Board will work with its jurisdictional partners to discuss the possibility of enhancing both wetland and forest conservations programs in 2024. Partners will be encouraged to share examples of effective state forest and wetland restoration programs.

Thank you again for your commitment to both the partnership and restoring the Chesapeake Bay and its local waterways. The Management Board looks forward to working with you and the Stakeholders' Committee on implementing these recommendations.