Chesapeake Bay Program

Communications Style Guide

Photo by Will Parson/Chesapeake Bay Program
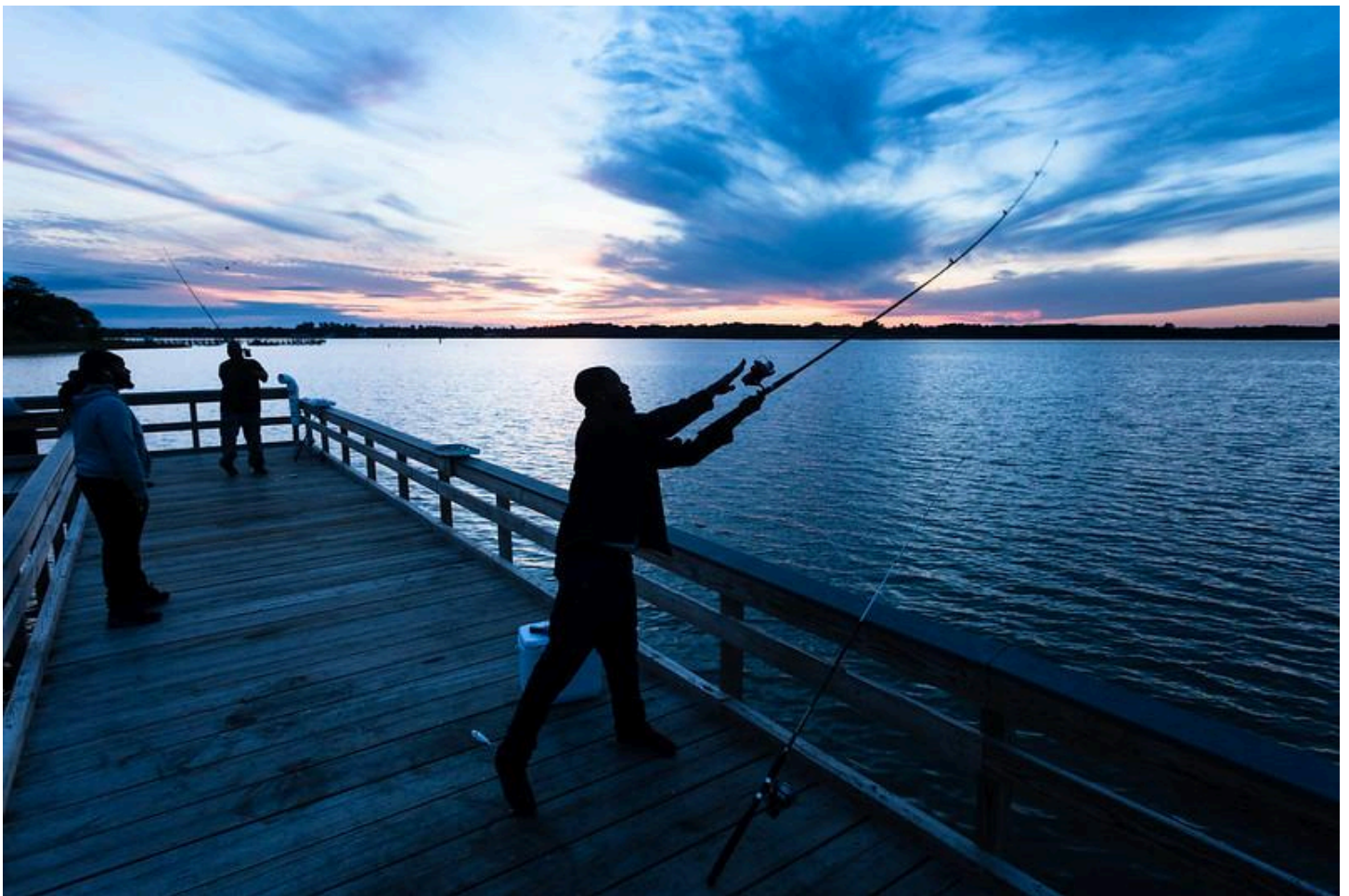
Chesapeake Bay Program
Science. Restoration. Partnership.

Table of contents

Glossary

A

acronyms - animal and plant names

Limit use in all documents to be distributed to the general public. If you need to use acronyms, be sure to spell out the acronym at its first use.

Example: Submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) offers important habitat to fish and shellfish. To protect this habitat, the Chesapeake Bay Program has established SAV restoration goals.

acronyms – Agencies and organizations

Use the agency or organization's full name on first reference (and place the appropriate acronym in parentheses). On the second reference, use appropriate acronym and maintain consistency in using that acronym throughout the document (i.e., do not switch back and forth between the formal name and acronym).

Example: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has set pollution-reducing goals for every jurisdiction in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. These goals are outlined in the Total Daily Maximum Load set by the EPA in 2010.

Use "*the*" in front of an organization's or agency's name if it's an established convention or locally used. Per AP Style, it's possible that common usage is to use the article before acronyms that are spoken as individual letters, but not before those that can be spoken like one word.

Examples: The research was led by the USGS.
Examples: The research was led by NFWF.

advisory committees (LGAC, SAC, STAC)

Do not use "the" when starting a sentence with these committee acronyms.

Examples:
- Correct: SAC presented its recommendations to the Chesapeake Executive Council.
- Incorrect: The SAC presented its recommendations to the Chesapeake Executive Council.

animal and plant names

Scientific names for animals and plants should be used when the common name could mean different things. For example, "blue crab" will only refer to one species, but witch hazel can refer to two different plants (*Hamamelis vernalis* and *Hamamelis ovalis*). When discussing less common plants or animals, air on the side of caution by including the scientific name or hyperlinking to a page that has the scientific name.

When writing scientific names, the first word is capitalized, and the second word is not capitalized. Always italicize.
Example: Callinectes sapidus
Common names: Do not capitalize, do not italicize.
Examples: blue crab, great blue heron

B

bay

When referring specifically to the Chesapeake Bay, capitalize. When referring to bays in general, do not capitalize.

Examples:
- The Bay is a great place to go sailing.
- A bay is a great place to go sailing.

bay grasses

The terms "underwater grasses" or "submerged aquatic vegetation" is preferred, but "bay grasses" is acceptable. When using, do not capitalize, as it is a common name for SAV.

bay-wide

Hyphenate. Use Bay-wide (instead of bay-wide) when referring to something that specifically occurs in the Chesapeake Bay.

