





The Chesapeake Bay Commission at the Stroud Water Research Center in Avondale, Pa.



IN MEMORIAM

The Commission fondly remembers Maryland Citizen Member Vincent Leggett, honorary Admiral of the Chesapeake and founder of Blacks of the Chesapeake Foundation. His message of connection, preservation, and empowerment will continue to impact our work for years to come.

OUR MISSION: POLICY FOR THE BAY

CREATED IN THE 1980s BY THE LEGISLATURES of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia, the Chesapeake Bay Commission develops sound policies to support the health and well-being of the waters, land, habitats, and people that define the Chesapeake Bay region.

As a tri-state legislative body, the Commission provides leadership at the state, regional, and federal level on matters of watershed-wide concern. Each of the Commission's state delegations craft and secure passage of laws and budgets designed to improve the condition of the Bay. A signatory to every Bay Agreement, the Commission is an integral member of the state-led, federally supported Chesapeake Bay Program partnership and a driving force on many of the partnership's initiatives. Nationally, the Commission serves as a model for collaborative bipartisan policy work and a liaison to the U.S. Congress on law and budgetary matters related to the health of the Bay and its watershed.

Our twenty-one members contribute their time, talents, and expertise to the work of sustaining the environmental and economic resources of the Bay watershed. Fifteen state legislators — five from each state — partner with a cabinet-level appointee from each Governor and a citizen representative from each jurisdiction. Together, across state and party lines, the members of the Commission anticipate the needs and respond to the challenges facing the Chesapeake Bay, its tributaries, its communities, and its economies.

The diverse and bipartisan membership of the Commission is essential to its effective approach in addressing the complex issues that face the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed. In the pages that follow, we are pleased to share highlights of the Commission's legislative and policy achievements in 2024.



2024 MEMBERS



From left, Vice Chair Dana Stein, Chair David Bulova, and Vice Chair Gene Yaw

- ◆ The Hon. David L. Bulova, *Chair* Virginia House of Delegates
- ◆ The Hon. Gene Yaw, *Vice-Chair* Senate of Pennsylvania
- ◆ The Hon. Dana Stein, *Vice-Chair* Maryland House of Delegates
- The Hon. Alex Q. Askew Virginia House of Delegates
- The Hon. Kerry A. Benninghoff Pennsylvania House of Representatives
- ◆ The Hon. Robert S. Bloxom, Jr. Virginia House of Delegates
- The Hon. Sarah K. Elfreth Maryland State Senate
- G. Warren Elliott Pennsylvania Citizen Representative
- ◆ The Hon. Guy J. Guzzone Maryland State Senate
- The Hon. Carol Hill-Evans Pennsylvania House of Representatives
- The Hon. R. Julian Ivey Maryland House of Delegates
- The Hon. Josh Kurtz Secretary of Natural Resources, Maryland
- Vincent Leggett Maryland Citizen Representative
- The Hon. Sara N. Love Maryland State Senate
- ◆ The Hon. Scott Martin Senate of Pennsylvania
- The Hon. Jeremy S. McPike Senate of Virginia
- The Hon. Sheila S. Ruth Maryland House of Delegates
- The Hon. Jessica Shirley Acting Secretary of Environmental Protection, Pennsylvania
- Missy Cotter Smasal Virginia Citizen Representative
- The Hon. Richard H. Stuart Senate of Virginia
- ◆ The Hon. P. Michael Sturla Pennsylvania House of Representatives
- The Hon. Travis A. Voyles Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources, Virginia
- The Hon. Mary L. Washington Maryland State Senate
- Rear Admiral Carl A. Lahti Department of Defense Liaison

◆ *Member of the Executive Committee*

A LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF CHESAPEAKE BAY RESTORATION

THIS IS A PIVOTAL MOMENT FOR THE multi-state effort to restore the health of one of our nation's greatest treasures — the Chesapeake Bay. While we have become an international model for cooperative, watershed conservation, there is no denying that we have not achieved all we had hoped when the current *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement* was signed in 2014. But falling short is not failure when you set ambitious goals and stay committed to progress despite the headwinds.

The Chesapeake Bay Program began with the recognition that the Bay's living resources were in crisis, and poor water quality was to blame. For decades, we have invested our time and resources to reduce two key contributors to poor water quality — nitrogen and phosphorus. We developed the largest multi-jurisdiction pollution diet in the nation and a framework for holding ourselves accountable. We upgraded wastewater utilities, developed urban stormwater plans, and asked farmers to try new conservation practices to keep nutrients on their fields and out of our streams.

