



Strategic Plan: 2025-2029

RESHAPING OUR FUTURE: A PLAN FOR CLEAN WATER AND
RESILIENT COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT THE CHESAPEAKE

“ Together, we must build on what has worked, learn from what hasn’t, incorporate the latest science, and inspire a renewed movement for a Chesapeake Bay ecosystem where humans and nature thrive together.



Hilary Harp Falk
President & CEO



Otis S. Jones
Board Chair

For nearly sixty years, efforts have been underway to restore the Chesapeake Bay and its rivers and streams. What began as a movement recognizing the Bay’s declining health has grown into a remarkable science-based collaborative effort considered a global model for ecosystem restoration. With support across communities, ideologies, and political parties, considerable progress has been made.

Even as the region’s population has increased by nearly fifty percent, pollution has been significantly reduced. Fish and crab populations are generally improving, and underwater dead zones are shrinking. The Bay and its waterways are proving resilient, responding to land-based pollution reduction efforts.

We need to be clear-eyed about the ongoing challenges and threats. Too much pollution continues to enter the Bay. Climate change is adding more stress to the ecosystem and our communities. Environmental injustices and toxic legacy pollution must also be addressed.

Creating a vibrant Chesapeake Bay ecosystem for future generations requires us to evolve in our approaches and expectations. Together, we must build on what has worked, learn from what hasn’t, incorporate the latest science, and inspire a renewed movement where humans and nature thrive together.

Change is often frustrating, messy, and uncertain. It does not mean abandoning the things we value most, but it does mean having the courage to do things differently.

With the support of our members and partners—existing and new—we will breathe new life into efforts that reduce pollution and improve the lives of the people who call the Bay region home. Our shared efforts will shape the future—a future with clean water, strong economies, and vibrant communities for the next generation. This is our moment. And this is our plan.

About Our Strategic Plan

At the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, our Strategic Planning Taskforce has taken the lead in a collaborative effort that truly reflects our commitment to the Bay and its communities. Through engaging visioning sessions and strategy discussions, our dedicated staff has actively participated in shaping our future.

We started by listening closely to our board members, partners, and community members. One-on-one interviews, external feedback sessions, and surveys conducted by our planning consultants at Due East Partners helped us clarify our collective vision for the Chesapeake Bay region. This process has illuminated our unique role in preserving and enhancing this vital ecosystem, ensuring that our actions resonate with the values and aspirations of those we serve.

Throughout the process, we engaged with a *diverse array of constituents* to help shape our new Strategic Plan:

925

Survey respondents

21

External Listening Session Participants

132

Strategy Session Participants (staff)

21

Key Informant Interviews

144

Visioning Session Participants (staff)

103

Attendees of the Field Testing Sessions

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Strategic Planning Taskforce
Ann Pelham (Taskforce Chair)
Alison Prost (Taskforce Co-Chair)
Everett Marshall (Taskforce Co-Chair)
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[Full Board and Staff](#)



Vision

A healthy and resilient Chesapeake Bay ecosystem where people, plants, and animals thrive together



Mission

Save the Bay and its waterways by educating, uniting, and inspiring people to take action

Values



CONNECTED:

More than 18 million people are connected to the Bay through lived experience, family legacies, and personal connections that fuel our passion to work together to restore our lands and waters.

CREDIBLE:

Through education, advocacy, and leadership—all backed by science, research, and lived experiences—CBF continues to fight for clean water, clean air, and healthy communities.

COURAGEOUS:

For over 50 years, CBF has been a vigilant “watchdog” for the Bay by holding government, businesses, and each other accountable. As we enter a new era, we seek innovative and creative approaches that build on the past while more fully centering people and equity in efforts to improve the Chesapeake Bay, its waterways, and communities.

Challenges

More than four centuries of intensifying human activities have severely degraded the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem's waterways, wildlife, and communities. While restoration efforts are making progress, major challenges remain, including:



Pollution: Polluted runoff from intensifying agriculture and developed land, wastewater, and air pollution continue to drive excessive nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment in waterways, creating harmful algal blooms and oxygen-deprived “dead zones” where fish and wildlife cannot survive. Toxic and emerging contaminants like PFAS and microplastics are also a major concern.



