# Understanding the Influence of the Conowingo Reservoir Infill on Expectations for States' Nutrient and Sediment Pollutant Load Reductions

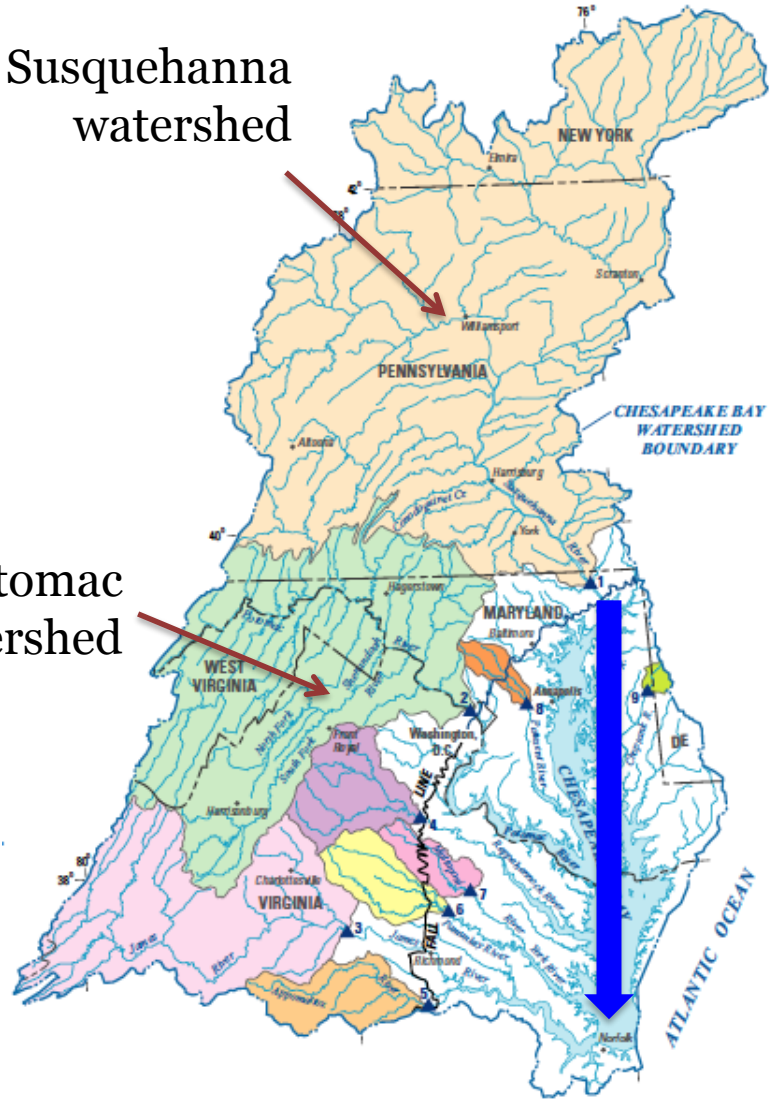
Presented to the Management Board
November 17, 2016

