FWG 2016 -- Retrospective
December 2016

2016 was dominated by preparations for the 2017 mid-point assessment of the TMDL. To do this, the Land Use Model was updated in 2016 with the new, wall-to-wall high resolution land use model. For the first time, there would be a "true" forest layer, several tree canopy layers, and a riparian layer. In order to have these as distinct land uses, the FWG worked hard to define the relative loading rates for each by digging into the literature. Forestry BMPs that underwent a review via an Expert Panel process included Riparian Forest Buffers (in 2014), Urban Tree Canopy Expansion, and Urban Forest Planting.

What did we accomplish in 2016?

Winter-Spring:

- Finished drawing up the Riparian Forest Buffer (RFB) and Urban Tree Canopy (UTC) 2-Year Workplans. These watershed-wide workplans incorporate work specified in separate state workplans.

    o Partners began work on the detailed activities January 2016

- Worked to get Tree Canopy accepted as a new, mappable land use with distinct loading rates and BMPs. This took great coordination feats by Julie and a detailed paper drawing upon accepted scientific principles: "Relative Loading Rates of Tree Canopy" by Justin Hynicka and Marion Divers, which recommended unique Tree Canopy loading rates. A partnership-wide webinar was held in February to gain support for the Loading Rate recommendations. The webinar slides can be found here. These were accepted into the model in April by the WQ GIT.

- Reviewed and re-reviewed new definitions around mapping Forest and Tree Canopy in Phase 6 of the Land Use Model based off of 2013/14 imagery. With help from Peter Claggett of USGS, various rules for classifying these land uses with the high-resolution land cover imagery were presented. After several iterations, it was decided that "forests" would be defined as tree canopy and areas of tree harvest farther than 30' to 80' from non-road impervious surfaces and forming contiguous patches >=1-acre in extent. All tree canopy over roads and within 30' to 80' of non-road impervious surfaces would be classed as "tree canopy".

- On the Riparian Forest Buffer Workplan/Initiative, brand new positions--riparian foresters-- were being hired in Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia. February 25-26, several of them were able to attend the first annual Riparian Forest Buffer Forum in Buckeystown MD. At the time of the Forum, we were most of the way through a series of 10 webinars dubbed BEES: Buffer Environmental Education Series. These were recorded and can be accessed here.

- Forests for the Bay (FFB), our program administered by Craig Highfield through the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, continues to be the singular Bay effort to do outreach and education to forest landowners. We heard from Craig throughout the year with a longer presentation in October. Welcome to your Woods, Your Woods and Your Wallet, Woods and Wildlife, are the alliterative mainstays of the FFB program. The Woods in Your Backyard, Legacy Planning, Healthy Streams Farm Stewardship Program, and 2 RCPP grants round out his education program. More information of FFB programs can be found here.

Spring-Summer:

- In April, we had a face-to-face meeting at Chesapeake Bay Foundation where we recognized Justin Hynicka and Eric Sprague for their work with a new FWG "Crown Achievement" award. And we bid both a farewell as they moved over to American Forests.

- April and May meetings had an urban focus. Here we were introduced to the City of Trees, a documentary about urban forestry work in DC that was supported in part by the USFS. The Chesapeake Trees website was announced with a call for content. And Julie began exploring the use of the iTree Landscape tool to serve up Tree Canopy data in the near future.

- We heard about the Tree Canopy initiatives of the Alliance: Trees for Tomorrow in Virginia and Pennsylvania, a Maintenance program in Harrisburg, Richmond Tree Initiative, and some exploration into tree maintenance policy and issues in multiple states. More information on these initiatives can be found here.

- We also were briefed on the Coastal Resiliency Project of the Greater Baltimore Wilderness group. American Forests, The Conservation Fund, and USFWS have led this effort.

- Chesapeake Bay Foundation was recognized for their partnership with the Arbor Day Foundation, having used many of their trees to bolster buffers.

- The Tree Canopy Expert Panel report was approved by the FWG in the spring, but it would come back to us several times before final approval by CBP.

- In May, the FWG held a training for riparian foresters and others to 1) learn how RFB sign-ups work and receive tips about working with landowners and 2) to learn about the monitoring protocol for an RFB effectiveness study using Penn State's Wetland, Riparian and Stream assessment protocol. The study is an effort the FWG is doing with Farm Service Agency, Agriculture Research Service and Penn State. Data will be collected over the summer and fall of 2016. Report of Findings can be found here.

