



ADVANCING CHESAPEAKE BAY RESTORATION

A Model for Voluntary, State-Led, Federally Supported Conservation

CHESAPEAKE BAY COMMISSION | FEBRUARY 2025

The Chesapeake Bay Program partnership is a model for voluntary, state-led, federally supported restoration. It has benefited from bipartisan, multi-jurisdiction support and leadership throughout its 40+ year history. The Chesapeake Bay Commission looks forward to working closely with you to ensure its continued success.

WHO WE ARE

Created by the General Assemblies of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia, the Chesapeake Bay Commission (Commission) is an interstate legislative organization dedicated to establishing and implementing collaborative and practicable policy for the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay. The Commission is a bipartisan assembly of prominent leaders from all three states, including fifteen legislative members, three cabinet-level secretaries, and three citizen appointees. Since its creation in 1980, the Commission has been a leader in the states' Bay-wide environmental protection and restoration efforts, driving state-led restoration opportunities and efforts which are now yielding a Bay in recovery.

THE BUSINESS OF THE BAY: AN ECONOMIC ENGINE

The Chesapeake Bay and its rivers and streams are not merely an ecosystem of immense natural resource value – they are also huge economic engines for the states of Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia. From recreational trout fishing to harvesting blue crabs, healthy Bay waters provide jobs, personal income, and state revenue.

Research shows that the total estimated natural capital value of the Chesapeake Bay watershed is a whopping \$107.2 billion annually in its current state of recovery.¹ The value of a Bay watershed with clean water jumps to \$129.7 billion annually, a \$22.5 billion per year increase.

The advantages of a recovering watershed are not simply economic; there are the added benefits of improved quality of life. These benefits include improved food production (farming, hunting and fishing), better urban management of stormwater that reduces flooding to protect life and property, safer drinking water supplies, and increased access to recreation (tourism, outdoor sports, fishing and hunting, etc.).

¹ Phillips, Spencer, and Beth McGee. 2016. "Ecosystem Service Benefits of a Cleaner Chesapeake Bay." *Coastal Management* 44 (3): 241–58. doi:10.1080/08920753.2016.1160205.

A STATE-DRIVEN, FEDERALLY SUPPORTED PARTNERSHIP

A model conservation and restoration program of cooperative federalism, the state-federal Chesapeake Bay Program partnership has successfully advanced a collaborative, state-led, federally supported restoration approach.

This state-federal partnership, joining together six states, the District of Columbia, the federal government, and the Chesapeake Bay Commission, is governed by voluntary commitments established by the partners themselves -- commitments focused on a comprehensive package of environmental indicators and a pledge to achieve the goals of the Clean Water Act.

VOLUNTARY AGREEMENTS

Framed by a series of voluntary agreements, the partnership's current operational framework document is the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement (Agreement), drafted and signed in 2014. Key to the Agreement are the concepts of public-private partnering, measurable results, and the use of new ideas and technologies.

These concepts have achieved remarkable progress toward the Agreement's goals and outcomes which include sustainable commercial and recreational fisheries; land and water habitats sufficient to support wildlife, recreational use, and scenic values; clean water that meets state and federal standards; increased citizen stewardship; and conservation of treasured landscapes.

THE CLEAN WATER ACT

The partnership's Chesapeake Bay restoration efforts are not exclusively voluntary. They also aid the states in meeting the requirements of the federal Clean Water Act related to impaired waters and Total Maximum Daily Loads (Section 303(d) et al). While the requirement to improve Bay water quality is appropriately driven by the Clean Water Act, how to do this is decided by each state, which creates buy-in and ensures efficiency. This is a model for how a watershed cleanup program should be done.

According to the Agreement, "[r]estoring the Bay's waters is critical to overall watershed restoration because clean water is the foundation for healthy fisheries, habitats and communities across the region. However excess amounts of nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment in the Bay and its tributaries have caused many sections of the Bay to be listed as 'impaired' under the Clean Water Act." The Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) sets nutrient and sediment reduction targets, and the states determine their pathway (Watershed Implementation Plan) for meeting those targets.

COOPERATIVE FEDERALISM

The defining feature of the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership is its collaborative structure. It is a joint enterprise where state governments and the federal government together share responsibilities to meet both statutory obligations and voluntary goals. The federal government's role in this collaborative structure is a vital one and has been a true partnership in every sense of the word.

The Clean Water Act expressly directs EPA's Administrator to provide critical support to the partnership, including oversight, technical assistance, and grants. EPA's Chesapeake Bay Program Office provides an infrastructure that ensures all partners are heard, coordinates complex decision-making and, when necessary, gives oversight and assurance that partners are observing their voluntary commitments.

CONTINUING SUCCESS: WHAT STATES NEED FROM OUR FEDERAL PARTNERS

SCIENCE AND PLANNING TOOLS

As state legislative leaders, we recognize the crucial role that EPA and the federal partners play in providing the scientific and technical information and expertise necessary to ground restoration decisions on the best science available. While EPA serves as the lead federal partner, the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership incorporates unequalled expertise from federal agencies such as USGS, NOAA, USDA and DOI. The states rely on these federal partners to provide data, analysis, interpretation, and more. No one state could either obtain or generate this information on its own.

The Chesapeake Bay Watershed Model (Bay Model) is another essential tool for the states' activities. A peer-reviewed model extensively calibrated and validated to stream monitoring data at locations throughout the Chesapeake Bay states, the Bay Model is one of international recognition and respectability. It is irreplaceable in its utility. The states rely on the model to develop implementation plans, make strategic planning decisions, assess progress, and continue forward momentum on reducing pollution and achieving clean water. It would be practically impossible for the states to develop a comparable model by themselves.

Another initiative critical to state success is the partnership's water quality monitoring program. Led jointly by USGS and the EPA, the federal government coordinates a monitoring network that utilizes federal monitoring stations, state monitoring stations, academic institutions, scientists, federal and state agencies and staff, and citizen scientists to monitor and assess water quality conditions as the states implement pollution control and reduction practices. Water quality monitoring is essential for determining which practices to implement and whether they are effective.

FUNDING ASSISTANCE

Federal partners do not just provide informational support. Federal funding support has historically played, and must continue to play, a significant role in Chesapeake Bay restoration. States currently outspend the federal government in supporting cleaner water in the Bay and its rivers. In FY 2023, state spending for watershed restoration exceeded \$1.5 billion. Federal spending on watershed restoration, across all partner agencies, was less than half as much: \$722 million.

The Chesapeake Bay's states are proud to outspend our federal partners, but federal contributions remain an essential catalyst. Whether the dollars come from USDA, NOAA, USFWS or EPA, these monies fund the informational science, collaborative leadership, and on-the-ground restoration work indispensable to our success. These contributions are felt far and wide by farmers and watermen, property owners and local governments, even places of worship, all looking to protect their lands and livelihoods. It is critical that these dollars continue.

The seal of the Chesapeake Bay Commission is a large, light gray circular emblem in the background. It features a map of the Chesapeake Bay in the center. The words "CHESAPEAKE BAY COMMISSION" are written in a circle around the map. At the bottom of the circle, it says "PENNSYLVANIA • VIRGINIA". The year "1980" is on the right side of the circle.

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