**Chesapeake Bay Program**
***Science, Restoration, Partnership***

# What is Science Telling Us?

# Susquehanna River Has a Major Influence on Chesapeake Bay Water Quality

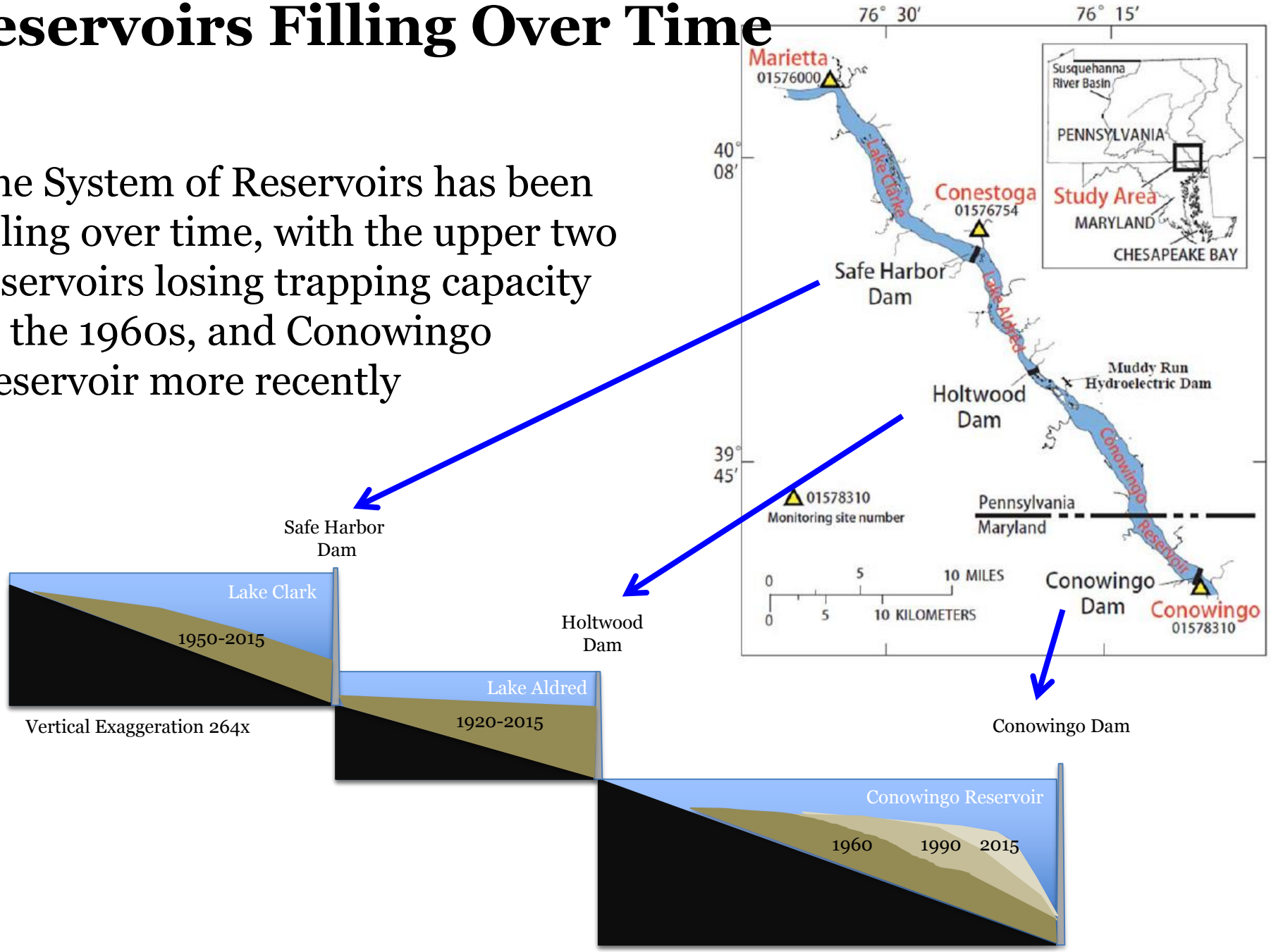
- 43% of Chesapeake Bay watershed
- 47% of freshwater flow into the Bay
- 41% of nitrogen loads to the Bay
- 25% of phosphorus loads to the Bay
- 27% of sediment loads to the Bay
- Influences Bay water quality well into Virginia's portion of the Bay




Source: Linker (2014)

# Reservoirs Filling Over Time

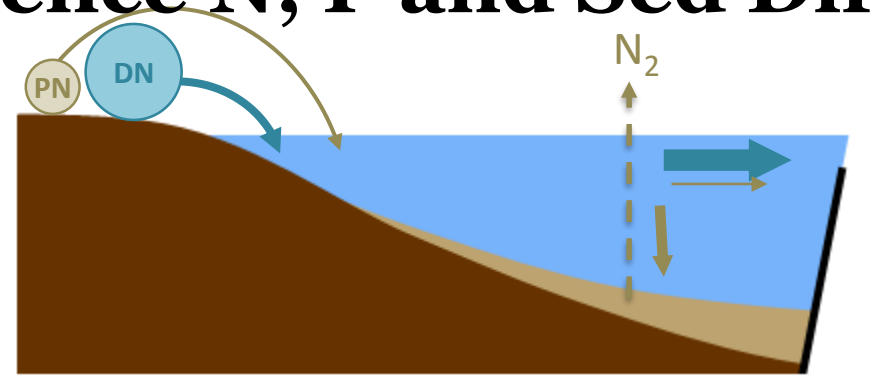
The System of Reservoirs has been filling over time, with the upper two reservoirs losing trapping capacity in the 1960s, and Conowingo Reservoir more recently