Our hard-won investments have resulted in meaningful progress in both modeled and monitored results. But some streams are still not responding. Recent studies show that while clean water is a critical part of a healthy ecosystem, it is not the only factor. It is a tough reminder that ecosystems are as complex as they are delicate. But that dose of reality comes to us with a healthy dash of opportunity. We have more tools at our disposal than a nutrient diet.

When the Chesapeake Executive Council met this year to chart a course for the future of watershed conservation, as chair of the Chesapeake Bay Commission, I urged us to choose a course true to our purpose: delivering clean water, vibrant living resources, and a healthy watershed for the benefit of all its people.

There is no question that improving the Chesapeake Bay's water quality remains at the core of our partnership. It is the water that unites us — the lifeblood that flows through all our jurisdictions. But a singular focus on water quality ignores the many other factors contributing to and necessary for watershed health.

This is an opportunity to think and act with local benefits in mind and improve the well-being of communities throughout the watershed — conserving the natural landscapes they enjoy; protecting the habitats that nurture the culturally and economically important fisheries they rely upon; and, building wetlands and shorelines that protect against the storm surge and flooding that threaten their homes.

Our vision for a healthy watershed means delivering what our natural resources need — clean water, yes, but healthy habitats, conserved lands, and thriving living resources, too. And at the heart of all our efforts must be connecting people to their natural environment at the local level. It is, after all, people who are the agents of the Bay's future health and the beneficiaries of its enormous blessings.



CBC Chair David Bulova, joined by Va. Gov. Glenn Youngkin, Md. Gov. Wes Moore, and Pa. Gov. Josh Shapiro (not pictured), commends the Executive Council on charting a people-focused future for the Bay Program.

THE COMMISSION AT WORK 2024



DoD Liaison RADM Carl Lahti (second from left) welcomes Va. Dets. Bloxom and Bulova as well as Md. Sen. Elfreth and DNR Sec. Kurtz to see shoreline protection in progress at Naval Weapons Station Yorktown.



Md. Citizen Member Vincent Leggett shows off the Commission's catch of the day — a treasured part of any fishing trip — while monitoring at Rocky Gap Run.



Md. DNR Sec. Josh Kurtz (left) learns about the role nutrient cycling plays in Pennsylvania's mushroom industry.



Pa. Rep. Carol Hill-Evans joins Md. DNR to try her hand at electrofishing and stream health monitoring.



At Md. Sen. Sarah Elfreth's final meeting before her election to Congress, Commission members enjoy an evening meal ahead of a packed agenda on the York River.



DAVE HARP

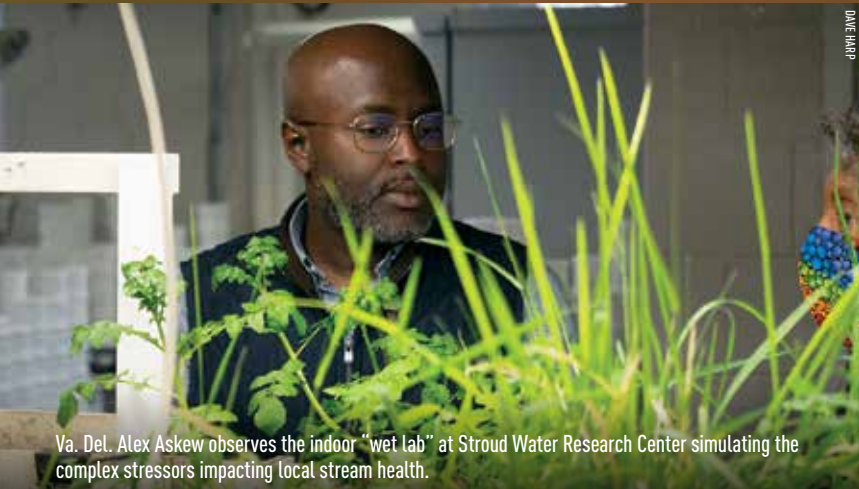
Pa. Rep. Kerry Benninghoff hears how corporate sustainability pledges are being leveraged to support soil health and groundwater recharge on farmland.



Md. Sen. Sara Love and Pa. Sen. Scott Martin gather insights from fishery managers and watermen on the pressures facing the Bay's iconic species.



