



CHESAPEAKE BAY COMMISSION

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The Chesapeake Bay Commission held its first quarterly meeting of 2025 on Thursday and Friday, January 2-3, 2025. The meeting was held in Annapolis, MD.

Commission members in attendance:

Delegate Alex Askew
Representative Kerry Benninghoff
Delegate Robert Bloxom
Delegate David Bulova
Warren Elliott, PA Citizen Member
Representative Carol Hill-Evans
Delegate Julian Ivey (Day One only)
Secretary Josh Kurtz
RADM Carl Lahti
Senator Sara Love
Senator Scott Martin
Senator Jeremy McPike
Delegate Sheila Ruth
Acting Secretary Jessica Shirley
Delegate Dana Stein
Secretary Travis Voyles
Senator Mary Washington
Senator Gene Yaw

Not in attendance:

Senator Richard Stuart
Missy Cotter Smasal, VA Citizen Member

Member Staff:

MD David Goshorn
VA Stefanie Taillon
PA Jill Whitcomb
DoD Kevin Du Bois

CBC Staff:

Jen Dieux
Mark Hoffman
Anna Killius
Marel King
Adrienne Kotula

Thursday, January 2, 2025

WELCOME AND NEW MEMBER INTRODUCTIONS

Commission Chair Bulova called the formal meeting to order at 12:29 P.M. and welcomed members to the Wiley E. Bates Legacy Center. Chair Bulova then recognized two changes to the membership of the Commission, first introducing Ms. Nikki Rivera, who will soon be sworn-in to fill Representative Mike Sturla's seat in the Pennsylvania General Assembly and will also be taking Representative Sturla's place on the Commission. He then recognized the recent passing of Vince Leggett, Maryland Citizen Member, who was instrumental in the planning of today's meeting. Chair Bulova noted that today's meeting was in his honor.

ROLL CALL

Chair Bulova then asked Executive Director Anna Killius to call the roll. A quorum was present.

ADOPTION OF MINUTES

Chair Bulova called for approval of the minutes from the November meeting. The motion was adopted by unanimous consent.

ADOPTION/MODIFICATION OF AGENDA

Chair Bulova asked for comments or questions on the agenda from the members. Hearing none, the agenda was approved unanimously.

FOLLOW-UP FROM NOVEMBER MEETING

Chair Bulova asked Executive Director Killius to present the group with follow-ups from the November Meeting. Ms. Killius provided updates as follows:

NOVEMBER LIGHTNING ROUND

Ms. Killius noted that, as requested in November, the lightning round updates were sent by email in advance of the meeting, so the members should have received an email with updates on the Beyond 2025 final report, Executive Council meeting, and catfish. Additional updates on these topics will be provided during tomorrow's meeting and catfish policy options will be a topic of discussion during our federal policy conversation with Jason Gleason and Crossroads Strategies tomorrow morning.

FISHERIES – Striped Bass

Ms. Killius then provided an update on the striped bass fishery in the Chesapeake Bay. In November, she noted the continuing concerns regarding low recruitment given that the young-of-year index for 2024 marked the 6th consecutive year of poor reproduction.

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Striped Bass Management Board is required to rebuild the spawning stock by 2029. But based on current projections, which anticipate higher fishing mortality in 2025, the probability of rebuilding the striped bass spawning stock by 2029 is less than 50%. In response, the Board held a special meeting in December to consider management changes to reduce fishing mortality.

We expected the Board to consider changes to the 2025 recreational seasons and size limits, and to the commercial quotas. However, the Board voted to keep the current management regulations in place for

2025 and to consider additional recreational and commercial management measures for 2026. Those decisions will be made no later than October 2025 for implementation in 2026.

In deciding not to take action this year, the Board cited an interest in providing more time to consider and receive public input on potential seasonal closures, which would be a new approach for the Board, and to review the full 2024 harvest data. Conservation advocates worry that the delay could make it even harder for striped bass to bounce back to sustainable levels.

CBC/Virginia Sea Grant Fellow

When the Commission first directed staff to look at hiring an intern or fellow to help grow the pipeline of future Chesapeake Bay leaders, we started by looking at several existing programs. None seemed like the right fit for our needs or mission based on their recruitment processes, internship timing, or participant type. Often, the focus was on high school and college students interested in field experiences and hands-on learning, or science fellows looking for research and applied science opportunities. It seemed like we would be a better fit for a graduate-level fellow interested in working at the intersection of science and policy, across jurisdictions, in a bipartisan and collaborative way. As this is very similar to the Knauss fellowship through the national Sea Grant program, we reached out to the Virginia Sea Grant program to ask about a collaboration.