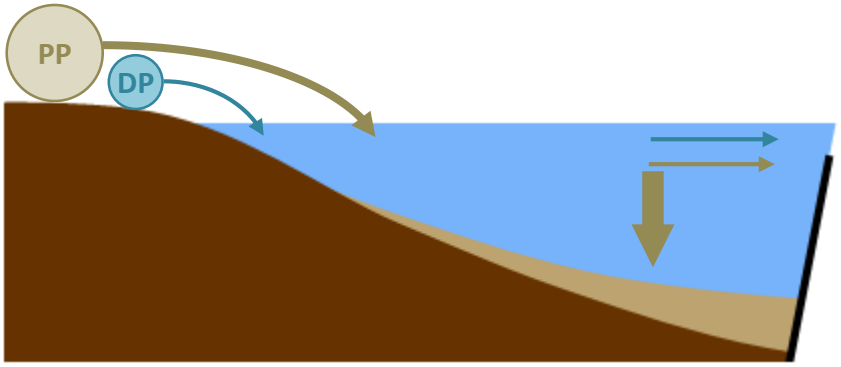

Source: Langland and Blomquist, USGS, personal communication

# Characteristics of Net Reservoir Trapping Influence N, P and Sed Differently

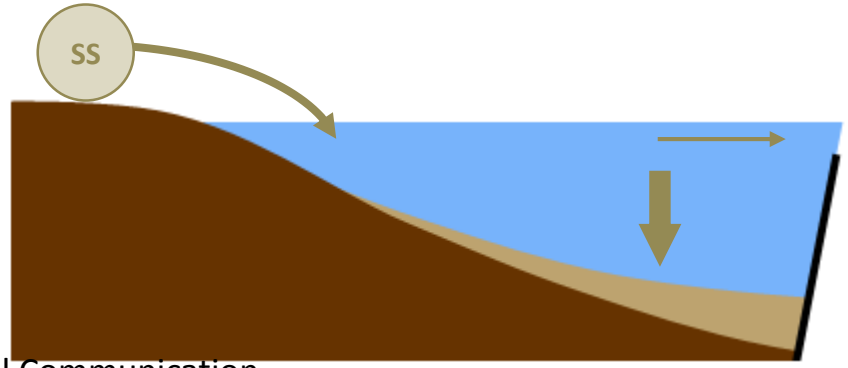
## Nitrogen




## Phosphorus



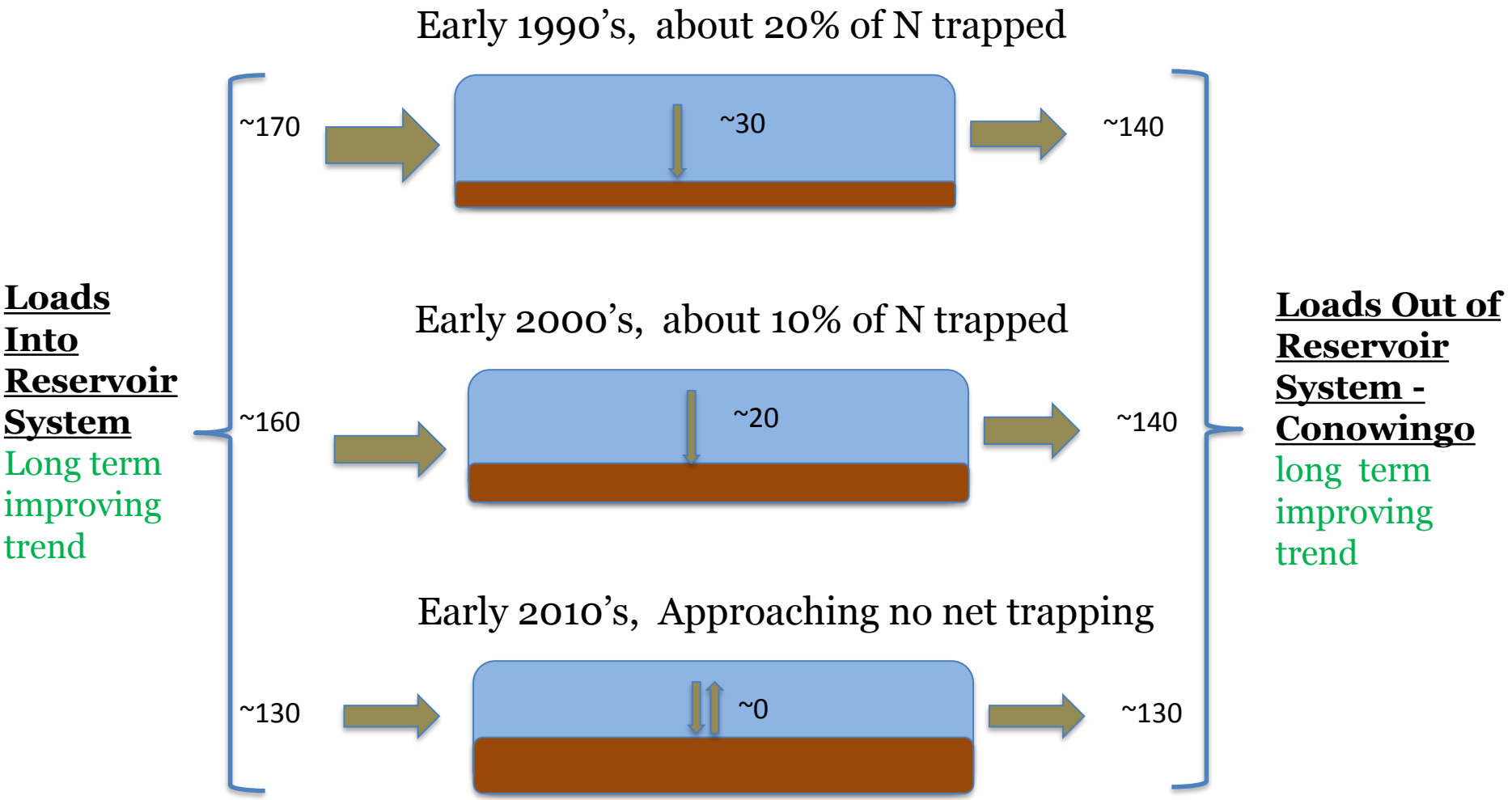