Example: Underwater grasses are found Bay-wide.

best management practice

Best management practices are conservation practices approved by the Chesapeake Bay Program. Use all lowercase when writing the term. Put BMP in parenthesis after the first use and then use BMP throughout the rest of the document. Other acceptable substitutes include conservation practices or pollution-reducing practices.

C

Chesapeake Bay

Use full title on first reference. On second reference, it is acceptable to use "the Bay" or "the Chesapeake", or continue to use the Chesapeake Bay. As the Chesapeake Bay is a formal name, do not simply refer to it as "Chesapeake Bay" without a "the" preceding it.

Chesapeake Bay agreements

Capitalize and italicize when using the full titles of any agreement. Lowercase when referring to past agreements as nouns. Do not add "2014" before the *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement.* Instead say *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement* or the most recent, or most current *Watershed Agreement*.

Example: The *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement* was signed in 2014. This agreement contains 10 goals.

Following are the proper titles for the major agreements that have been signed:
- *The Chesapeake Bay Agreement of 1983*
- *1987 Chesapeake Bay Agreement*
- *Chesapeake 2000*
- *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*

Other documents of note include:
- Executive Order 13508 or *Executive Order on Chesapeake Bay Protection and Restoration*

Refrain from using the acronym "C2K" or short-hand term "Bay Agreement" in documents to be distributed to the public. If *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement* must be shortened, use *Watershed Agreement* or the agreement.

Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network

Commonly referred to as the Gateways Network, the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network is a series of natural, cultural and historical sites and water trails throughout the Bay watershed. The National Park Service coordinates this effort.

Chesapeake Bay Program

Use full title on first reference. On second reference, use Bay Program or continue using "Chesapeake Bay Program" or abbreviate to CBP. Less formal writing often calls for Bay Program, though CBP can be used in titles to limit character count. Do not use Chesapeake Bay Program Partnership or Chesapeake Bay Partnership as they are not correct. Do use Chesapeake Bay Program partners or the partnership to emphasize the organizational structure of the Bay Program. "Partners" and "partnership" should not be capitalized.

Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load

Use full title on first reference (the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load). On second reference, use "Bay TMDL". Do not use "pollution diet." When called for, you can describe the Bay TMDL in a conversational way, such as, "a set of pollution limits," while linking to a webpage on the Bay TMDL.
Example: The Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (Bay TMDL) limits the amount of pollution that can enter the Chesapeake Bay if it is to reach clean water standards.

Chesapeake Bay watershed

The phrase "Chesapeake Bay watershed" refers to the 64,000-square-mile area that drains into the Chesapeake Bay. The word "watershed" should not be capitalized. Use full title on first reference. On second reference, it is acceptable to use "Bay watershed," "watershed" or continue to use "Chesapeake Bay watershed."

Chesapeake Bay watershed jurisdictions

The following jurisdictions are part of the Chesapeake Bay watershed:
- State of Delaware
- State of Maryland
- State of New York
- Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
- Commonwealth of Virginia
- State of West Virginia
- District of Columbia*

*When referring to the geographic location, use Washington, D.C. When referring to the government, use District of Columbia.

Examples:
- There are many museums in Washington, D.C.
- The District of Columbia is a signatory to *Chesapeake 2000*.

It is imperative to use "jurisdictions" when referring to all seven, as the District of Columbia is not a state. However, it is acceptable to say "the six watershed states and the District of Columbia". When referring to all the jurisdictions at once, use jurisdictions. When referring to Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia, use states. When referring to Delaware, New York and West Virginia, use headwater states.

Chesapeake Executive Council

The full name is "Chesapeake Executive Council." Use Chesapeake Executive Council on first reference. On second reference, it is acceptable to use "Executive Council".

citizen

Avoid using "citizen" to describe residents of the watershed. Preferred terms are "resident" or "community member."

climate adaptation

Climate adaptation refers to the actions people and wildlife are taking because of climate change. This could be humans adapting to higher floods but implementing green infrastructure. It could mean fish migrating to newer areas because of changing water temperatures associated with climate change.   The process of adjusting to new climate conditions in order to reduce risks to valued assets. Both humans, animals and plants can adapt to climate changes. An example would be moving buildings out of a floodplain (physical adaptation) or using less water during a drought (behavioral adaptation).

climate mitigation

Any action taken by governments, businesses or people to reduce or prevent greenhouse gas emissions or to enhance carbon sinks that remove these gasses from the atmosphere. An example would be a government changing a country's infrastructure to support solar and wind energy.

climate resilience[1]

 The capacity of social, economic and ecosystems to cope with a hazardous event, trend or disturbance, while responding or reorganizing in ways that maintain their essential function, identity and structure.

cropland

One word.

commas

In lists

The Chesapeake Bay Program follows AP Style, which does not use the Oxford Comma. When listing simple items, do not place a comma between the second-to-last item and the "and." However, when creating a compound list—with lots of "ands/ors" or other complex series—DO place a comma between the 2nd to last item and the "and."

Examples:

- The Chesapeake Bay is home to blue crabs, oysters and menhaden.

---

[1] For more information and guidance on climate-related terms, please visit the United Nations Development Programme's *The Climate Dictionar*y at https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/climate-dictionary-everyday-guide-climate-change.

- There are six Goal Implementation Teams working on fisheries, habitat, water quality, healthy watersheds, stewardship and leadership.
- The team is soliciting projects that have to do with fish habitat, rivers and streams, and living and hardened shorelines.

D

dates

Capitalize the names of months in all uses. When a month is used with a specific date, abbreviate only *Jan.*, *Feb.*, *Aug.*, *Sept.*, *Oct.*, *Nov.* and *Dec.* Spell out when using alone, or with a year alone. When a phrase lists only a month and a year, do not separate the year with commas. When a phrase refers to a month, day and year, set off the year with commas.
Example: January 2016 was a cold month.
Example: Jan. 2 was the coldest day of the month.
Example: His birthday is May 8. Feb. 14, 2013, was the target date.
Example: She testified that it was Friday, Dec. 3, when the crash occurred.

designated use

Designated use refers to the way in which a federal, state or local government envisions a water body being used. For instance, the designated use of a tributary or bay could be for aquatic habitat, a commercial fishery or public recreation.
Example: The river includes fish spawning and nursery as a designated use.

directives

All directives should be italicized and use the following format: [Group Name][subject] Directive ([Year-Number])
Example: Chesapeake Executive Council Riparian Forest Buffers Directive (94-1)
Do not capitalize when using only the word directive.
Examples:
- The directive sets goals for riparian forest buffer restoration.
- The Chesapeake Executive Council has signed many directives.

dissolved oxygen

Refer to as DO on second reference only if you include this acronym in parentheses after the first reference.
Example: Dissolved oxygen (DO) is the amount of oxygen present in the water. DO is measured in milligrams per liter.

