

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

CONOWINGO WATERSHED IMPLEMENTATION PLAN (WIP)



The Chesapeake Bay Watershed



Photo by Will Parson
Chesapeake Bay Program

Why Do We Need To Reduce Pollution In The Chesapeake Bay?

The Chesapeake Bay is in poor health due to pollution from a variety of sources, including stormwater runoff, air emissions, wastewater, agriculture, development and more. For many years, pollution that flowed into the streams and rivers of the Chesapeake Bay was not managed to meet water quality standards. At the same time, the population in the 64,000-square mile watershed increased significantly – rising 43% between 1980 and 2017, from 12.7 million people to 18.2 million people. All of this has harmed water quality in the watershed.



Chesapeake Bay Program
Science. Restoration. Partnership.

Since 1983, the Chesapeake Bay Program has led and directed the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay. Bay Program partners include federal and state agencies, local governments, non-profit organizations and academic institutions. Staff members work at our offices in Annapolis, Maryland, and at partner organizations throughout the watershed.

In 2010, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) established the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (Bay TMDL), which set nitrogen, phosphorous and sediment reduction goals so that all practices would be in place by 2025 to meet the Bay's water quality standards. Sediment can smother aquatic life and pollutants such as nitrogen and phosphorus cause algae to grow in local waterways and the Chesapeake Bay that rob the waters of oxygen when they begin to die off and decompose. To meet these goals, the seven jurisdictions (Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia) that drain to the Bay developed Watershed Implementation Plans to help guide their Chesapeake Bay clean-up efforts. The entire 27,500-square mile Susquehanna River – the largest single source of freshwater to the Chesapeake Bay – drains to the Conowingo Reservoir.

The Conowingo Dam and reservoir were built in 1928 and are owned and operated by Exelon Corporation. The Conowingo Dam and other dams in the Lower Susquehanna have historically trapped and stored sediment. A 2015 study by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Maryland Department of the Environment concluded the reservoir has reached approximately 92% capacity, no longer trapping sediment and associated nutrients. In December 2017, the Chesapeake Bay Program agreed to a separate Conowingo Planning Target and to collectively develop a separate Conowingo WIP. All Chesapeake Bay Program Principals' Staff Committee (PSC) jurisdictional members agreed to pool resources and to identify a process to fund and implement the Conowingo WIP.