## Sediment




| Key: | |
|---|---|
| PN= | Particulate Nitrogen |
| DN= | Dissolved Nitrogen |
| PP= | Particulate Phosphorus |
| DP= | Dissolved Phosphorus |
| SS= | Suspended Sediment |

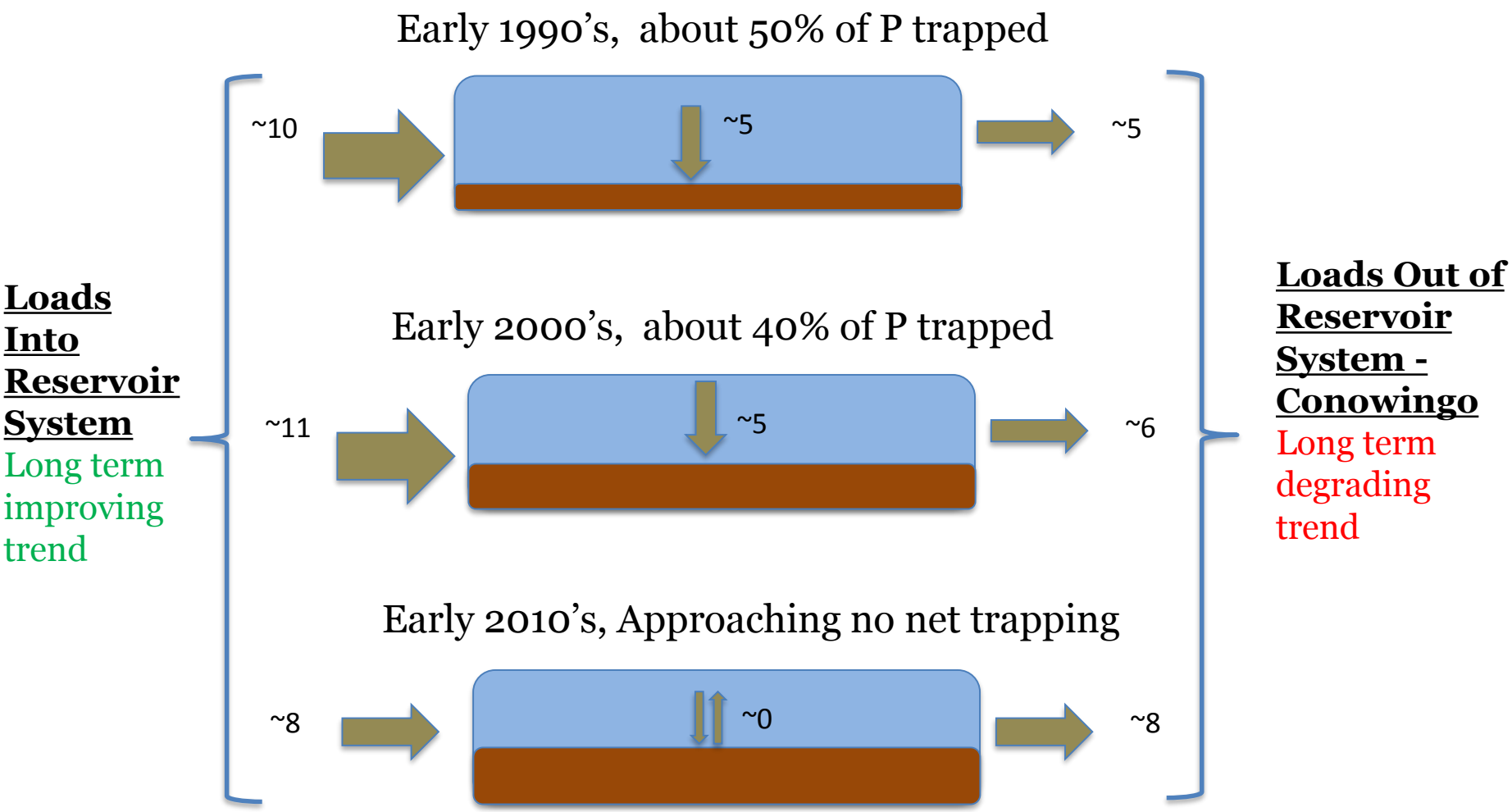
Source: Currey, MDE, Personal Communication