E

e.g. versus i.e.

Use i.e. to indicate "that is" or "in other words." Use e.g. to indicate "for example." Always use a comma after each.
Example: The document included a number of questions (e.g., what time does the sun rise?). The entire team will be tasked with answering them (i.e., the responsibility will not fall on one person).

em dashes

Do not leave a space on either side of the em dash (—). This differs from the AP Style standard but is used for design standards.

F

federal government

Not capitalized.

fisherman

Avoid using "fisherman" and instead try "anglers" or "people who like to fish."

fishery

A fishery refers to a geographic area that is associated with a population of aquatic organisms (fish, mollusks, crustaceans, etc.) which are harvested for their commercial or recreational value. You may use "commercial fishery" when focusing on the fishing industry, but in general it is preferable to use "blue crab fishery" instead of "blue crab commercial fishery".

forage fish

Forage fish are the smaller fish, shellfish and invertebrates that underwater predators such as striped bass and bluefish feed on. Continue using "forage fish" as opposed to "forage" when writing for the general public.

forest buffers

Use riparian forest buffers on first reference. On second reference, it is acceptable to use forest buffers.

G

Goal Implementation Team

Use title case when referring to a specific goal implementation team. Use lower case in other instances. On second reference, it is acceptable to use GIT or continue using goal implementation team.
Examples:
- The Vital Habitats Goal Implementation Team or the Vital Habitats GIT.
- The Chesapeake Bay Program has six goal implementation teams.

goals

Use title case when referring to specific goals of the *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*. Use lowercase when referring to goals in general.
Example: The agreement contains 10 goals. The Sustainable Fisheries Goal is listed first.

groundwater

One word.

H

headwater states
Phrase used to collectively refer to Delaware, New York and West Virginia.

hydraulic fracturing
Use "hydraulic fracturing, also known as "fracking," on first reference. It is permissible to use fracking on the second reference.

I

indicators

i.e. versus e.g.
Use i.e. to indicate "that is" or "in other words." Use e.g. to indicate "for example." Always use a comma after each.
Example: The document included a number of questions (e.g., what time does the sun rise?). The entire team will be tasked with answering them (i.e., the responsibility will not fall on one person).

Indigenous people
This refers to people who lived in the Chesapeake Bay watershed prior to the arrival of European colonists. It should be used over Native Americans; if someone is part of a specific tribe, you should mention that over more general terms such as "Indigenous."

J

K

L

Loads
Short for sediment loads or nutrient loads, this is a technical term that shouldn't be used when communicating to the general public.

lists
From AP: Capitalize the first word following the dash or bullet. Use periods, not semicolons, at the end of each section, whether it is a full sentence or a phrase.
- Use parallel construction for each item in a list.
- Start with the same part of speech for each item (in this example, a verb).
- Use the same voice (active or passive) for each item.
- Use the same verb tense for each item.
- Use the same sentence type (statement, question, exclamation) for each item.

- Use just a phrase for each item, if desired.

Introduce the list with a short phrase or sentence: "Our partners:" or "These are our partners:" or "Our partners are:"

M

mainstem
One word.

man-made
Avoid using this term. Words like "human-made" and "artificial" are good substitutes.

"more than" versus "over"
More than is preferred with numbers.
Example: The *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement* contains more than 30 outcomes.

multispecies
One word.

N

non-native
Always hyphenate. Use for plants and animals that aren't native to the region but are relatively unharmful to other wildlife (invasive, in comparison, or non-native species that are destructive to other wildlife because the wildlife lack defenses against them).

nonpoint
Do not hyphenate.

nonprofit
Do not hyphenate.

non-tidal
Always hyphenate.

numerals
In general, spell out whole numbers below 10, use figures for 10 and above. If you are starting a sentence with a number, always spell it out.
Examples:
- I found nine crabs in the Bay.
- I found 55 crabs in the Bay.
- Fifty-five fish were counted in the survey.

O

outcomes

Use title case when referring to specific outcomes of the *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*. Use lowercase when referring to outcomes in general.
Example: This agreement contains 31 outcomes. The Blue Crab Abundance Outcome falls under the Sustainable Fisheries Goal.

overharvesting

One word.

over versus more than

More than is preferred with numbers.
Example: The *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement* contains more than 30 outcomes.

P

percent

From AP: Use the % sign when paired with a numeral, with no space, in most cases (a change in 2019):
- Average hourly pay rose 3.1% from a year ago.
- Her mortgage rate is 4.75%.
- About 60% of Americans agreed.

Use figures: 1%, 4 percentage points.

For amounts less than 1%, precede the decimal with a zero: The cost of living rose 0.6%.

In casual uses, use words rather than figures and numbers: "She said he has a zero percent chance of winning."

At the start of a sentence: Try to avoid this construction. If it's necessary to start a sentence with a percentage, spell out both: "Eighty-nine percent of sentences don't have to begin with a number."

Constructions with the % sign take a singular verb when standing alone or when a singular word follows an "of" construction:
- The teacher said 60% was a failing grade.
- He said 50% of the membership was there.

It takes a plural verb when a plural word follows an "of" construction: "He said 50% of the members were there."

Use decimals, not fractions, in percentages: "Her mortgage rate is 4.5%."

For a range, "12% to 15%," "12%-15%" and "between 12% and 15%" are all acceptable.

Use percentage, rather than percent, when not paired with a number: "The percentage of people agreeing is small."

percentage

From AP: Be careful not to confuse percent with percentage point. A change from 10% to 13% is a rise of 3 percentage points. This is not equal to a 3% change; rather, it's a 30% increase.

Usage: "Congress passed a 0.25 percentage point tax cut. Not: Congress passed a 0.25 percentage points tax cut or Congress passed a tax cut of 0.25 of a percentage point."

Use percentage, rather than percent, when not paired with a number: "The percentage of people agreeing is small."