Horticulture, sustainability, and workforce development merge during a tour of Longwood Gardens with Citizen Members Elliott and Leggett, Md. Del. Ruth and Sen. Washington, Va. Del. Askew, and Pa. Rep. Hill-Evans.



DAVE HARP

Va. Del. Alex Askew observes the indoor "wet lab" at Stroud Water Research Center simulating the complex stressors impacting local stream health.



Hairnets are required, selfies are encouraged while touring Yeatman's Mushroom Farm in West Grove, Pa.



Md. Del. Julian Ivey wades in at Rocky Gap State Park on the lookout for trout.



Commission members Va. NHR Sec. Voyles, Sen. McPike, Del. Askew, Sen. Stuart, and Pa. Rep. Sturla learn the important role macroinvertebrates play as living water-quality indicators.

THE COMMISSION'S ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2024

IN VIRGINIA, MARYLAND, PENNSYLVANIA, AND Washington, D.C., the Commission is a driving force for the policies and resources needed to secure a healthier Chesapeake Bay watershed. Highlighted below are a few of our achievements from this past year.

IN VIRGINIA

The Virginia Delegation focused on investing in natural resources and ensuring program implementation to move Virginia forward. This approach proved immensely successful. A record \$207 million was allocated to the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost-Share Program for Fiscal Year (FY) 2025. The funding provides farmers and producers throughout the Commonwealth with financial support to adopt conservation practices designed to protect water quality. Farmers can receive up to \$300,000 in state cost-share reimbursement for best management practices aimed at reducing nutrient pollution, sediment, and waste from entering local waterways. The voluntary practices can provide a long-term boost to an operation's bottom line through higher productivity and lower labor and input costs. This funding is an increase over FY 2024's previous record of \$124.6 million and ensures that Virginia's program is on track to meet the agricultural goals of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Implementation Plan.

Additionally, with Chairman Bulova's leadership, the Delegation secured the establishment of two long-term priorities: the Office of Commonwealth Resilience and a Pay-for-Outcomes pilot program. These two programs well position the Commonwealth to embrace future innovations and cost-effective approaches for addressing our water quality concerns.

Finally, the Delegation successfully launched a statewide invasive species management program, supported staffing for the record agricultural cost-share program, created a forestry policy position, and secured future investments for wastewater treatment plant upgrades.

IN MARYLAND

The Commission continues to provide a crucible for the development of new and innovative policy approaches by the Maryland Delegation — as demonstrated by the Whole Watershed Act of 2024. In 2022, the Commission welcomed lead authors of a significant new report, *A Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response*, by the Bay Program's Science and Technical Advisory Committee. The report evaluated progress on Bay water quality restoration and made specific recommendations for improvement. Embracing the challenge, Senators Elfreth and Love worked with key stakeholders to draft legislation consistent with the report's recommendations. They also sponsored a high-level legislative briefing to lay the groundwork for successful passage. Learn more about the bill's origins and innovations on page 10, "People-Focused, Place-Based Restoration."

In addition, Delegate Ivey shepherded legislation to enhance funding for flood management in underserved communities; Senators Love and Elfreth again teamed up to enhance legal standing for enforcing environmental protections; Senator Love and Delegate Ivey spearheaded legislation to address industrial PFAS pollution; and Delegate Stein and Senators Guzzone and Elfreth secured passage of legislation to improve and strengthen the Clean Water Commerce Act. On the budget front, Senator Guzzone, as Chair of the Senate

The Virginia Delegation weathered downed trees and power outages from Tropical Storm Debby to discuss plans for land conservation and outdoor recreation at Shenandoah River State Park.



Budget and Taxation Committee, along with Senator Elfreth, as Chair of the Natural Resources Subcommittee, and House Appropriations member, Delegate Ivey, maintained strong investments for Bay-related initiatives.

IN PENNSYLVANIA

As part of the FY 2024–2025 budget package, a dedicated funding stream was established for the Clean Streams Fund. Championed by Senators Martin and Yaw, the Fund will receive \$50 million annually from Personal Income Tax revenues to be distributed to programs that support agricultural conservation, pay-for-success, stormwater management, and other non-point source reductions.

Since its establishment in 2022 with \$220 million from the American Rescue Plan Act, the Clean Streams Fund and its associated programs have demonstrated high demand and the ability to spend allocations effectively even among brand new programs like the Agriculture Conservation Assistance Program (ACAP), providing cost-share to farmers for implementation of best management practices, and the Clean Water Procurement Program, a pay-for-success strategy that promotes private investment in conservation.

