

Chesapeake WILD Stakeholder Engagement Sessions

March 23, 2021

These sessions identified ideas, actions, and strategies to inform the Chesapeake WILD Program Framework document. Information generated in facilitated breakout groups was organized into themes associated with the 5 Pillars established in the Framework document listed below. The main themes collected from the sessions include:

Pillar 1: Habitat Conservation

Sustain and enhance restoration and conservation activities by conserving a resilient network of fish and wildlife habitats and connecting corridors, with emphasis on vulnerable species and habitats.

- Develop data-driven blueprints to guide strategic conservation action and investments.
- Integrate/synthesize multi-state wildlife action plans and prioritize corridors for wildlife movements to adapt to changing conditions.
- Create multi-agency strategies for joint operations with partners to work at scales that transcend geo-political boundaries.
- Support a wide range and diversity of project types to illustrate the breadth and scale of the implementation envisioned.
- Strengthen and accelerate private landowner participation in strategic conservation programs.
- Enhance wildlife values and community benefits in non-traditional areas, especially for urban or historically disadvantaged communities.
- Distribute technical assistance, technology, research, etc. equitably to ensure vertical and horizontal connectedness across jurisdictions.
- Leverage future grant funds by synchronizing and aligning with existing restoration and conservation funding and relevant grant programs.

Pillar 2: Climate Adaptation

Address climate change by increasing scientific capacity and supporting strategic planning, monitoring, and applied science activities necessary to ensure resilience of natural ecosystems and habitats impacted by changing climate and development.

- Make science a whole community effort by engaging work at all levels (academia, government, environmental/conservation NGO's, citizen scientists).
- Require actions and investments to demonstrate climate resiliency benefits.
- Prioritize actions and investments based on climate vulnerability and equity assessments.
- Forecast landscape change and design conservation strategies based on predicted future habitats conditions.

- Facilitate integration of climate resiliency considerations within and across all public and private conservation funding programs.
- Prioritize investments to instill a climate stewardship ethic in all sectors.
- Acknowledge the importance of considering Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) in all decisions.

Pillar 3: Outreach, Education, and Civic Engagement

Increase outreach, education, and civic engagement by enhancing capacity and support for coordinated restoration and protection activities in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, particularly in underserved communities.

- Build on the success of existing and complementary outreach, education, stewardship and community engagement programs (ex. Chesapeake Bay Program, Gateways Network, state programs).
- Put listening and working toward the goals of communities first. Address Chesapeake WILD priorities within that context.
- Emphasize experiential learning and stewardship. Involve communities in planning/restoration activities and invest in resources and services to expand access (ex. translation services to expand participation and engagement).
- Invest in organizations that focus on community organizing, capacity building sustainable operations in historically disadvantaged communities, where communities in need and conservation/restoration priorities intersect.
- Build on successful youth stewardship, leadership, and career development programs and create new ones to target unmet needs, especially in DEIJ communities.
- Establish a network of regional partnerships with directed outreach and marketing for conservation education, stewardship and community engagement programs.
- Create new programs to organize and connect community, homeowner, private landowner and citizen steward networks for leveraging, collective impact, and sustainable operations.

Pillar 4: Access for Outdoor Recreation

Enhance recreational opportunities and public access with a strong emphasis on equitable access to nature, consistent with the ecological needs of fish and wildlife habitat.

- Ensure availability of parks, green spaces, water access within 5 to 10-minute walk from homes -- creating additional access points along key corridors
- Enhance accessibility, aesthetics and environmental quality in new and existing green space/waterways with increased funding, technical assistance, transit access, regular maintenance and comprehensive interpretation.

- Align and integrate planning for access/civic engagement/water quality/habitat to target priority actions and investments.
- Invest in public access sites with facilities necessary to accommodate student groups.
- Engage local community members and special interest (user) groups in planning - identifying needs, gaps, programming preferences, etc.
- Promote access to nature as means for healing (physical, mental, emotional well-being).

Pillar 5: Clean Water for People and Wildlife

Improve and sustain water quality, reduce flood damage, and upgrade water-management capability, with an emphasis on green infrastructure and natural infrastructure to support fish and wildlife, habitats of fish and wildlife, and drinking water for people.

- Align and leverage funding sources (SWCD, DOT, FEMA, environmental impact bonds, low-to-no match grants for underserved communities) with an emphasis on capacity building for communities and organizations in need.
- Quantify the benefits of green infrastructure (data analysis, drinking water, financial, wildlife and ecological benefits).
- Target headwater areas, upland and upstream locations that benefit both local communities and the bay.
- Promote and invest in green infrastructure programs with an emphasis on private lands.
- Partner with local governments (planning) and community organizations. Fortify connections to community priorities (fishable/ swimmable waters, citizen stewardship efforts, TEK from Tribal Nations).
- Emphasize water management measures with “co-benefits” for other values, especially habitat (e.g. dam removal, riparian buffers, reduction of impervious surfaces, erosion management, etc.)