Phone numbers

Use parentheses around area codes and hyphens between number segments.
Examples:
- (410) 267-5757
- 1 (800) YOUR-BAY

policymakers

One word.

program names

Capitalize program names of the Chesapeake Bay Program, such as:
- Chesapeake Bay Small Watershed Grants Program.
- Bay Watershed Education and Training Program (B-WET).

For Chesapeake Bay Small Watershed Grants Program, you may shorten it to the Small Watershed Grant upon second use.

Example: Many projects received funding through the Chesapeake Bay Small Watershed Grants Program. The Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay used their Small Watershed Grant to fund a tree planting.

public access sites

Public access sites refer to ways in which the public can access the water, such as docs, boat ramps and kayak launches. Public access refers to the general ability and opportunities that people have to get on or use the water.

Q

quotation marks

Single quotes

Use for a quote within a quote or within a headline. Commas and periods go within the quotes; all other punctuation goes outside.
Example: Scientists calls new report "a game changer" for Bay restoration

Double quotes

Use for everything else. Commas and periods go within the quotes; all other punctuation goes outside.
Example: "The new report changes the way we think about restoration," said John Doe.
Example: "This is the most important report I've ever worked on".

R

river names and spellings

Refer to the following reference sites for correct names and spellings:
- Rivers of Maryland: http://www.mgs.md.gov/geology/rivers_in_maryland.html
- Rivers of Virginia: https://dwr.virginia.gov/rivers/

- Rivers of Pennsylvania: http://geology.com/lakes-rivers-water/pennsylvania.shtml

When including multiple rivers in a list, capitalize the proper names of the rivers first and insert the word rivers (lowercase) at the end of the list.

Example: The Susquehanna, Potomac and James rivers provide more than 80% of the fresh water that flows into the Chesapeake Bay.

runoff

One word.

S

sea level rise

Do not hyphenate.

spaces after a period

Use one space after a period, not two.

state abbreviations

Abbreviations with all capital letters—such as MD, VA, PA, etc.—are postal abbreviations. When abbreviating state names in text, use the following: Md., Va., Pa., etc. The names of the 50 U.S. states should be spelled out when used in the body of a story, whether standing alone or in conjunction with a city, town, village or military base.

Example: Jen recently moved to Annapolis, Md.

Whether or not you are writing the full state name or abbreviation, include a comma after the state, unless it is the last word in the sentence.

Example: I began working at the Chesapeake Bay Program in Annapolis, Md., on December 15.

state government

Not capitalized.

stormwater

One word.

streambank

One word.

submerged aquatic vegetation

Do not capitalize. "Underwater grasses" is preferred but can also be referred to as "bay grasses" or, after being written out, abbreviated as "SAV."

T

Total Maximum Daily Load

See entry for Chesapeake Bay Total Daily Maximum Load.

Example: The Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (Bay TMDL) limits the amount of pollution that can enter the Chesapeake Bay if it is to reach clean water standards. The restrictions contained within this "pollution diet" have been incorporated into the *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*.

toxic contaminants
Refer to as "toxic contaminants" on first reference. On second reference, use "toxics."

tree canopy
Tree canopy refers to areas of land that are shaded by trees, but don't necessarily form a forest. This could be trees planted in a yard or along a street. Urban tree canopy refers to areas in cities that are shaded by trees.

U

Underwater grasses
Use underwater grasses over submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) when the majority of your audience is part of the general public. SAV can be used for more technical writing like reports or Chesapeake Progress webpages.

U.S. EPA
Proper spelling of the United States Environmental Protection Agency acronym. Use periods but no spaces between "U.S." and one space between the "U.S." and "EPA."

V

W

watermen
If using watermen, say "watermen and water women" to avoid implying that only men harvest crabs and oysters. Try avoiding the term all together by saying "people who work the water" or "people who harvest crabs and oysters."

Watershed Implementation Plans
Capitalize full title on first reference. On second reference, use WIPs. Do not say "WIP 3".
Example: Under the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (Bay TMDL), jurisdictions must develop Watershed Implementation Plans (WIPs) that describe the steps they will take to reduce pollution. In 2019, these jurisdictions will develop Phase III WIPs.

watershed-wide
Hyphenate.

webpage
One word, not capitalized.

website

One word, not capitalized.

website addresses

Do not include the http:// portion of the address unless the address does not include a "www." Only spell out the website in this way when it is a short URL. In most other cases, hyperlink text the describes the website.
Examples:
- For more information about the Chesapeake Bay Program, visit www.chesapeakebay.net.
- To check your email, visit http://mail.yahoo.com
- Check out the Chesapeake Bay Program's field guide.

workgroup

Use title case when referring to a specific workgroup. On second reference, use workgroup.
Example: The Wetlands Workgroup or the workgroup that restores wetlands

X
Y
Z

Writing for the Chesapeake Bay Program blog

The Chesapeake Bay Program is the authoritative source for news, data and information about the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Each year, at least 84 news posts and feature stories are written with journalistic integrity and promoted through newsletters and social media.

In general, we use U.S. English according to the [Associated Press Stylebook](#).
- Login email: rfelver@chesapeakebay.net
- Password: savethecrabs

Blogs categories

Articles written by the Chesapeake Bay Program fall within one or more of the following categories:
- **Restoration spotlight:** Stories about restoration work by the Bay Program and its partners, preferably [funded](#) by the partnership. These are typically longer and include quotes from multiple sources.
- **Wildlife**: Blogs about wildlife, including wildlife conservation work.
- **Watershed science**: Blogs that help readers understand the health and workings of the Bay, including studies, reports and answers environmental science questions.
- **Chesapeake stewardship**: Profiles on individuals or groups that work in Bay restoration, as well as stewardship tips for the public.
- **Partnership news:** Press releases turned into blogs, as well as any quick updates we want to give about outcomes, workgroups or staff. These updates would be a way to announce information (like hiring an active director) that won't turn into formal press releases.
- **Travel, recreation and culture**: Blogs about history and current events. Places of cultural significance would likely go in this category.