Based on those discussions, we are planning to bring a full-time, year-long fellow on board during the 2026 fiscal year in partnership with Virginia Sea Grant. This would be pilot, where Sea Grant would help cover more than 50% of the cost in the first year and take on some of the administrative and human resources responsibilities that complicate our ability to hire for a year-long temporary position by ourselves. CBC's share would be approximately \$30,000 in Year 1, but if all goes well and it is a rewarding experience for us and the fellow, the Commission will need to come up with a higher proportion of the cost in future years to ensure this partnership is sustainable. By partnering, we can provide a year-long experience, tap into a network of potential applicants interested in science-based policy, and get the support of an organization with years of experience providing quality fellowship experiences for their participants that prioritize professional growth.

Chair Bulova thanked Ms. Killius for the updates. He then introduced the day's first speaker, Ms. Mariah Davis, with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

REACHING UNDER-RESOURCED COMMUNITIES

Mariah Davis, Environmental Justice Officer, Maryland Department of Natural Resources

Ms. Davis shared with the members multiple initiatives the State of Maryland is undertaking to improve reaching under-resourced communities. The topics discussed included regenerative agriculture, the use of DNR agriculture leases as a model of sustainable and inclusive land management, removing barriers to entry for minority farms, and other best practices.

After Commission questions and discussion, Chair Bulova thanked Ms. Davis for her time, and introduced the next speakers on growing community capacity.

GROWING COMMUNITY CAPACITY

Kacey Wetzel, Vice-President of Programs - Outreach and Education, Chesapeake Bay Trust
Bonnie Sorak, Director of Outreach at Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake

Ms. Wetzel provided background on her organization, the Chesapeake Bay Trust, and informed the members on the work of the Trust to better engage a diverse group of communities in environmental work. She noted the importance of bridging the knowledge gap, building trust, overcoming complexity, and increasing confidence to have success in these efforts.

Ms. Sorak then walked the members through multiple examples of the work Interfaith Partners is doing to enhance the environment, such as Faithful Green Leaders Training, the Partner Congregation Pledge, and Monthly Learning Labs.

Chair Bulova thanked the presenters and then introduced the final panel of the day on the next generation of Bay leaders.

THE NEXT GENERATION OF BAY LEADERS

Breck Sullivan, Physical Scientist at U.S. Geological Survey

Peggy Re, Associate Provost, Academic Affairs at University of Maryland, Baltimore County

Mary K Foley, Director of USGS MD-DE-DC Water Science Center

Zach Clifton, Physical Scientist at USGS MD-DE-DC Water Science Center

The panel members shared perspectives and progress on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that had been executed between the US Geological Survey (USGS) and the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. The MOU's goals are to provide: 1) a seamless pipeline to bring environmentally literate and technologically capable candidates to the workforce; 2) increase representation of underrepresented/underserved communities with careers in environmental science and engineering and related fields; 3) an environmental stewardship ethic in students at all educational levels; 4) innovative teaching and a commitment to community engagement; and 5) a partnership which strengthens connections between staff and students at a Minority Servicing Institution with federal agencies.

Following their discussion and questions, Chair Bulova thanked the panelist for their time and expertise.

COMMISSION DISCUSSION

The Commissioners then had an open dialogue about agenda topics they would like to see at future meetings. Topics brought up included: impacts of climate change on restoration policy; work force development; hearing from people who make their living from the Bay; federal funding; emerging contaminants; TMDL status; comparing specific legislative initiatives across the three jurisdictions; and impacts of demographics on restoration. Ms. Killius raised the idea of having webinars between formal meetings to enable Commissioners to address these topics in more detail.

The Commission adjourned the day at 3:38 P.M.

Friday, January 3, 2025

DELEGATION BREAKFAST BREAKOUTS

Delegations discussed news and issues relevant to their jurisdictions over breakfast.

WELCOME & ROLL CALL

Chair Bulova called the meeting to order at 9:20 A.M. and asked Executive Director Killius to call the roll. A quorum was present.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S LIGHTNING ROUND UPDATES

Chair Bulova asked Executive Director Killius to update the Commission on important and timely issues impacting the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

2024 Executive Council Meeting

Ms. Killius noted that the 2024 Executive Council meeting was on December 10 in Annapolis, MD. Governor Moore, as chair of the Executive Council, presided over the meeting and was joined in person by Governor Youngkin and, virtually, by Governor Shapiro. It was a very foggy morning, which prevented Governor Shapiro from being there in person, as he had previously planned. Our Chair, Delegate Bulova, was in attendance on behalf of the Commission. The remaining Executive Council members sent designees.