- The FWG began the development of priority forest conservation layers to help CBP define the forests with important values for the environment and economy. We developed layers focused on riparian and headwaters forests, large forest blocks, harvestable forests, and woodlots. These new layers do not necessarily replace the high-value forests for conservation maps that the states developed in 2007, but an evaluation of this still needs to take place.

- The FWG and Tree Canopy Expert Panel held a CBP-wide webinar on the findings of the Expert Panel in June.

Summer-Fall

- We had several presentations by TetraTech on an effort proposed by the Water Quality GIT to Quantify the Impact of BMPs on Management Strategies. The role of the FWG is to provide guidance on how forest BMPs should be ranked, and also to rank them.

- The FWG commented on the Forest Conservation map layers that would then be presented to the Chesapeake Conservation Partnership for further discussion.

- We endorsed 2 proposals for GIT funding: a proposal to demonstrate the WQ value of multifunctional buffers in Pennsylvania, and a proposal to do more wetland outreach. Both received the funding.

- Chesapeake Forest Champions were proposed, selected and recognized at the annual Chesapeake Watershed Forum in September.

- Also at the Forum, a 2-day Forestry Track was sponsored by the Alliance.

- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation continues to promote Riparian Buffer projects as a high priority and this year conducted a survey of grant recipients on how implementation was going.

- We dealt briefly with the consequences of CRP being near the national cap of 24 million acres. Sign-ups for CREP were paused in August-September. This is a policy decision that we hope will be prevented in the future.

- In New York, the very welcome news that their CREP amendment was finally approved and they could begin to spend the ~$1 million award announced by Farm Service Agency a year ago. New York is the first state to have their amendment approved.

- We heard about the Virginia Trees for Clean Water program – awards given annually for worthwhile projects and funded in part by USFS Chesapeake funds. Grant recipients can be found here.

- From the Rappahannock to Yellow Breeches in PA, the Healthy Watersheds for TMDLs continues to make progress. Greg Evans reported to the FWG in October on this project that uses the Chesapeake Bay model and local plans to evaluate how retaining forests (instead of allowing development) could amount to cost savings to reach water quality goals (e.g., $125 million could be saved in the Rappahannock). Greg's presentation can be found here.

- At the request of the WQ GIT, we looked at E3 (Everyone, Everywhere, Everything) to help parameterize what could go into Phase 3 of the Watershed Implementation Plans (WIPs). Draft final E3 document will be available in December. We have a first-cut analysis at what the E3 is for riparian buffers – the amount of bufferable acres. Instead of waiting for 2-3 years for a high resolution stream layer to do this analysis, a modeled stream layer was used as a proxy to do that analysis.

- In other news from WQ GIT, we are still waiting to hear whether a 2025 land use layer will be used as the basis of the WIPs. This could make a big difference as to how the benefits of forest retention is weighed.

- The 2 new websites: chesapeaketrees.net and chesapeakeforestbuffers.net, are nearing completion with much thanks to Jenny McGarvey.

- Rebecca Hanmer has continued to champion the idea to attribute nutrient attenuation to forest land cover in the CB Model. She developed a draft paper on how this might work for the benefit of the Modeling Team who will consider it in early 2017. On a similar note, we are looking at the Forest Conservation BMP and whether it would be feasible to make that BMP accessible to states without a Forest Conservation Act.

While we are happy with these accomplishments, here's what did not get fully addressed in 2016:

- Verification – We had hoped to go over how implementation of each states' Verification protocols were working

- High Value Forests for Water Quality – Revise priority forests maps to determine those forests, if lost that would levy the most N, P, and sediment to the main stem of the Bay.

- Workplans – Achieve more actions in the RFB and UTC workplans http://www.chesapeakebay.net/documents/22043/2_riparian_forest_buffers_draft_workplan.pdf and http://www.chesapeakebay.net/documents/22044/4_draft_tree_canopy_workplan__appendix_state_workplans.pdf

- The Chesapeake Forest Restoration and Working Land Conservation Strategies – Achieve more actions in these strategies

FWG Administration

- In 2016, we were able to finalize our new Governance/Membership document. We now have "official" members even though we expect to continue to operate on consensus and have everyone on equal footing as in the past.

- We happily continue under the able leadership of our Chair, Rebecca Hanmer, into the foreseeable future (according to the Governance document, this would be revisited every 2-4 years).

- Julie Mawhorter worked on a detail from June through September for the Forest Service Washington Office. During that time, she kept up her leadership of the Tree Canopy Management Strategy with 20% of her time.

- Tuana Phillips left us having completed nearly all of her 3 year fellowship. Katherine Wares entered in August to staff the FWG.