Fisheries: Invasive species, intense fishing pressure, and dams and barriers that block migration and spawning habitats continue to threaten the long-term health of fish populations in both the Chesapeake Bay and inland rivers.



Environmental injustices: The Chesapeake Bay ecosystem is shared by a wide diversity of more than 18-million people. Many of these people have been historically excluded from restoration and policy-reform efforts. Without being included in solutions, their communities continue to be unfairly harmed by pollution.



Development and population growth:

A growing population in the Chesapeake Bay region has intensified pressure on wastewater systems and the demand for food, energy, and transportation. Sprawling development replaces forests, farmland, and wetlands with hardened surfaces, increasing polluted runoff while removing the landscape's natural filters and habitat for wildlife.



Climate change: Rising sea levels, warming water temperatures, and more frequent intense storms are increasing pollution and putting wildlife, their habitats, and human communities at risk.

Restoring the Chesapeake Bay is about more than just returning the Bay to its former state.

Restoring the Bay in the modern era means creating a vibrant, resilient ecosystem that thrives for generations to come. By redefining restoration in this way, we can inspire a collective movement that not only Saves the Bay but also sets a precedent for environmental stewardship. Together, we can make the Chesapeake Bay a symbol of hope, resilience, and the power of community-driven change.

Desired Results & How We Will Measure Collective Progress

Restoring and protecting the Chesapeake Bay, its waterways, lands, and wildlife is a shared priority of individuals, businesses, and governments



- Sustained or increased private and public investment in innovation, restoration, and monitoring
- Increased public support for Bay restoration and environmental issues

The Chesapeake Bay ecosystem is healthy, resilient, and protected for future generations in a changing climate



- Improved water quality in targeted pollution hot spots (measured by UMCES/CBF report card)
- Reduced number of rivers and streams on state impairment list
- Increased investment in natural/green infrastructure and climate resiliency in the watershed

All people who live, play, or work in the Chesapeake region have equitable opportunities to experience, and benefit from, a thriving Chesapeake Bay



- Growth in local economies and green jobs resulting from a healthier Bay and waterways
- Increased number of environmental literacy programs and initiatives in schools
- Improved social and economic metrics

MISSION Save the Bay and its waterways by educating, uniting, and inspiring people to take action

VISION A healthy and resilient Chesapeake Bay ecosystem where people, plants, and animals thrive together

PRIORITIES

SHARED RESULTS

1 Drive the necessary policy and accountability actions

2 Build the next generation of environmental leaders

3 Advance restoration of the Bay's natural infrastructure

CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY

Activate, build, and empower a diverse, equitable, and inclusive movement through powerful storytelling, active listening, and strategic partnerships.

STRATEGIES

- **ADVOCATE:** Advance policies and regulations that improve the health and resiliency of the Chesapeake Bay, its people, and its fisheries
- **LITIGATE:** Hold polluters, regulators, and decision-makers accountable to ensure clean water for all
- **INNOVATE:** Advance holistic solutions that target pollution hot spots in our communities, towns, and on farms

- **EDUCATE:** Through hands-on experiences, teach and inspire students throughout the region to take action to protect the Chesapeake Bay
- **CONNECT:** Engage and equip emerging and diverse leaders to increase participation in advocacy
- **SCALE:** Support systemic integration of environmental and climate literacy programming and curriculum

- **TARGET:** Implement projects that reduce pollution and strengthen communities' resilience to climate change
- **LEAD:** Champion ambitious goals for oysters and critical habitats to rebuild the Bay's natural infrastructure
- **PARTNER:** Align with key restoration partners and communities to advance collective clean water and climate goals

CBF PERFORMANCE MEASURES

- Increasing trends (modeled) in carbon sequestration and pounds of nitrogen and phosphorous reduced through CBF projects
- Increase the percentage of CBF members engaged and taking action for a healthy and resilient Chesapeake Bay
- Increase the engagement level of schools, and school systems in environmental or climate literacy planning and implementation
- Increase funding to protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay at the state and federal level