During the private portion of the meeting, the Executive Council heard recommendations from the three current Advisory Committees, issued a Charge for executing Phase 2 of the Beyond 2025 work, and signed a directive creating a new Agriculture Advisory Committee. A few of the recurrent themes throughout the recommendations and remarks were the need to center the people of the watershed in the work of its conservation, the importance of communicating the impact of the work we do, and the goal for everyone to be part of and benefit from that work. We heard about the importance of commitment, of urgency, and of being able to measure and monitor progress. And we discussed the importance of delivering local benefits to communities and living resources in the immediate term while making progress toward our long-term clean water goals for the mainstem of the Bay.

Overall, the public portion of the meeting was well-received by those who attended or tuned in to the livestream. There were very positive reactions to having all three of our governors give remarks reflecting on recent achievements, proactive plans for the future, and a commitment to partnership. But the hard work is ahead of us, to come back in one year with revisions for a refreshed Watershed Agreement and a plan for a more efficient Chesapeake Bay Program for the future. We also will have some leadership changes at EPA as we complete this work. We will have a new EPA Administrator and Regional Administrator. And Martha Shimkin, the Chesapeake Bay Program Director and my co-chair during Phase 1 of planning for Beyond 2025, has retired. Lee McDonnell, who is the Branch Chief for Science, Analysis, and Implementation, will be serving as acting director during this critical time.

Reviewing and Refreshing the Watershed Agreement Outcomes

Ms. Killius said that based on the charge issued by the Executive Council, the Chesapeake Bay Program will be focused on four major tasks over the next year and a half: assessing and revising the Agreement Outcomes, making any other necessary revisions to the Agreement, streamlining the program's structure and processes, and then incorporating these changes into the formal Governance document.

Additionally, the main focal point for the next 6-8 months will be in assessing and revising the outcomes. The outcomes are the 31 time-bound targets partners use to plan our work and measure our progress toward achieving the Watershed Agreement's overarching goals like water quality, sustainable fisheries, and environmental literacy.

To get this assessment and revision done by the end of the year, partners are going to be working at a very fast pace. Right now, as part of the assessment, goal implementation teams are preparing advice on whether to keep, combine, remove, or change all the current outcomes as well as whether to add any new outcomes. The Management Board will consider that advice and make a recommendation on what to do with all the outcomes, before moving on to draft the specific revisions. That recommended set of revised outcomes will be presented to the Principals' Staff Committee for approval and elevation to the Executive Council. Throughout this review and revision process, partners will need to incorporate the advice of our Advisory Committees as well as the input of our external partners and the public.

Even though partners are staying focused on updating the outcomes and not drafting a brand-new Agreement, this is a phenomenal amount of work and potentially a lot of change coming fast to the federal agencies, the states, and the non-profit and private sector partners working together toward watershed conservation. It's going to take a lot of trust and good faith.

Ms. Killius told the members that Commission staff are their eyes, ears, and voice in all these conversations. Staff are participating in the goal team discussions as they formulate advice. Ms. Killius will represent the Commission on the Management Board as they prepare recommended revisions to the outcomes, and act on the Commission's behalf as part of the Principals' Staff Committee as they guide the process and make the final recommendation to the Executive Council for a refreshed Agreement.

A couple of tenets staff will be keeping in mind as they represent you in these discussions:

- At the foundation of the Chesapeake Bay Program is a belief that cooperative watershed conservation is necessary to deliver clean water and thriving living resources for and with the people of the watershed;
- That as stewards of public resources, we need to stay focused on our mission of achieving a healthy, sustainable watershed, but we need to maintain a holistic view of watershed health to be truly successful;
- That conservation of the ecosystem services we enjoy now is just as important as restoring benefits we have lost over time; and
- That we need to be proactive in planning for and mitigating the impacts of changes we know are coming, whether they are to our climate, to our native species and habitats, or to the development our watershed will continue to experience.

By our May meeting, Ms. Killius will hopefully be able to share the results of the outcome assessment process and the general sense of what the partnership proposes to do with each of the current outcomes. At that time, staff will be asking for Commission feedback to help draft the revised language.

