



Backgrounder

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In June 2014, the Chesapeake Executive Council, which includes leaders from six states and the District of Columbia, and representatives of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Chesapeake Bay Commission, signed the landmark *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*. This restoration, conservation and stewardship accord contains ten interconnected goals and thirty-one measurable, time-bound outcomes that will help create a healthy ecosystem. The Chesapeake Bay Program's Goal Implementation Teams have developed draft management strategies that outline our plans to meet those thirty-one outcomes. The twenty-five strategies are grouped into five themes that align with Bay Program partners' vision, described in the Watershed Agreement: **Conserved Lands, Abundant Life, Clean Water, Climate Change and Engaged Communities**.

About Conserved Lands



With a land-to-water ratio higher than any other coastal water body in the world, the Chesapeake Bay is particularly vulnerable to the changes we make on land. Natural lands—including wetlands and forests—improve the water quality of streams, rivers and the Bay while providing habitat for native and migratory species. Millions of people live within a few miles of the more than 100,000 creeks, streams and rivers that thread through the region and carry the pollution and contaminants from our activities on land downstream, eventually reaching the Bay.

Since 1950, the population of the Bay region has nearly doubled—and it is continuing to grow. Two million people are expected to move to the region by 2030, and the changes we make to the landscape—building homes, schools, roads and shopping centers—could pollute local waters, degrade habitats and alter culturally-significant lands. Stormwater runoff is the fastest growing source of pollution in the watershed, and continuing to convert the natural lands that soak up these pollutants to paved, impervious surfaces would worsen the problem. By conserving and

protecting treasured lands across the watershed, we not only protect the quality of our waters and habitats but the cultural, historical and community value associated with those lands.

Although permanent protection is an important step, it is only part of the solution—lands that are not protected may still be vulnerable to development, and the way we use land in our cities, towns and neighborhoods throughout the watershed can still degrade water quality and the habitats of thousands of species. But our growing communities do not have to harm the ecosystem. Many local leaders have already implemented policies and tools to encourage smart growth in their communities. Measuring and assessing how the landscape is changing, what impacts those changes have on our ecosystem and on the economy, and what options are available will help us to protect our natural world while maintaining healthy, vibrant communities.

Associated Management Strategies

Protected Lands

Lands treasured for their ecological, cultural, historical and recreational value are of particular importance to maintaining the health and identity of the Bay watershed. Development pressures, transportation and energy infrastructure and new housing and commercial areas are dramatically changing the landscape in some areas. One approach to preventing the loss of these lands is to permanently protect them from development. To ensure the long-term sustainability of lands across the watershed, Bay Program partners have committed to protecting two million new acres of land by 2025, including 225,000 acres of wetlands and 695,000 acres of forest of the highest value for maintaining water quality. Our plan to achieve this outcome begins with identifying lands that are high-priority for protection based on their ecological, historical and cultural value. Increasing funding and incentives and building public support for conservation efforts will help build a new generation of land stewards. Furthermore, collaborating with new and existing partners will increase the capacity and effectiveness of our collective work.

Land Use Methods and Metrics Development

As millions move to the watershed, new infrastructure—schools, roads, shopping centers—is built to accommodate them. In the past, much of this development has been low-density sprawl, which converts forests, farms and shorelines and degrades habitats and water quality. But development itself does not have to harm the Chesapeake Bay. By developing our cities and towns in a strategic and methodical way, we can avoid degrading the health of our ecosystem. As part of the Watershed Agreement, partners committed to learning more about the land use change happening in the watershed by monitoring and reporting the rates of farmland, forest and wetland conversion and the change in impervious surfaces at a local scale. This information will continually improve our understanding of land use and its associated impacts and will be communicated to local leaders, decision-makers and stakeholders. Our strategy to achieve this outcome includes developing a plan for monitoring land use change, measuring current rates of land conversion and understanding how those changes are affecting the natural environment. Our research will inform the decision-makers and stakeholders working to plan for the future growth of their communities.

Land Use Options Evaluation

Roughly half of the land in the Chesapeake Bay watershed is forested, and an additional quarter is made up of farmland. To accommodate a growing population, care must be taken to minimize the conversion of these valued lands and—when they must be converted for development—to reduce the loss of the ecological services they provide. Traditional land protection is one tactic to retain the ecological, cultural and economic benefits of these lands, but assessing the development options available to rural towns, suburban areas and cities can offer a range of additional solutions for accommodating growth. Evaluating the policy options, incentives and planning tools available to local governments to reduce the rate of changing landscapes will help support local decision-making and conserve ecologically and economically significant lands. Our plan includes determining the tools and policies that are currently in place across the watershed, surveying the effectiveness of those options and better understanding what local leaders need to slow the loss of natural and agricultural lands.