Blog types

The Communications Office posts a few different types of blogs that have different word-count and styles:
- **Editorial**: Editorial posts are typically longer (800-1,000 words) and more story-driven. They incorporate quotes from experts and include several sections set off by headers.
- **List post**: List posts include numbered content and are meant to help readers digest information quickly. The title should generally imply that it's a list post (example: 10 Bay beaches to explore in Virginia).
- **Educational**: Educational blogs explain a topic of importance to the Bay. Typically, these blogs will answer common questions the public has when doing research. They incorporate headers to make it easy to find information. These blogs cover more niche topics that what you will find on the Learn the Issues, Discover the Chesapeake, and What We Do sections of chesapeakebay.net
- **How-to blogs**: A version of an educational blog, these blogs help readers accomplish a specific task or adopt a behavior (e.g., How to Reduce Food Waste). They are different from How-To Guides in that How-To Guides provide step-by-step information to help readers accomplish a task instead of general information.
- **Photo essay**: Photo essays include an introduction and then a series of photographs with in-depth captions. These posts typically highlight a community and tell personal stories.
- **News**: News posts are either press releases turned into blogs or short updates about the Bay Program.

Writing a blog post

1. **Generate an idea:** Ideas can come from partner updates shared in a meeting, updates from press releases or social media posts, leadership, colleagues, your own knowledge and experiences—wherever! A topic may also be provided to you by the Communications Office.
2. **Research topic and write a first draft:**
   a. *Essential elements of a blog post:* A blog is concise and straight-forward. It answers the five W's (Who, What, Where, When and Why). Link to relevant content and sources, prioritizing Chesapeake Bay Program content when possible. If you can, tie in the *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*.
   b. *Basic structure of a blog post:*
      i. First paragraph: A short and straight-forward sentence that hits on the news or two to four "feature" sentences that use narrative to draw the reader into the news.
      ii. Second paragraph: An explanation of the five W's.
      iii. Third paragraph: Explain why it matters. Provide information about the "issue" at the heart of the story, and explain why it is important.
      iv. Following paragraphs: Include supporting examples that illustrate the news, relevant quotes and additional background information.
      v. See writing tips below.
   c. *Remember:* Follow AP Style guidelines and those tips outlined in the above. Also, the Bay Program has a host of subject matter experts! Consult them for information and, if necessary, review.
3. **Connect with Multimedia Manager on accompanying visuals and/or video:** Talk with the Multimedia Manager about your post, and they will provide you with photos and/or video to include in your post. This may be from a trip the two of you take together, a separate trip they took or the Bay Program archive.
4. **Send first draft to Web Content Manager for review:** If necessary, edit draft and re-send.
5. **Once accepted by the Web Content Manager, send draft to the Communications Director:** If necessary, edit draft and re-send. Once the Communications Director has signed off, the blog is considered final.
6. **Publish blog online:** If you are outside the Communications Office, the Web Content Manager will post your blog.
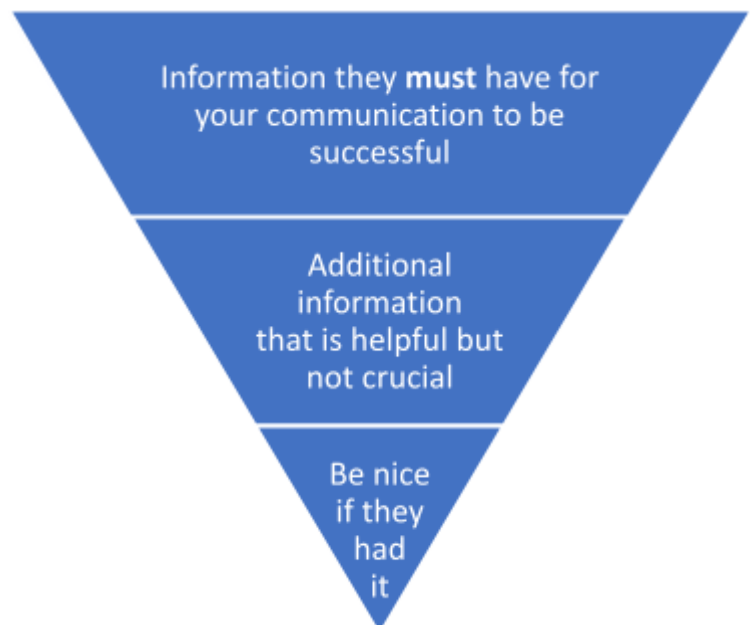
Writing tips

Get to the point.

Use the "Inverted Pyramid" model. Put the most important or newsworthy facts at the top, followed by the most important supporting information and end by giving the background. Since web users do not take a lot of time to read, get to the point quickly; use as few words as possible while retaining the meaning.

Information they **must** have for your communication to be successful

Additional information that is helpful but not crucial

Be nice if they had it

Have one idea per paragraph.

Users often scan, which means they frequently read the first sentence to decide if the paragraph is worthwhile. If more than one idea is addressed in a paragraph many readers will miss the additional ideas not addressed in the first sentence.

Include headings and subheadings.

Informative headings and subheadings help readers quickly find content of interest, since most web readers scan. It is important to use meaningful headings that tell the user what to expect if they read the accompanying text.

Break up text with bullet points.

Bullet points help break up text to make it seem less daunting and more visually pleasing.

Use active voice.

In sentences written in active voice, the subject performs the action expressed in the verb; the subject acts. In sentences written in passive voice, the subject receives the action expressed in the verb; the subject is acted upon. Passive voice is often not as clear and can lead to wordiness.

Examples:

- Passive: The Bay Program's preliminary modeling results of climate change in 2025 **were relayed** to the jurisdictions in the form of nutrient load projections. (Who relayed it? No subject)
- Active: The **Chesapeake Bay Program relayed** preliminary modeling results of climate change in 2025 to the jurisdictions in the form of nutrient load projections. (Who relayed it? The Chesapeake Bay Program)

Use simple language.

Reading from a computer screen is more difficult than reading from print; don't make it more difficult. Use simple sentence structure and language where possible. Convoluted writing and complex words are even harder to understand online.

Use the simplest word.

- "Use" instead of "utilize."
- "More" instead of "additional."
- "About" instead of "approximately."
- "Help" instead of "assistance."

Don't turn verbs into nouns.

- "Analyze" instead of "conduct an analysis."
- "Report" instead of "present a report."
- "Assess" instead of "do an assessment."
- "Help" instead of "provide assistance."
- "Conclude" instead of "come to the conclusion."

Don't use idioms.

- "We all have the same problem" instead of "we're all in the same boat."
- "We don't agree." instead of "we don't see eye to eye."
- "Start over" instead of "back to square one."

Don't use buzz words, jargon or acronyms.

A buzzword is a fashionable word or concept, often associated with a particular group of people and not understood by outsiders. Avoid using buzzwords, jargon and acronyms that may not be understood by your visitors; rather use concise descriptive text. If you must use acronyms, spell them out on first use.