2024 Chesapeake Bay Commission Annual Report

The Commission is statutorily required to prepare an annual report each year including environmental and economic issues impacting the Bay and the progress made by our coordinated efforts. With the start of the

new year, we have begun work on the Commission's 2024 annual report. As usual, our goal is to have printed copies available before the end of the Virginia General Assembly.

This year, we plan to include the 2024 roster of Commission members, key highlights from our work in each of the three states as well as federally, and a letter from the Chair reflecting on the Executive Council Charge guiding the work of the Program over the next year. We also plan to highlight how recent funding increases at the state and federal level are influencing the pace of progress and how future budget outlooks may impact that pace. And we are taking a look at how our states are approaching conservation with local benefits and people-focused actions in mind through programs like Rapid Stream Delisting, Pay-for-Performance, and the Whole Watershed Act.

You can also expect to see lots of great pictures recapping the field experiences we prioritized in 2024!

2025 & 2026 Meeting Dates

Finally, the Commission was reminded of the approved 2025 meeting dates as well as the proposed 2026 dates. They were asked to make sure the 2025 dates and locations are in their calendars. Finally, they were reminded that they will be asked to approve the 2026 dates in May.

Chair Bulova thanked Ms. Killius for her updates, and then turned to the next agenda item, a preview of each's states legislative session.

THE 2025 GENERAL ASSEMBLY SESSIONS

Members from each Delegation then shared policy initiatives they were considering for their upcoming legislative sessions. Each Delegation discussed both legislation as well as budget priorities.

Afterwards, Chair Bulova thanked the members, and introduced the next panel, our federal legislative liaisons from Crossroads Strategies.

FEDERAL POLICY UPDATES

Jason Gleason, Executive Vice President at Crossroads Strategies

Wally Burnett, Principal at Crossroads Strategies

Mr. Gleason and Mr. Burnett shared with the members their current thoughts on federal policy and budgets, especially given the results of November's election. They noted that much will unfold over the coming months but stated that educating new members of Congress would be a priority, as well as continuing to be a strong advocate for the programs and funding the Commission finds important.

Chair Bulova thanked Mr. Gleason and Mr. Burnett for their time, and then introduced the day's last formal presenter, Mr. David Reed, Executive Director of the Chesapeake Legal Alliance (CLA).

BETTER KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORS

David Reed, Executive Director at Chesapeake Legal Alliance

Mr. Reed presented an update of the joint CLA-CBC comparison of the three states that make up the Commission. The analysis considered diverse topics such as geography and demographics, the composition of each General Assembly, legislative procedures, and state budget processes. This helps Commission members understand and

appreciate the differences in how their states function. During the presentation, members asked questions and shared examples of various points.

Chair Bulova thanked Mr. Reed and the CLA for putting this excellent work together.

INTERIM ACTIONS

Chair Bulova asked Executive Director Killius to share any interim actions identified by Commission members during the meeting. She identified four topics during the meeting: 1) guides or resources that may help Commission members assess whether their programs and initiatives are accessible and support community capacity; 2) periodic updates on the Beyond 2025 efforts; 3) topics for future meetings as well as interim learning webinars; 4) an update on the Chesapeake Natural Resource Area proposal in Congress.

Chair Bulova thanked Ms. Killius for keeping track of the action items.

NEW BUSINESS

Chair Bulova asked if there was any new business to come before the Commission, and there was none.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Bulova asked if any members of the public had expressed interest in providing comments. No one had done so.

ELECTION OF 2025 OFFICERS

Each Delegation then presented its nominations for leadership during 2025.

Maryland:

Senator Sara Love, Chair

Delegate Dana Stein, Vice-Chair

Virginia:

Delegate David Bulova, Chair

Senator Jeremy McPike, Vice-Chair

Pennsylvania:

Senator Gene Yaw, Chair

Representative Carol Hill-Evans, Vice-Chair

The members unanimously endorsed the slate of candidates from each Delegation.

Chair Bulova then shared that the Chairmanship of the full Commission would rotate to Maryland for 2025 and offered his congratulations to Senator Love. Delegate Bulova shared closing remarks related to his tenure as Commission chair during 2024 and thanked all the members and staff for their support.

Senator Love thanked Delegate Bulova for his service, presented a small token of appreciation, and shared her thoughts on the Commission work in 2025.

Senator Love then wished the Delegations success for their legislative sessions and shared the next meeting of the full Commission will be held in May in Washington, DC.

ADJOURNMENT

The Commission formally adjourned at 12:23 P.M.

*The next meeting of the full Chesapeake Bay Commission
will be held in Washington, DC on May 1-2, 2025*