- Increase the number and diversity of communities, farmers, and landowners actively working with CBF on resiliency projects across the region



Restoring and protecting the Chesapeake Bay, its waterways, lands, and wildlife is a shared priority of individuals, businesses, and governments



The Chesapeake Bay ecosystem is healthy, resilient, and protected for future generations in a changing climate



All people who live, play, or work in the Chesapeake region have equitable opportunities to experience, and benefit from, a thriving Chesapeake Bay

Cross-Cutting Strategy

Activate, build, and empower a diverse, equitable, and inclusive movement through powerful storytelling, active listening, and strategic partnerships.

This strategy cuts across all 3 priorities in our plan and represents CBF's renewed commitment to:



Priority

1



Drive the necessary policy and accountability actions

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) advocates for strong regulations to improve and sustain the Bay's health, its fisheries, and its communities.

When necessary, CBF uses strategic litigation to hold polluters and decision-makers accountable. Innovation is key to CBF's approach toward developing solutions that reduce pollution from communities, farms, and towns. Well short of achieving pollution-reduction goals of the Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint, there's a critical need for stronger policies and greater accountability. Success will require significant behavioral changes among stakeholders. By fostering collaboration, we will drive the shared responsibility and actions necessary to ensure a sustainable future for the Bay.

STRATEGIES

ADVOCATE: Advance policies and regulations that improve the health and resiliency of the Chesapeake Bay, its people, and its fisheries

LITIGATE: Hold polluters, regulators, and decision-makers accountable to ensure clean water for all

INNOVATE: Advance holistic solutions that target pollution hot spots in our communities, towns, and on farms

Priority

2

Build the next generation of environmental leaders



Through education, advocacy, and hands-on engagement, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation is inspiring a new generation who are committed to restoring our lands and waters.

By equipping young leaders with the knowledge and skills to address complex ecological challenges, we are investing in the future and enduring progress throughout the region. Empowering future leaders is crucial to achieving water quality and habitat goals.

STRATEGIES

EDUCATE: Through hands-on experiences, teach and inspire students throughout the region to take action to protect the Chesapeake Bay

CONNECT: Engage and equip emerging and diverse leaders to increase participation in advocacy

SCALE: Support systemic integration of environmental and climate literacy programming and curriculum

Priority

3



Advance restoration of the Bay's natural infrastructure

Traditional approaches alone are not enough to address the complex challenges facing our lands, waters, and ecosystems.

To accelerate the pace of progress, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation is focused on experimentation and innovation in our targeted restoration efforts, particularly in developing strategies for behavioral change. By investing in new methods and technologies to reduce pollution and tackle climate change, we are working with our partners to bring these cutting-edge solutions to scale, creating a healthier and more resilient future for all.

STRATEGIES

TARGET: Implement projects that reduce pollution and strengthen communities' resilience to climate change

LEAD: Champion ambitious goals for oysters and critical habitats to rebuild the Bay's natural infrastructure

PARTNER: Align with key restoration partners and communities to advance collective clean water and climate goals

CBF'S VISION

A HEALTHY AND RESILIENT CHESAPEAKE BAY ECOSYSTEM

where people, plants, and animals thrive together



CORE VALUES:

We are connected, credible, and courageous in every facet of our work.



SHARED RESULT:
RESTORING AND PROTECTING THE CHESAPEAKE BAY, ITS WATERWAYS, LANDS, AND WILDLIFE IS A SHARED PRIORITY OF INDIVIDUALS, BUSINESSES, AND GOVERNMENTS.

SHARED RESULT:
THE CHESAPEAKE BAY ECOSYSTEM IS HEALTHY, RESILIENT, AND PROTECTED FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS IN A CHANGING CLIMATE.

SHARED RESULT:
ALL PEOPLE WHO LIVE, PLAY, OR WORK IN THE CHESAPEAKE REGION HAVE EQUITABLE OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPERIENCE, AND BENEFIT FROM, A THRIVING CHESAPEAKE BAY.





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Appendix

What Will It Take?