# Nitrogen Loads Into, Trapped Within and Exiting the Reservoir System: 1990s-2010s



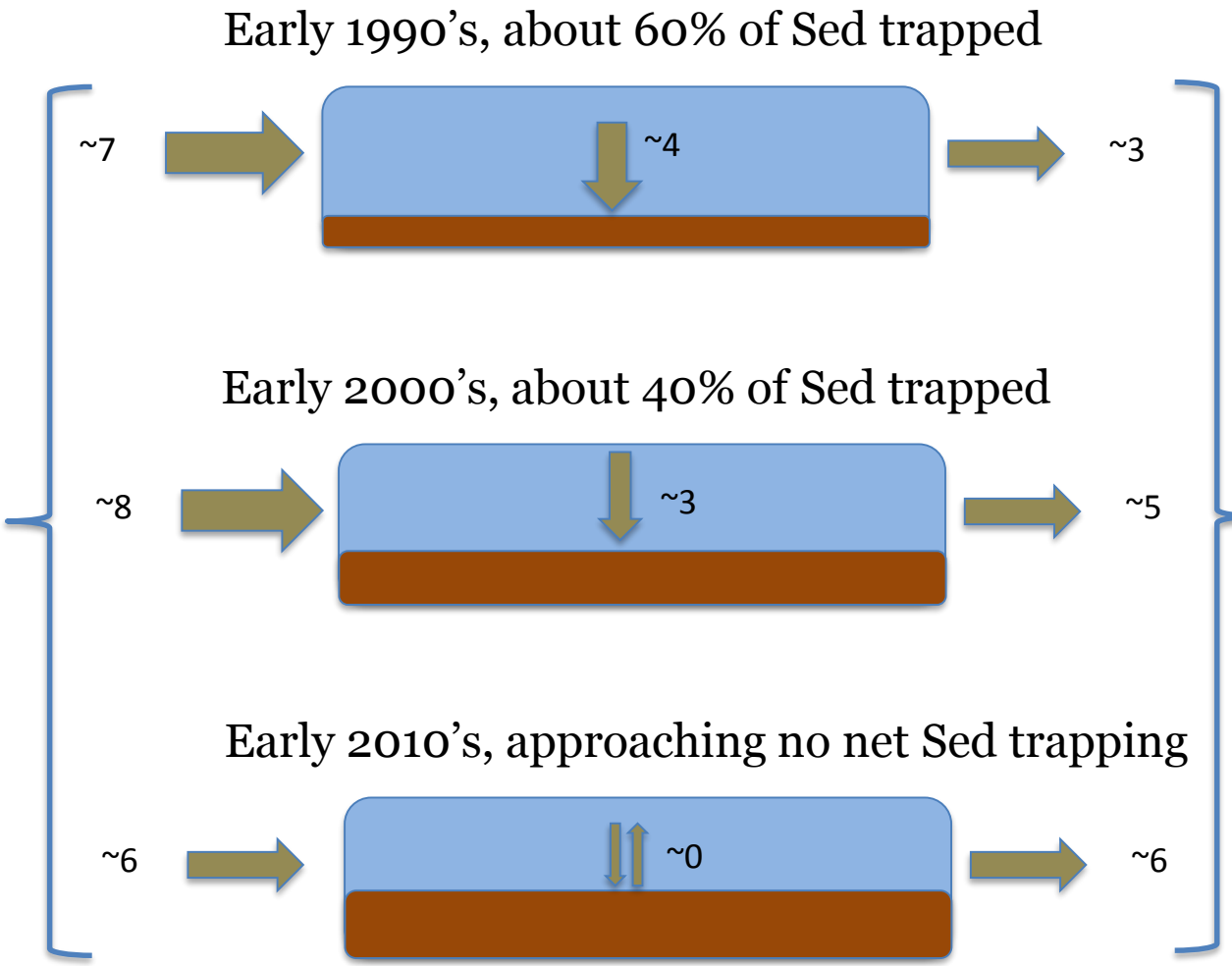

Source: Data from USGS (2016), http://cbrim.er.usgs.gov/loads_query.html
loads are approximate and in units of million lbs/year using estimates for 1992, 2002, and 2012

# Phosphorus Loads Into, Trapped Within and Exiting the Reservoir System: 1990s-2010s




Source: Data from USGS (2016), http://cbrim.er.usgs.gov/loads_query.html
loads are approximate and in units of million lbs/year using estimates for 1992, 2002, and 2012

