

## **PSC RESPONSE to the STAC 12-10-24 letter to the Executive Council**

March 14, 2025

Dr. Larry Sanford  
Chair, Chesapeake Bay Program's Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC)  
Chesapeake Research Consortium  
645 Contees Wharf Road  
Edgewater, MD 21037

Re: Principals' Staff Committee Response to the STAC Recommendations

Dear Dr. Sanford:

On behalf of the Chesapeake Bay Program's (CBP) Chesapeake Executive Council (EC) and as Chair of the Principals' Staff Committee (PSC), I want to thank you and the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) for your thoughtful recommendations (letter dated December 10, 2024). In addition, I would like to express my gratitude for the advice offered during the private EC session and the subsequent public meeting and thoughtful presentations all three Advisory Committees have offered during recent Management Board and PSC meetings. We are pleased by the increased engagement we've built between our respective committees over this past year, such as intentional time set aside on meeting agendas to amplify your expert advice and engagement with members. We hope you have seen significant improvement in the ways the Program has tried to incorporate and consider your feedback.

The PSC very much appreciates the opportunity to respond to these recommendations and stands ready to assist STAC in fulfilling its annual priorities. Please find as follows the PSC's responses to each of STAC's recommendations. The PSC and the larger CBP partnership look forward to working with STAC on implementing these recommendations.

**STAC Recommendation 1: The Partnership should integrate public perspectives and participation to the greatest extent possible.** *Without the full consent, support, and participation of the public, restoration of Chesapeake Bay and its watershed will always be an uphill battle. There are several ways in which public engagement can be further enhanced, most of which already exist. One is through greater engagement between CBP management and the CBP Advisory Committees, especially those representing local governments, stakeholders, and the agricultural community. STAC already enjoys an effective working relationship with the CBP due to its historic emphasis on natural science and environmental technology, but it has also established a new Social Science standing workgroup to explore specific ways in which social science expertise can be brought to bear on restoration efforts in the Bay watershed.*

**PSC Response to Recommendation 1:**

The PSC agrees that the partnership should integrate public perspectives and participation to the greatest extent possible and anticipates working with STAC and the other CBP advisory groups to broaden and improve public engagement and participation through the Beyond 2025 Phase II process. We also recognize we can make better use of the Strategic Engagement Team talents (formerly the Communications Workgroup) to identify local leaders and decision makers as well as watershed and community organizations across the spectrum of watershed representation to implement a strategic engagement plan. The beginnings of that strategic engagement plan are under development now and with input from the Management Board, PSC, and Advisory Committees we believe we can make significant progress on improving shared learning, public participation in our work, and increased support for the work we still need to achieve.

We also recognize the tenets and techniques from the field of social science can help us build more support and help move people along the spectrum from interested public to engaged stewards, volunteers, and ultimately leaders in their communities and advocates for this meaningful conservation and restoration work at the most local level. We applaud STAC for creating the newly formed Social Science team, which we understand is already generating ideas, and we look forward to hearing their thoughts and suggestions of how they can help us succeed in this endeavor.

**STAC Recommendation 2: The Partnership should articulate engagement opportunities with the Advisory Committees.**

*Building on the momentum started earlier this year, the Stakeholders' Committee recommends that the Principals' Staff Committee (PSC) begin 2025 by releasing a statement on the Advisory Committees. Such a statement could affirm the unique role of each individual Advisory Committee, highlight opportunities for collaboration with the full partnership, clarify the duties of the Advisory Committee Chairs as non-voting members of the Management Board (MB) and PSC, and document plans for deeper collaboration.*

**PSC Response to Recommendation 2:**

The PSC agrees the roles of the Advisory Committees are critical and their unique member perspectives make the partnership stronger and better informed. As part of the EC Charge, *Charting a Course Beyond 2025*, the partnership is actively engaged in a review of the structure, governance, and process components of our work. It is our intent that this review explores ways to better consider and factor in the advice of the Advisory Committees into the partnership's collaboration, processes, and decision making. The PSC invites the Advisory Committees' specific suggestions on how to more effectively and formally engage the Advisory Committees into the partnership's efforts going forward beyond 2025. This should include clear affirmations of the roles and responsibilities of the Committees and their members, who serve on a voluntary basis. We understand STAC is already engaging in these conversations, and we welcome and will continue to seek input from all Advisory Committees to ensure that the definitions are reflective of your Committees' mission, scope of work, and talents. We also recommit to the practice of building in specific consultation with Advisory Committees during the Beyond 2025 Phase II process and continuing to program agenda time at future PSC and Management Board meetings to interact with the Advisory Committees. Finally, we encourage ongoing interaction between the Advisory Committees and Goal Implementation Teams (GITs) as the need arises.

**STAC Recommendation 3: Likely climate change impacts can and should be built into all CBP planning and implementation efforts.**

*Climate change will impact many, if not most, CBP goals and outcomes in interconnected ways that have yet to be fully identified or explored. Several recent STAC workshops and reports have considered likely climate change impacts and made recommendations for mitigation and adaptation. Consideration of climate response may actually accelerate achievement of some CBP outcomes. STAC is prepared to help identify and prioritize climate change impacts and responses.*

**PSC Response to Recommendation 3:**

The PSC notes and appreciates the prodigious number of expert hours committed by STAC in understanding the challenges presented by changing environmental conditions in the Chesapeake watershed. STAC has conducted an impressive number of workshops, reports, and technical reviews on changing environmental conditions and their impacts on the Chesapeake. Just recently STAC completed its Climate Change 3.0 Workshop and we look forward to the guidance that STAC continues to provide in this and other reports. We recognize that changing environmental conditions present factors that affect our ability to achieve the Vision of the *2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement (Agreement)*, and these impacts should be effectively built into our considerations going forward.

