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Agreement for Shared Stewardship

Between

THE STATES OF DELAWARE, MARYLAND, NEW YORK, PENNSYLVANIA, VIRGINIA, WEST VIRGINIA, AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

and the

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,

FOREST SERVICE

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Background

The state forestry agencies of Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia and the USDA Forest Service (the "Parties") have developed this agreement to advance Shared Stewardship and forest restoration in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The purpose of this MOU is to establish a framework for working in partnership to implement the actions identified in the Chesapeake Forest Restoration Strategy. Federal, state, tribes, and local partners in the Chesapeake Bay watershed have been integrating their restoration work for decades through the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership. Multiple USDA agencies have helped facilitate the work of the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership, including the Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Farm Service Agency. Research has been included as appropriate by all entities to help improve restoration activities. In this context, Shared Stewardship provides an ideal framework for the partnership to prioritize where forest restoration - including afforestation - is most needed and outline pathways to implement targeted activities to help achieve watershed-wide ecosystem goals.

The Chesapeake Bay watershed is the largest estuary in North America and a national treasure encompassing 64,000 square miles, including extensive shoreline, rural areas, dense urban populations, and a socio-political hub. Forests cover 60% of the watershed, extending from the Appalachian Mountains to the coastal plains. Chesapeake forests provide many valuable ecosystem services such as wildlife habitat, recreation, air and water filtration, and flood control. However, in the 1990s and early 2000s, forests were lost to development at a rate of 100 acres per day across the Bay watershed. The watershed is also agriculturally productive with more than 83,000 farms. The majority of the watershed's forests are held in private ownership (~80%), and many are associated with a farm. This means private landowners are a key partner in restoring the health of existing forests. In addition, the watershed is also rich with forested public land, containing portions of two National Forests and numerous state forests.

Purpose

Forests are the most beneficial land cover for reducing nutrient and sediment pollution and for restoring the functions and services of Chesapeake ecosystems. Many forests in the Chesapeake Bay watershed have been lost or fragmented as a result of rapid development and at the same time, forest health is often compromised. Through forest restoration, as forests and tree canopy cover are re-established and forest health is improved, the landscape moves to an improved ecological condition. These activities benefit both Chesapeake Bay watershed ecosystems and the human communities that rely on them.

In 2018, the USDA in partnership with the National Association of State Foresters adopted a "Shared Stewardship" strategy to address large-scale land management challenges. The Shared Stewardship approach involves working with a variety of stakeholders to set mutual goals, convening to reach shared

decisions, working across boundaries, and seeking outcomes that improve forests, grasslands and watersheds at scale. To give greater recognition and emphasis to implement forest restoration across the watershed, the Parties convened to update the Chesapeake Forest Restoration Strategy using Shared Stewardship as a framework. This Strategy lays out broad priorities and actions that will guide our forestry partnership efforts in the years ahead, in compliance with applicable laws and based on availability of appropriations.

Forest Restoration Needs in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed

Forest restoration provides the foundation to meet a number of key outcomes and actions set forth in the 2014 Chesapeake Watershed Agreement, such as improving habitat, water quality and climate resiliency. The Watershed Agreement sets specific targets for increasing riparian forest buffers and tree canopy coverage which are also reflected in each State's Watershed Implementation Plan. This Forest Restoration Strategy addresses these targeted forest restoration practices and identifies many additional opportunities to improve overall forest health and resilience using Shared Stewardship:

- Supporting community-based tree planting initiatives in urban areas.
- Strategically incorporating agroforestry practices into farms to provide economic and environmental benefits.
- Restoring forests, including early successional habitat, to improve their health and address stressors such as pests, diseases, and invasive species.
- Designing and implementing climate-resilient forest restoration projects that will help communities adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Statement of Mutual Benefit and Interest

To demonstrate our commitment to advancing Shared Stewardship across the Chesapeake Bay watershed, the parties will work collaboratively to:

- Expand the restoration workforce and supply chain to build capacity for sustainable, large-scale restoration projects.
- Facilitate private capital investments to accelerate forest restoration economies.
- Train and educate leaders at all levels so they can better support forest restoration through funding and policies.
- Expand outreach and education on forest restoration.
- Work to meet the specific actions identified in the Chesapeake Forest Restoration Strategy for urban and community, agricultural, and natural landscapes which include supporting the development of diverse markets for forest products.

The Parties celebrate the progress we have made to date restoring forests through the Chesapeake Bay Partnership. Through Shared Stewardship, the Parties will further collaborate to restore forests as outlined in the Chesapeake Forest Restoration Strategy for the benefit of both the ecosystems and the people of the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Authorizing Representatives:

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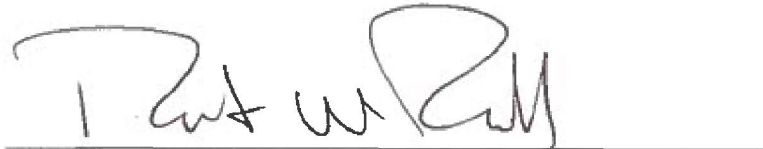
Robert Davies   10/8/20
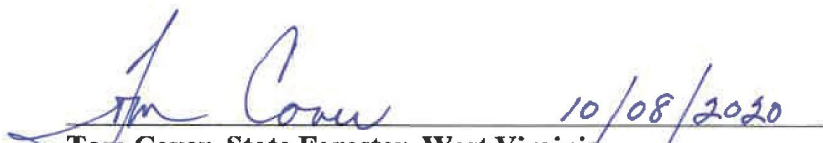Robert Davies, State Forester, New York

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