# Sediment Loads Into, Trapped Within and Exiting the Reservoir System: 1990s-2010s

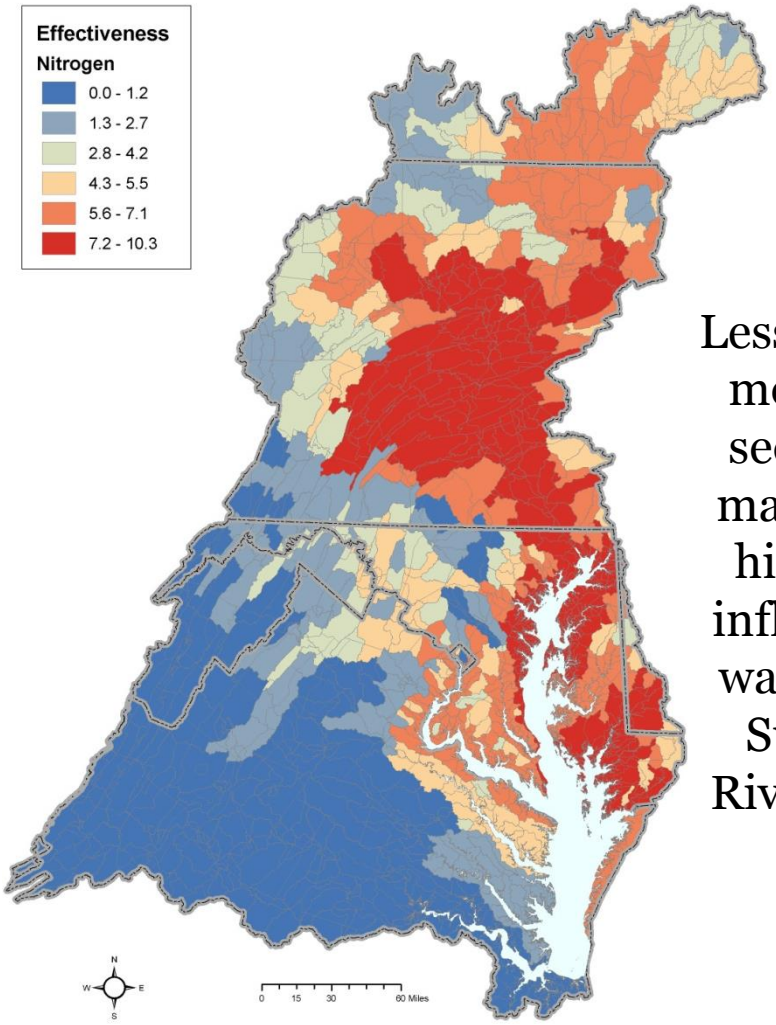



**Loads Into Reservoir System**
Long term improving trend

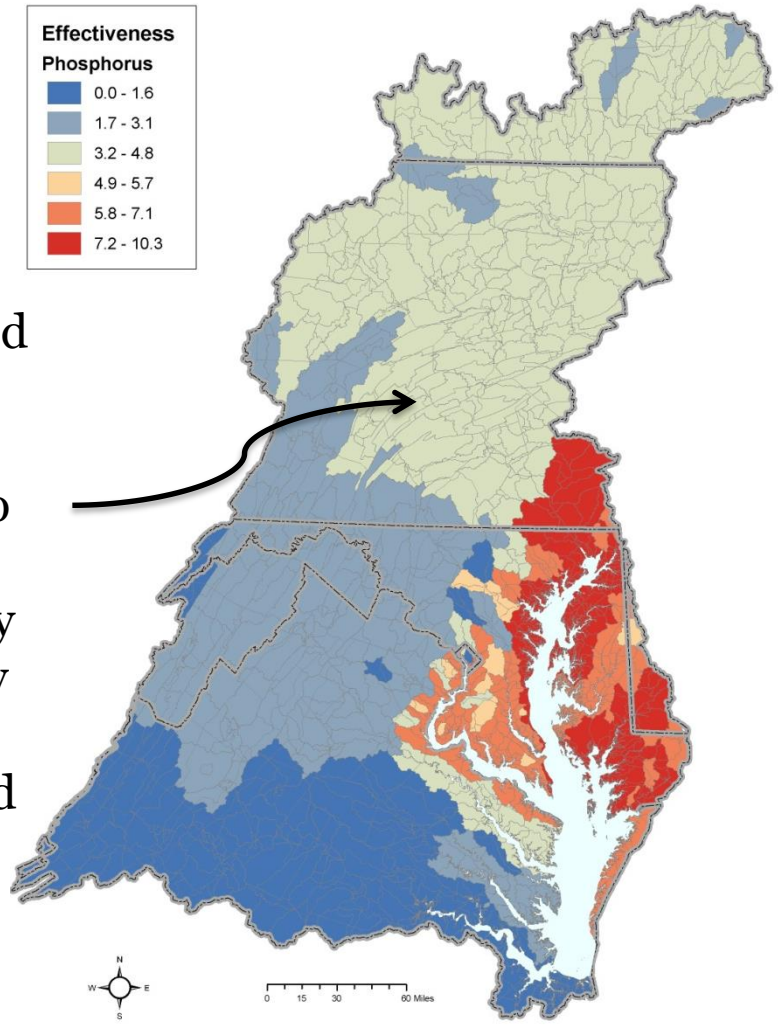
**Loads Out of Reservoir System - Conowingo**
Long term degrading trend

Source: Data from USGS (2016), http://cbrim.er.usgs.gov/loads_query.html