Good scientific and technical guidance by STAC is a critical foundation to make our work targeted and achievable. Moving forward, its implementation across the *Agreement's* Outcomes will allow us to get ahead of, or adapt to, the emerging challenges presented by changing environmental conditions. To that end, STAC's offer to identify and prioritize related environmental impacts in the CBP is welcome and we look forward to your assistance in identifying discrete and specific urgent recommendations in all our Goals and Outcomes that the PSC considers a priority across the full body of our work and what actions and considerations would create the greatest impact if we sequence them over several years. We encourage the STAC to continue its active participation and input in the Beyond 2025 efforts on all the Outcomes and welcome any specific recommendations on proposed Outcomes to the PSC prior to the PSC's May 23, 2025 meeting.

**STAC Recommendation 4: The Partnership should elevate the importance of living resources in its program goals.**

*Conservation and restoration of living resources throughout the Bay and its watershed are often among the highest priorities for the public. While water quality is an important prerequisite for improved living resource habitat, achieving water quality goals does not guarantee living resource restoration. The quality of shallow water habitat is particularly important for many species of concern, for example. A locally focused and holistic approach to prioritizing living resource conservation and restoration is needed, including clear articulation of desired outcomes and metrics.*

**PSC Response to Recommendation 4:**

The major STAC report *Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response* (CESR) points to a potentially important new direction for the CBP partnership's prioritization of restoration efforts. Its recommendation to emphasize habitat, living resources, and shallow waters is acknowledged and was incorporated into the EC Charge informing our Beyond 2025 Phase II work. We hope STAC will continue to keep us focused on this point during the Phase II revisions to the *Agreement* and into the future.

We are pleased that shallow water discussions between the Fisheries GIT, STAC, and EPA have resulted in work that is already underway to develop tools to address suitable fish habitat recommendations of the CESR Report. Given that the initial focus has been on tidal shallow water areas in these modeling discussions, we invite STAC to help us better define what is meant by "shallow water" in the CESR Report, and how to apply that definition and resulting methodology to the land/water interface across the watershed, especially in inland areas where people interact with the resource in their local streams. Further, the PSC acknowledges that achieving water quality standards is a necessary but not sufficient condition for restoring living resources in Chesapeake's watershed and Bay. STAC, the Local Government Advisory Committee, and several small groups from the Beyond 2025 Steering Committee have made similar recommendations to use a holistic approach that is locally focused and driven to highlight the other component parts of the *Agreement's* Vision that people across the watershed care about. We continue to see better and stronger connections and engagement with local decision makers and hope to expand our engagement to make sure we include a spectrum of voices, so the restoration and conservation supports what communities care about, their needs, and priorities.

**STAC Recommendation 5: The Partnership should expand its capacity for flexible responses to changing conditions and improved understanding, embracing adaptive management approaches at multiple program levels to improve the CBP's capacity to learn while doing.**

*STAC believes that the CBP Strategy Review System (SRS) can serve as a basis for this expansion through revision, re-organization, and re-evaluation on a regular basis, assessing not only the capacity to address current outcomes but also whether the outcomes themselves need reassessing or revising.*

**PSC Response to Recommendation 5:**

The PSC recognizes that STAC was instrumental in guiding the CBP toward embracing an adaptive management decision framework and helped the Program develop and operationalize our Strategy Review System (SRS) and processes for continuous evaluation and learning. We thank you for this and believe the SRS has served the partnership well in preparing for this Beyond 2025 work and informing the review of Outcomes happening now in Phase II. We see the value in not only the implementation and the "doing," but also how the SRS allows us to identify the learning so we can make our work more impactful and responsive to multiple changing factors. We recognize that expanding adaptive management was a theme that clearly came through in the CESR Report and it is our intent that as the partnership works through revisions to the *Agreement* and the partnerships' structure and governance framework, we will look specifically at the organizational structure, governance, and decision-making processes and identify improvements for PSC consideration. We will look for ways to expand the use of adaptive management at all programmatic levels, and hope that STAC can help pinpoint specific ways we can improve our flexibility and apply the learning more effectively. Given the

SRS is one of our main processes, it can and should be evaluated for improvement. We look forward to working with STAC on the evaluation and may request a technical review of SRS if the PSC deems it necessary and helpful.

Since the very beginning of the CBP partnership, STAC has steadfastly provided sound scientific and technical guidance on the protection and restoration of the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed. The partnership will continue to rely on the guidance provided by the strong independent scientific and technical voice of STAC. With appreciation we recognize STAC as a world class liaison and coordination group between the region's scientific community and the CBP bringing a multitude of scientific contacts, organizations, and research institutions to the table. The CBP deeply appreciates STAC's commitment to the support and development of good science, its stewardship, and its application to environmental management in the partnership.

We thank you again for your commitment to restoring the Chesapeake Bay and its local waterways as well as for your past and continued participation in the Beyond 2025 process. Your ongoing engagement and scientific and technical guidance are invaluable contributions that make our partnership stronger and more successful as we amend the *Agreement* for the future.

Sincerely,

Josh Kurtz  
Chair, Principals' Staff Committee