ACAP also provides administrative support enabling the State Conservation Commission to partner with Penn State and USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service on a new Center for Agricultural Conservation Assistance Training, helping to fill a critical need for new technical assistance providers.

With dedicated funding, the agencies, farmers, businesses, and communities participating in these programs have the assurance they need to keep investing in success.

IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

In a difficult budgetary landscape where significant cuts have been proposed, the Commission has helped maintain level funding for critical priorities like EPA's Chesapeake Bay Program, US Fish and Wildlife Service's Chesapeake WILD



At Penn State's Ag Progress Days, Pa. Sen. Gene Yaw (center left) discusses new, dedicated state funding for the Clean Streams Fund with EPA Regional Administrator Adam Ortiz (far left).

grant program, and the National Park Service's Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Trails program. The Commission also worked with Senator Cardin and Representative Wittman to secure five-year reauthorizations of these three programs. Legislation to create a new Chesapeake National Recreation Area passed the Senate but will need to be reintroduced in the upcoming Congress.

The Department of Defense's (DoD) Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) program received a \$25 million increase for 2024, and the Commission proudly partnered with DoD to feature the innovative conservation opportunities offered through REPI and the Sentinel Landscapes program during its quarterly meeting on the York River. To help address stormwater runoff and flood prevention on military installations, the Commission continued to advocate for dedicated DoD stormwater funding, working with Representative Kiggans and Senator Kaine to increase authorities for stormwater infrastructure in the 2025 National Defense Authorization Act.

Controlling invasive Blue Catfish continues to be a priority at the state and federal level. The Commission worked with Representative Harris, USDA, and our fisheries partners to increase wild-caught catfish processing capacity and federal commodity purchasing authority.

PEOPLE-FOCUSED, PLACE-BASED RESTORATION

AS THE CHESAPEAKE BAY PROGRAM partnership embarks on a year-long process to revise the 2014 *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*, we are called to take a science-based holistic approach and be responsive to changing conditions. But now, perhaps more than ever before, we are charged to engage all people and all communities in the work of delivering local benefits throughout the watershed. This additional mandate reflects consistent feedback from the public as well as the partnership’s scientific advisors for making our watershed restoration effort more relevant to the stakeholders critical to its success.

One strategy for better centering people and their local watersheds is to adopt a tiered approach to water quality implementation that prioritizes key habitats where living resources and the public interact. Discussions are already underway regarding how to apply this approach in tidal waters and what impact it might have on how we plan and conduct our work. Under the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load, the Bay is divided into 92 distinct segments, including shallow water, open water, and deep channel segments, each with their own water quality standards and pollution targets. Focusing first on shallow water habitats, where communities and living resources may have the most to gain, could provide a framework for tiered implementation of our clean water efforts.

A similar strategy is already being tested in the freshwater reaches of the watershed. In Pennsylvania, a “30 by 30” strategy is underway to remove 30 streams from the Commonwealth’s list of impaired waters under the federal Clean Water Act by 2030. Led by the Chesapeake Conservancy in partnership with over 60 organizations, work is focused on 57 streams in seven counties. Using precision mapping and other advanced data tools, collaborators are identifying high priority properties and targeted best management practices with the goal of rapid water quality response.

Remarkably, four streams have already been delisted under this strategy, with the success celebrated in April at an event along Turtle Creek in Union County. Commission members, four state agency heads, the Chesapeake Conservancy, and other federal and private partners came together to acknowledge the success of the “de-listing” approach and its potential for replication not only in Pennsylvania, but across the Bay watershed.

Inspired by Pennsylvania’s example, a similar approach is being piloted in Maryland. The Whole Watershed Act will target existing state resources to five small watersheds that represent the diversity of geography, land use, and sources of impairment across the state. In addition to water quality improvement, the Act seeks to achieve multiple other benefits important to stakeholders, including public access, wildlife habitat, fisheries improvement, environmental justice, and climate resiliency. Administered by the Department of Natural Resources, the first round of applications for the new program are already under review with announcements expected in March 2025.

Other new programs are also promoting local benefits. Pay-for-success programs in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia all include provisions that account for local benefits such as environmental justice, climate resiliency, and local impairments in their evaluations of projects that are otherwise ranked on cost-effectiveness of nutrient reductions to the Bay. The ability to quantify these additional benefits remains a challenge and will be necessary for further progress on people- and community-focused outcomes.