Cut and consolidate.

More time than not, you can improve the reader's experience and strengthen your message by shortening your draft. One way to shorten your blog is to find redundancies—moments where you are repeating the same information or topics. Consolidate paragraphs so that the blog has seamless structure.

Brand Guide—Voice

Yes, we have a voice!

Put simply, the Chesapeake Bay Program's brand voice is the organization's personality exhibited through text. It shows up in webpages, video scripts, factsheets and all other touchpoints we have with audiences. By applying a consistent brand voice—adapted to different mediums and purposes—we can strike the desired emotional connection with audiences. We can be seen as reliable and effective, but also passionate and inclusive. We can express our love of the Bay without alienating those who aren't super outdoorsy. We can be hopeful of the Bay watershed's future without ignoring its challenges.

Description of our voice.

The Chesapeake Bay Program's voice—its personality—is built around three core values: trusted authority, commitment to the Bay, and collaborative and inclusive. Let's take a quick look at each of those values to understand how they can be exhibited in our written communications.

A trusted authority.

The Chesapeake Bay Program has a long track record of success and expertise that it brings to every project. We rely on rigorous science to ensure we are making the desired impact on the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Our brand voice should indicate that we are experts in the information that we are communicating and that our messages are rooted in science. **Example: "The 'dead zone' is an area of little to no oxygen that forms when excess nutrients enter the water through polluted runoff and feed naturally occurring algae." (The Dead Zone)**

Commitment to the Bay.

We strongly believe in the importance of protecting and restoring the Chesapeake Bay watershed—a national treasure that improves the lives of its 18 million residents. Our brand voice should convey our love of all aspects of the Bay, from its wildlife and recreational opportunities to its history and economic value. **Example: "Oysters are one of the most recognizable species in the Chesapeake Bay, and one of the most important to the health of its ecosystem" (Bay 101: Oysters)**

Collaborative and inclusive

Our unique partnership offers a way for agencies, communities, organizations, universities and governments to work together for the good of the people and the environment. We are also an inclusive organization that seeks to engage all people who care about the Bay watershed. Our brand voice should reflect this value by being easy to understand and approachable, and complimentary of our partners. **Example: "… Forests act like giant sponges, keeping our rivers and streams clean and protecting our drinking water." (Forests)**

Writing for ChesapeakeProgress

While ChesapeakeProgress generally follows the same style as other Bay Program products, there are a few differences to note and guidelines for the structure of outcome pages.

General Guidelines

- On ChesapeakeProgress, headings are capitalized in title case, whereas Bay.net uses sentence case. As per AP style, this includes capitalizing all words except for articles of any length and prepositions and conjunctions of three or fewer letters, unless those words begin or end the heading. If prepositions are part of a verb phrase (e.g., "To Report" or "Turn Off"), they should be capitalized. https://titlecaseconverter.com/ is a useful tool for this.
- Writing for Progress should avoid the first person when possible, even when this leads to increased use of the passive voice. The passive voice may also be preferred in some instances when the subject is uncertain (e.g., when we don't know what caused a change), or in the Recent Progress or Outlook when a complicated subject receives further discussion later on (e.g., "significant progress has been made"). There are also boilerplate sentences that are widely used on Progress that use the passive voice in ways that are unnecessary but currently perpetuated for consistency's sake.
- Avoid referencing an outcome's "cohort." This designation is not widely known or understood outside specific internal audiences.
- ChesapeakeProgress uses a color ramp for its charts and maps to ensure consistent branding as well as accessibility.
- Webtext documents often list a "readable score," which isn't included in on the live websites but helps to make sure Progress content isn't too dense and full of jargon for people to read. https://readable.com/ and other tools allow you to test content for its readable score and identify areas for improvement.

Outcome Page Structure

Outcome Language

Outcome pages on Progress begin with the official outcome language, which only changes through a process of amendment and approval. The standard text for modified outcome footnote language (using an asterisk at the end of the current outcome language and before the footnote) is "In [month year], the outcome was modified from the original language." The month of the change should be linked to the decision on ChesapeakeDecisions and "original language" should link to the goal page on chesapeakebay.net, where the full text of the original outcome is listed along with other information about all of the goal's outcomes.

Recent Progress and Outlook

In the Progress section, each outcome is assigned an icon for Recent Progress and one for Outlook, each with a brief description. These sections serve as a brief overview of the outcome's status, and the same icons indicated should be selected in the Outcome Status tab of the CMS[CK4] . After these, the Progress section often contains charts of data and a more in-depth account of what is being reported regarding that outcome,

including any necessary clarification and often a look ahead at expected and ongoing efforts as well as the overall importance of the outcome.

Management Strategy

The Management Strategy section does not tend to change often apart from the final paragraph, in which the dates change with every update. The standard text for this paragraph is:

"As part of the Chesapeake Bay Program's partnership-wide implementation of adaptive management, progress toward this outcome was reviewed and discussed by the Management Board in [month of year]. It will be reviewed and discussed by the Management Board again in [month year]."

Both included dates should be linked to the relevant meeting page when such pages are available; when an outcome is first updated and it will next be reviewed in two years, meeting pages are not available.

Logic & Action Plan

The Logic & Action Plan section has two parts; Ongoing Actions and Recently Completed Actions appear on the main outcome page, while older actions appear on the separate L&AP page (accessed through the Learn About Logic & Action Plan button). The best practices for this section have been evolving, so inconsistencies are present on Progress but are gradually being addressed.

Actions should be presented in bulleted lists in reverse-chronological order, starting with ongoing actions and proceeding back in time. In most cases, we do not need to distinguish "watershed-wide actions" from jurisdiction-specific ones, but if there are many actions that are rooted to specific jurisdictions, that separation may be helpful.

Ideally, the listed actions should be fragments with the assumed subject of the relevant workgroup or partners (e.g., "Developed educational resources for local governments"). Ongoing actions should use the present tense while completed actions use past tense verbs. The items in these lists end with a period as per AP.

The Participating Partners section states the primary group responsible (linked to the Groups page) and then lists other partners. Jurisdictions or larger agencies that include the listed group are listed after the group in parentheses and italicized. The items in this list do not end in punctuation.

Inclusivity in Communications

According to the Linguistic Society of America, "inclusive language acknowledges diversity, conveys respect to all people, is sensitive to differences, and promotes equal opportunities." Using inclusive language means actively and intentionally creating communications with impact on a diverse audience in mind, including working to mitigate potential unconscious biases.

