

EPA EVALUATION OF NEW YORK'S 2026-2027 MILESTONE COMMITMENTS

Executive Summary

The Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) partnership established the goal to implement and maintain practices and controls to reduce nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment in order to achieve the applicable water quality standards, as described in the [Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load](#) (Bay TMDL). The CBP partnership, including the seven jurisdictions (Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), agreed to develop and implement a framework for holding each partner accountable for reducing nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment loads to meet the [CBP partnership water quality targets](#). EPA has evaluated New York's draft 2026-2027 milestone commitments for the CBP partnership and the public in accordance with its oversight role and responsibility under the CBP partnership's accountability framework. The next evaluation will assess New York's 2024-2025 milestone progress, final 2026-2027 milestone commitments, and numeric progress toward meeting its water quality targets through implementing the Phase III Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) and two-year milestones.

Background

The CBP partnership has been using two-year milestones since 2009 to help identify shorter term actions to implement the WIPs and document progress toward the partnership's water quality targets. In January 2025 the Principals' Staff Committee (PSC) approved [an updated approach to the two-year milestones](#) to streamline the milestone commitments and milestone progress reporting, starting with the 2026-2027 milestones. Jurisdictions, the Conowingo WIP Steering Committee, and Federal Agencies (collectively referred to as Milestone Partners) are expected to identify high-level programmatic actions they plan to implement during the 2026-2027 milestone period to maintain or accelerate implementation toward meeting the water quality targets through 2030. By December 31, 2030, the CBP partnership will update its modeling tools, approve updated planning targets, and develop or amend WIPs designed to meet these updated targets by 2040.

Progress and Monitoring

In addition to updating tools, targets, and WIPs, the CBP partnership is also exploring ways to better explain progress, using a combination of modeling results and monitoring data. Although this evaluation of the *draft* 2026–2027 milestones will not review modeled or monitoring information, the final evaluation will include a detailed review of load reductions and further descriptions of monitoring data.

EPA encourages each of the Milestone Partners to review and assess both the available real-world monitoring data and the most recent modeling results (Progress Year 2024) to inform the priority strategies and actions identified in the final 2026-2027 milestones. Milestone Partners can use the [Chesapeake Assessment Scenario Tool \(CAST\)](#) to access the latest modeled progress results and build scenarios estimating future nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment loads. The CBP partnership's Chesapeake Bay Nontidal Water Quality Monitoring Network, [supported by twenty-five groups](#) representing local, State, and Federal agencies, including the EPA, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), the Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC), and the Bay jurisdictions, generates water quality monitoring data in freshwater rivers and streams throughout the watershed that is analyzed by USGS to provide monitoring-based information about the amount of nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment entering the Chesapeake Bay through its nontidal rivers. These data inform watershed management by providing information on which to base restoration and conservation actions. The most recent results (www.usgs.gov/CB-wq-loads-trends) for the full 123-station network over the long-term 1985-2023 and short term 2014-2023 were published in March 2025.

Additionally, the [Monitored and Expected Total Reduction Indicator for the Chesapeake \(METRIC\) tool](#) can be used to compare observed water-quality trends with expected outcomes based on management actions, helping to clarify progress and guide priorities.

Future EPA evaluations will continue to stress the importance of using both modeling and monitoring information to target water quality actions such as milestone commitments to maintain and accelerate meeting the partnership's water quality targets. This integrated approach supports more accurate assessments and reduces misinterpretation, ultimately aiding partnership efforts to maintain and accelerate restoration and conservation efforts to achieve the water quality targets.

Feedback on 2026-2027 Milestone Commitments

Under the updated milestones framework, there are two categories of milestone commitments: core commitments and sector initiatives. Core commitments are the

activities or actions of Milestone Partners that sustain or accelerate implementation priorities identified in the milestone narratives of the optional [milestone commitments template](#), while sector initiatives are the *innovative* actions introducing new approaches that sustain or advance implementation priorities that do the same.

This evaluation reviews how milestone commitments support the identified priorities and acceleration of implementation. When EPA evaluates milestone [progress in 2028](#), EPA will only evaluate progress in meeting the core commitments. EPA will recognize the innovative actions but will not evaluate their outcomes, to encourage innovation and creativity in achieving nutrient and sediment reductions.

EPA reviewed New York's draft 2026-2027 milestone commitments, assessing the core commitments and sector initiatives in context of how well they align with the priorities described in New York's narrative summary and Phase III WIP, and offers the following feedback.