Pa. Sens. Gene Yaw and Scott Martin, sixth and seventh from left, join DEP Sec. Jessica Shirley and other partners to celebrate the successful recovery of Turtle Creek.



A COMMITMENT TO FUNDING RESTORATION

THROUGHOUT ITS HISTORY, the Commission has prioritized the funding needs of watershed restoration. Many of our state legislators serve as leaders on appropriations committees; our cabinet secretaries prepare budget proposals for each Administration. These individuals bring expertise in balancing the many societal demands of government, providing the Commission with an informed perspective on meeting the fiscal needs for restoration within the context of larger state and federal budgets.

In 2003, the Commission published *The Cost of a Clean Bay*, the first attempt to quantify the financial needs of achieving our shared goals. The report demonstrated the importance of maximizing the impact of each dollar spent by targeting our financial investments. One year later, the Commission conducted a cost-benefit analysis on the suite of potential pollution control measures, charting a path for the widespread implementation of the best options. Together, these reports have guided the Commission in championing sufficient, targeted, and cost-effective funding for Bay restoration.

A recent surge in funding is now at work in the watershed, with great results. With the passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) in 2021, an additional \$238 million was allocated to EPA's Chesapeake Bay Program over five years (FY 2022–2026). Some of these new funds have been used to enhance water quality monitoring, a vital link in understanding the interconnection between BMPs and water quality improvement. But the majority of these funds — 85% — have been granted to state and local partners for on-the-ground restoration.

A significant portion of this IIJA funding has been allocated through two existing grant programs to ensure effective and low-cost delivery. For FY 2022 through 2024, these grants are expected to result

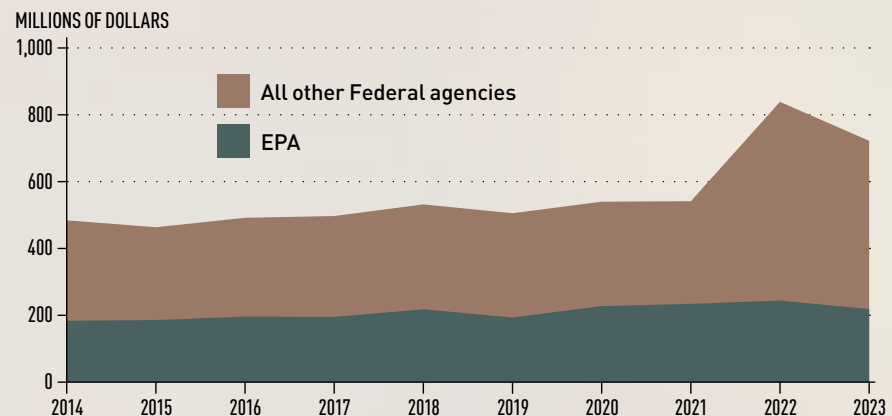
in water quality improvement practices on nearly 20,000 acres, more than 250 miles of restored streamside forest buffers, and nearly 800 acres of restored tidal and nontidal wetlands, helping to prevent more than 20,000 tons of sediment and nearly half a million pounds of nitrogen from reaching the Bay each year. Moreover, these awards will leverage an additional \$50 million in state, local, and private contributions.

State funding has also hit all-time highs. In 2023, Virginia fully funded its Agricultural BMP Cost-Share program with a record level investment and did so again in 2024. Meanwhile, Pennsylvania established a dedicated funding source for its nascent Clean Streams Fund.

INCREASED FEDERAL INVESTMENT

Federal funding for Chesapeake Bay Watershed restoration, FY 2014–2023

SOURCE: OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET'S CHESAPEAKE BAY RESTORATION SPENDING CROSSCUT



More information on these programs and the Commission's role in supporting them can be found on pages 8–9.

Altogether, federal funding for Chesapeake Bay Restoration totaled more than \$700 million in FY 2023, with state spending across all seven Bay jurisdictions contributing another \$1.5 billion, marking an incredible responsibility to seize the opportunity. Soon, however, IIJA funding will come to an end, and other fiscal challenges at the state and federal level may arise. The Commission remains ready, driven by our continuing ethic of effective fiscal stewardship, to advocate for the state and federal resources needed to secure a healthy Chesapeake Bay watershed.

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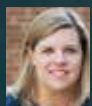
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