VITAL HABITATS GOAL

Wetlands Outcome

2025 PROGRESS
OFF COURSE

OUTCOME: Continually increase the capacity of wetlands to provide water quality and habitat benefits throughout the watershed. Create or re-establish 85,000 acres of tidal and non-tidal wetlands and enhance function of an additional 150,000 acres of degraded wetlands by 2025. These activities may occur in any land use (including urban), but primarily occur in agricultural or natural landscapes.

PROGRESS AS OF 2021: The Wetlands Outcome is off course. Between 2010 and 2017, 9,103 acres of wetlands were established, rehabilitated or re-established on agricultural lands. While the outcome includes a target to restore 85,000 acres of tidal and non-tidal wetlands in the watershed, 83,000 of these restored acres should take place on agricultural lands. This marks an 11% achievement of the 83,000-acre goal. No progress has been reported toward the wetlands enhancement goal. Numerous challenges in reaching this outcome have been identified, including a lack of funding and resources to complete projects, the unwillingness of landowners to take on voluntary restoration, conflicting state priorities and incomplete tracking information.

BACKGROUND: Wetlands act as natural filters, absorbing nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment pollution before it can enter waterways. It also provides habitat for commercially important fish species, juvenile blue crabs and migrating waterfowl. They stabilize shorelines, control erosion and buffer inland and coastal properties from damages associated with flooding and storm surges. The current Wetlands Outcome was established by federal, state and non-profit partners. The outcome is also linked to the National Wetlands Inventory estimate that one million acres of tidal and non-tidal wetlands are available for restoration or enhancement in the Bay watershed. Wetland restoration (resulting in gains in wetland acreage) is tracked separately from wetland enhancement (results in gains in existing wetland functions). The outcome specifically calls out wetlands established, rehabilitated or re-established on agricultural lands due to the additional benefits these habitats provide, when compared to other types of wetlands (e.g., urban stormwater ponds).

BASELINE: The progress of the Wetlands Outcome is measured from zero acres starting in 2010 when the first Watershed Implementation Plans were drafted and adopted by each jurisdiction. Between 2010 and 2013, 6,098 acres of wetlands were established, rehabilitated or re-established on agricultural lands throughout the watershed.

DATA SOURCE: Jurisdictional representatives compile state, federal and non-governmental wetland restoration and enhancement accomplishments and data and submit the to the Chesapeake Bay Program. Wetland restoration on agricultural lands is tracked through the National Environmental Information Exchange Network.