General Comments

- EPA commends New York for revising the format of its milestone commitments to align with the PSC directive to streamline the 2026-2027 milestone commitments.
- EPA recommends New York clarify the baselines it will use for milestone outcomes that include “increases” – i.e., how an increase is being measured or determined and by what starting point.
- EPA recommends New York revise the narrative summary to clearly identify priorities for the two-year milestone period and how those priorities will achieve implementation and water quality targets.

Core Commitments

Agriculture Sector

Strengths

- EPA commends New York for continuing to implement statewide funding for agriculture technical assistance through the Base Agricultural Environmental Management Program including best management practice (BMP) system implementation by Soil and Water Conservation Districts.
- EPA commends New York for continuing to implement the Agricultural Nonpoint Source Abatement and Control Program.
- EPA commends New York for continuing to pursue additional funding sources for agricultural implementation through the Upper Susquehanna Coalition (USC) and state Conservation Districts. Funding opportunities may include National Fish and

Wildlife Foundation, Regional Conservation Partnership Program and other state funding sources.

Recommendations

- EPA recommends that New York include a milestone to continue to focus on promoting cover crops and providing technical assistance throughout its portion of the Bay watershed with the use of public engagement events, webinars and other outreach methods.
- EPA recommends that New York continue to seek opportunities to accelerate implementation of priority agriculture BMPs that account for the majority of New York's statewide nutrient targets.

Developed Lands (Regulated and Unregulated) Sector

Strengths

- EPA commends New York for continuing to implement the Water Quality Improvement Program, the Nonpoint Source Planning Grant Program and the Green Infrastructure Grant Program, which are funded through New York's Environmental Protection Fund.
- EPA commends New York for aiming to reduce flooding and build resilience in flood prone watersheds through the Resilient Watersheds Grant Program. This Program currently funds four ongoing studies.

Recommendations

- EPA recommends that New York include a milestone that aims to achieve more stringent implementation targets and expand its stormwater program to meet the stormwater sector nutrient targets.
- EPA recommends that New York include a milestone to continue to provide enhanced oversight of facilities regulated by State Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (SPDES) permits in the watershed, including municipal separate storm sewer systems (MS4s) and construction stormwater sites.

Wastewater and Septic Sector

Strengths

- EPA commends New York for continuing to allocate funding for the Water Quality Improvement Project Program, the Wastewater Infrastructure and Engineering Planning Grant, and the Water Infrastructure Improvement and Intermunicipal Grants, which are funded through the New York's Environmental Protection Fund and the New York's Environmental Bond Act.

- EPA commends New York for committing in the narrative summary to continue to perform an agreed upon wastewater growth analysis and for tracking wastewater growth to determine if changes in wastewater flow are due to measurable growth or due to wet weather and impacts of inflow and infiltration.

Recommendations

- EPA recommends that New York include a milestone to continue to implement the 2024-2025 milestone to analyze wastewater trends to determine if changes in wastewater flow are due to measurable growth or due to wet weather and impacts of inflow and infiltration and report results using the two-year milestones.
- EPA recommends that New York include a milestone to continue to implement the 2024-2025 milestone to monitor the USGS gaging station at Towanda, Pennsylvania to monitor phosphorus and nitrogen trends.

Sector Initiatives (i.e., Innovative Actions)

General Comments

- Under the updated milestones framework, sector initiatives are innovative actions introducing new approaches that sustain or advance implementation priorities. EPA recommends that New York review its sector initiatives to determine whether any should be reclassified under the core commitments section.

Agriculture Sector

Strengths

- EPA commends that New York, working through the Upper Susquehanna Coalition (USC), prioritizes implementation of riparian buffers, wetlands, grazing, and stream corridor restoration by dispersing grant funding to member counties.
- EPA commends that New York, working through the USC, continues to contract with Soil and Water Conservation Districts to promote whole farm verification, annual practice data collection, and reporting.

Developed Lands (Regulated and Unregulated) Sector

Strengths

- EPA commends the New York Department of Environmental Conservation (NYDEC), along with the Upper Susquehanna Coalition, for developing guidance for implementing nutrient management plans on turf grass to minimize run-off.

Recommendations

- EPA recommends that New York include a milestone to continue to promote and implement statewide projects similar to the 25 Million Trees by 2033 Initiative.