loads are approximate and in units of billion lbs/year using estimates for 1992, 2002, and 2012

# Relative Influence on Bay Dissolved Oxygen Changing as a Result of Reservoir Infill



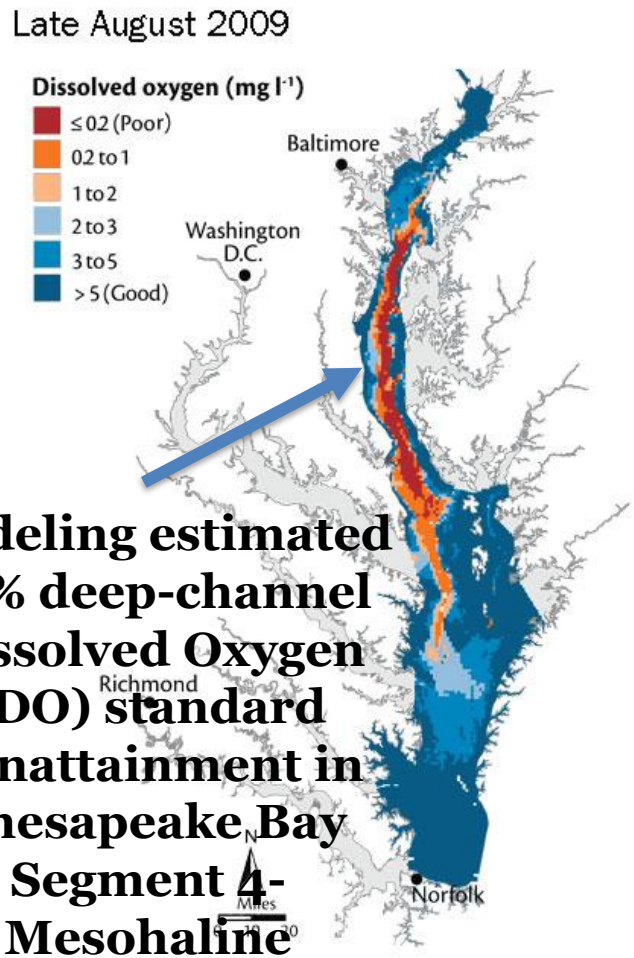

Less trapping and more nutrient/ sediment loads may translate to higher relative influence on Bay water quality by Susquehanna River Watershed loads