Here are a few common aspects of inclusivity in communications to look out for:
- **Making assumptions**: Consider what assumptions you are making, directly or implied, and whether they might be excluding people you don't intend to. Assumptions can be conveyed to generalizations, word choice, what is emphasized or treated as a cultural default, and more. These assumptions might be about your audience (e.g., "We all want a better future for our kids"), about groups of people (e.g., "Indigenous people care more about the environment"), or about what is normal (e.g., "Most of us have easy access to nature") or strange (e.g., why specify a "male nurse" but not a "female nurse"?; "exotic food" from what perspective?).
- **Precise qualifiers**: Be precise in your meaning. This can be especially difficult in categorizing people, which can easily become too broad or too narrow (e.g., if an individual is Korean American, it's better to describe them as such than as Asian American, but if describing a group of people who aren't all Korean American, a broader category is necessary). Attributes like race, gender and disability are complex, and creating a binary without overlap requires thoughtful precision (e.g., even "people who smoke" v. "people who don't" has gray areas).
- **Visuals**: When representing people in images, videos, examples, quotes, spotlights, etc., consider both the diversity of the array of people depicted and how they're depicted. Inclusive communications present respectful depictions of a diverse group of people, as individuals and/or as groups, and treat them equally rather than tokenizing or stereotyping any individual or group.
- **Word choice**: Think about word choice to avoid judgmental connotations, such as implications of pity, condescension, dismissiveness or stigma (e.g., "confined to a wheelchair," "HIV-infected," "hysterical"). This is also closely related to coded language, which evokes a stereotype without actually naming the group of people it stereotypes (e.g., "thug"), and implicit dehumanization, which creates distance from the humanity of the people discussed, often by presenting the group as a problem or concept (e.g., "illegal aliens," "the homeless").
- **Terminology**: Use up-to-date and respectful terminology, including the terms specified by individuals to refer to themselves and aspects of their identity. The resources listed below can help in researching which terms are most current and accepted at a given time.
- **Prioritize accessibility**: This includes providing alternative text for graphic elements and transcripts for video and audio, avoiding reliance on color to convey information and ensuring strong contrast between colors, and using plain language. For guidance on accessibility, including writing alt text, see the Accessibility Guidelines.

For specific terminology to use or avoid, we use the guidance in the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay's DEIJ Terminology Guide wherever possible. In addition:
- "Citizen" should only be used in contexts (like voting) where the distinction between citizens and non-citizens is significant.
- Our style does not hyphenate identity terms like "African American."
- Most identity terms are best used as adjectives rather than nouns (e.g., "Latino people" rather than "Latinos") in general usage.
- The term "minority-serving institution" (MSI) is an appropriate use of "minority."
- "Local government leaders" is preferred over "elected officials" unless the context is specific to those who are elected and intentionally excluding all appointed officials.
- We use both "urban" and "community" in the context of tree canopy discussions, in particular because the official language for the tree canopy best management practices (BMPs) uses "urban." In general, "community" is a broader term that encompasses cities as well as suburban areas, small towns, etc. In

the general context of trees in developed areas, outside of references to specific BMPs, "community" is usually a better fit.

For more information on diversity, equity, inclusion and justice (DEIJ) efforts at the Bay Program, visit the [Diversity Workgroup](#) and the [DEIJ Backgrounder](#).

These other resources may be helpful in inclusive language efforts:

- [Conscious Style Guide](#)'s articles on writing about environmental and climate topics
- [AP Stylebook on Inclusive Storytelling](#)
- [Harvard Implicit Bias Testing](#)
- [The Diversity Style Guide](#)
- [Ableism/Language](#)
- [Northwest Science Writers Association panel on Inclusive and Bias-Free Language in Science Writing](#)
- [Inclusive Science Communication Starter Kit](#)

- [Choose Clean Water's DEIJ Resources](#)

General Web Writing Standards

The following standards should be used across Chesapeake Bay Program's suite of web tools.

Alt text

Alt text (alternative text) describes the appearance or function of an image on a page. Alt text is read aloud by screen readers used by visually impaired users, displays in place of an image if it fails to load and is indexed by search engine bots to better understand the content of your page. When writing alt text, describe the information being communicated in the image, using the visual details that are pertinent to the communications product.

Examples:

An osprey with its wings spread wide lands on a man-made wooden nesting platform with a fish in its talons.
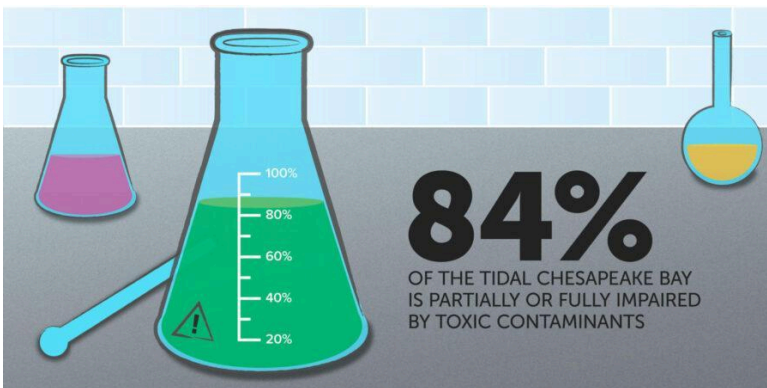
84 percent of the Chesapeake Bay's tidal segments are partially or fully impaired by toxic contaminants.

Hyperlinking

Hyperlinks should be added to cite sources, provide more information on a topic or point users towards a website they would find useful. The hyperlink should be placed on key words and relevant phrases. Headers should not be hyperlinked.

Examples:
- This project was funded by the [Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay](#).
  - *o   Link to organization's website.*
- The striped bass population has been [declining](#) for several years.
  - *o   Link to data showing the declining population.*
- Local leaders have implemented [green infrastructure projects](#) that reduce stormwater runoff.

o   *Link to information about the projects that were implemented.*

Website titles

Website titles should be written in title case without italics and should be hyperlinked. You can also describe the website and hyperlink instead of writing the name.

Examples:
- Visit [ChesapeakeBay.net](#) to learn more.
- To learn more, visit the Chesapeake Bay Program [website](#).

Photo captions

A photograph without a descriptive caption runs the risk of misleading the user. Captions should not simply describe what is in the photo (the way alt. text does); instead, captions should provide pertinent details such as where and when the photo was taken, who is in the photo, and who is credited for making the photo. Captions may also enhance the story and provide details not included elsewhere in the text.