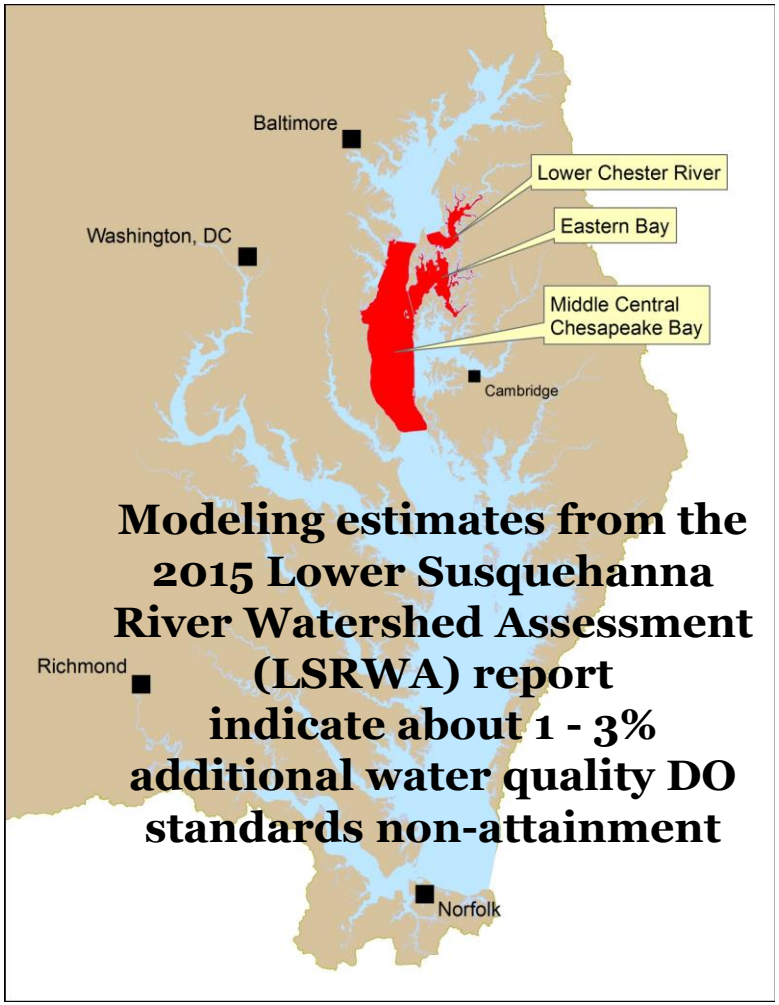



Source: U.S. EPA 2010

# Nutrients Associated with Sediments No Longer Trapped in the Conowingo Reservoir are Influencing Bay WQ




**Modeling estimated 23% deep-channel Dissolved Oxygen (DO) standard nonattainment in Chesapeake Bay Segment 4-Mesohaline**




**Modeling estimates from the 2015 Lower Susquehanna River Watershed Assessment (LSRWA) report indicate about 1 - 3% additional water quality DO standards non-attainment**



Source: Linker et al. (2016), LSRWA (2015)

# Policy Discussions

# Conowingo Reservoir Infill Decision-Making Timeline

Three Key Sets of Partnership Decisions:

- **December 2016***: Which jurisdictions will be responsible for addressing the additional nutrient and sediment loads resulting from infill of the Conowingo Reservoir

- **May 2017***: How much additional nutrient and sediment loads must be addressed resulting from infill of the Conowingo Reservoir

- **December 2017**: Final Phase III WIP planning targets fully reflect best understanding of additional loads from infill of the Conowingo Reservoir

* Date of PSC approval – WQGIT and MB recommendations will be made in preceding months

# WQGIT Summary

- October 20 Webinar communicated recent science regarding measured changes and a timeline to quantify additional load reductions
- October 24-25 Provided a brief review of science and followed with a policy options discussion resulting in several recommended approaches
- Nov 14 call, members recommended that policy options needed more definition and discussion to inform MB and PSC of implications prior to a decision

# Policy Decisions

- **What** are the additional load reductions required?
  - N and P similar to measured increases
  - Exchange reductions between N and P (#3)

- **Who** is responsible for additional load reductions?
  - All jurisdictions (#1)
  - Upstream jurisdictions (#2)

- **How** will responsibility assigned?
  - Allocation equity rules used in the Bay TMDL (considers #4)
  - Most cost effective practices and locations (#5)

- **When** will the additional reductions be required to be met?
  - 2025 planning horizon or something else (#6 and #7))

# Summary

- The briefing document will be updated to better organize the decision making framework
- Seeking MB feedback on
  - The framework provided for upcoming policy decisions
  - The level (MB or PSC) at which options should be presented vs. decisions made regarding this issue