A caption should always include:

- Credit to the person and organization providing the image (unless specified elsewhere).
- Name of person(s) in the photograph if they are prominent.
    o   A photograph of several people out fishing, for example, does not need to be labeled.

Examples:

Brandon Williams, right, hikes with his family past the former site of Bloede Dam in Howard County, Md., on May 2. "We were looking for it," Williams said, disoriented by the lack of the familiar landmark. (Photos by Will Parson/Chesapeake Bay Program)
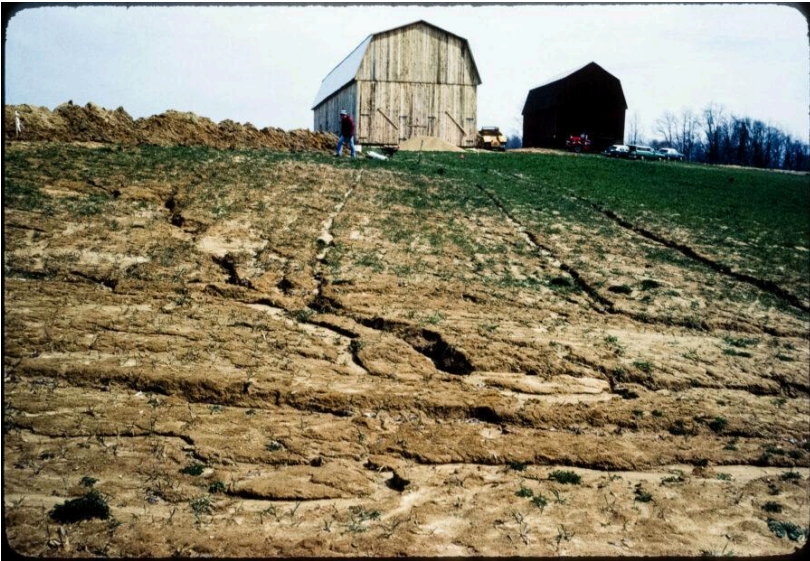
Erosion on Griffiths tobacco field in Anne Arundel County, Md., is seen circa April 1983. The erosion issues were expected to be solved by terraces. (Photo by Katherine C. Gugulis/USDA NRCS)

Logo Use & Guidelines

What our logo represents

The Chesapeake Bay Program logo is an abstract depiction of a healthy Chesapeake Bay ecosystem, one where water, land and wildlife are in harmony. The colors used are within the partnership's color pallet.
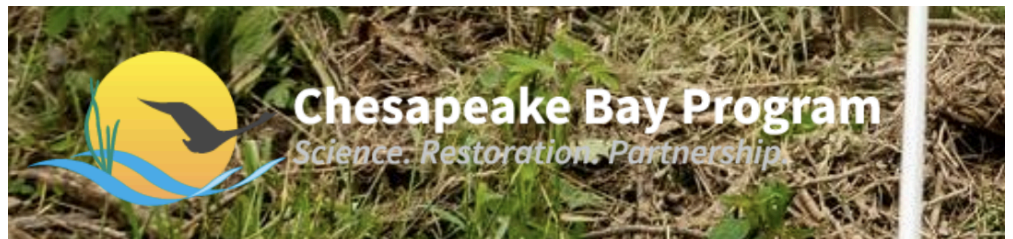
When to use the logo

The Chesapeake Bay logo should be used on reports, factsheets, webpages, brochures, invitations and flyers that are for or are the result of projects that were **funded** by the Chesapeake Bay Program or **coordinated** through a partnership workgroup, goal implementation team or committee.

How to use the logo

When using the logo, you should consider size, resolution, contrast and legibility. Ask yourself:

- Is the logo large enough for the text to be legible?
- Does the file of the logo I'm using have high enough resolution to not be pixelated or blurry?
- Is there enough contrast between the text and the background image?
- Is there enough contrast between the icon elements (grass, water, waterfowl) and the background image? (Make sure the waterfowl's neck isn't getting cut off).
- Are the name and tagline legible or do you need to use a version without the tagline?

How NOT to use the logo

When using the CBP logo, do not:

- Screenshot all or part of the logo and use that for a product (instead, download the .png or Adobe Illustrator file)
- Use a low-resolution file that results in a pixelated logo.
- Place the logo over a background that renders it unreadable or distracting.
- Shrink the file down to the point where you cannot read the text.
- Use the old logo with "A watershed partnership" as the tagline.
- Manipulate or add to the logo in any way.

Choosing the right logo option

Picking the right logo option for your product is key. The logo is available with or without the name and tagline, in full color, white text or all white, and in a vertical or horizontal treatment.

- **Full logo vs. Icon-only**
    - In most cases you should use the full logo, and especially when it is not clear who the document belongs to (the icon itself is not recognizable enough to signify that).
    - Use the Icon-only logo in rare cases where "Chesapeake Bay Program" is clearly stated on the document within close proximity to the logo.
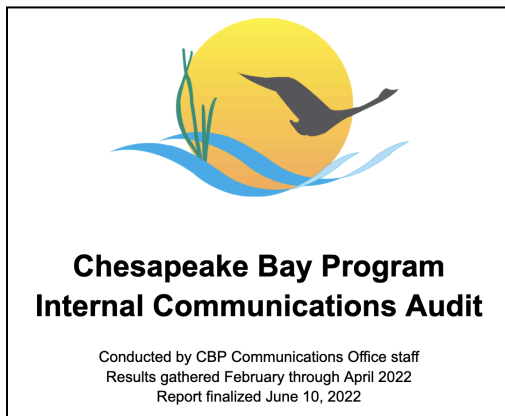
- **Full color vs. white text vs. full white**
    - Use the full color logo whenever possible, if the background of the document is a light color (such as white or gray) and the text is still readable.
    - Use the white text logo when the background of the document is a dark color.
    - Use the full white logo in rare cases, against a dark background that would not accommodate the full color logo or contrast with the yellow, blue and green.

- Horizontal logo vs. vertical
    - Choose whichever version best fits the layout of your design and the surrounding elements.

How to access the logo

Currently, you will need to email the communications office to access a high resolution version of the Chesapeake Bay Program logo. Please indicate how you would like to use the logo.

- Jake Solyst: jsolyst@chesapeakebay.net
- Rachel Felver: rfelver@chesapeakebay.net