Chesapeake Bay Comprehensive Water Resources and Restoration Plan Framework

Authority

The U.S. Corps of Engineers- Baltimore and Norfolk Districts has been authorized to develop a Chesapeake Bay Comprehensive Plan (CBCP) that will provide a single, comprehensive, and integrated restoration plan to guide the implementation of projects affecting the Chesapeake Bay estuary. The CBCP will be developed to avoid duplication of ongoing or planned actions by others and will focus on USACE core mission area (ecosystem restoration, navigation, and flood risk management). The study will be conducted under the authority provided by the United States Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, Committee Resolution adopted September 26, 2002. The study resolution reads as follows:

"Resolved by the Committee on Environment and Public Works on the United States Senate, that the Secretary of the Army is requested to review the report of the Army Corps of Engineers on the Chesapeake Bay Study, dated September 1984, and other pertinent reports, with a view to developing a coordinated, comprehensive master plan within the Corps mission areas for restoring, preserving and protecting the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem. The plan shall focus on integrating existing and future work of the Corps of Engineers, shall be developed in cooperation with State and local governments, other Federal agencies, the Chesapeake Bay Program, the Chesapeake Bay Commission, and the Chesapeake Executive Council, and shall encompass all Corps actions necessary to assist in the implementation of the goals of the 2000 Chesapeake Bay Agreement. The plan shall identify additional feasibility studies and research efforts required to better understand and solve the environmental problems of the Chesapeake Bay."

The study is also being conducted under the authority provided by Section 4010(a) of the Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014 (WRRDA 2014). The study resolution reads as follows:

"Section 4010(a) of WRRDA 2014 further amends Section 510 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1996, which authorized the Chesapeake Bay Environmental Restoration and Protection Program (Section 510 Program). Section 4010(a) directs development of a comprehensive Chesapeake Bay restoration plan no later than 2 years after the enactment of WRRDA 2014 and provides for design and construction, cost shared 75 percent Federal and 25 percent non-Federal, of water-related resources protection and restoration projects affecting the Chesapeake Bay estuary, based on the comprehensive plan. It changes the types of projects eligible for assistance to sediment and erosion control; protection of eroding shorelines; ecosystem restoration, including restoration of submerged aquatic vegetation; protection of essential public works; beneficial uses of dredged material; and other related projects that may enhance the living resources of the estuary. It provides that Section 510 will be carried out in cooperation with appropriate federal, state and local government agencies."

Vision

On June 16, 2014, the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement was signed. Signatories included representatives from the Chesapeake Bay Commission, State of Delaware, Maryland, New York, and West Virginia, the Commonwealths of Pennsylvania and Virginia, the District of Columbia, and the Federal Leadership Committee for the Chesapeake Bay including: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Department of Defense, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Department of the Interior, and the U.S. Department of Transportation.

The CBCP will incorporate the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement vision for the Chesapeake Bay: "We envision an environmentally and economically sustainable Chesapeake Bay watershed with clean water, abundant life, conserved lands and access to the water, a vibrant cultural heritage, and a diversity of engaged citizens and stakeholders."

Goal

The goal of the CBCP is to provide a single, comprehensive, and integrated restoration plan to guide the implementation of projects that would achieve the shared vision for a restored Chesapeake Bay by: (1) effectively and efficiently engaging Bay stakeholders to identify problems, needs and opportunities in the watershed and avoid duplication of ongoing or planned actions by others; (2) identifying actions by other local, state, and federal agencies and non-governmental-organizations (NGOs) in the watershed to address problems outside of USACE mission areas; and (3) determining where and how USACE mission areas could be utilized in the watershed to address problems, needs, and opportunities.

Problems

The problems plaguing the 64,000 square mile Chesapeake Bay watershed are broad and varied. Degradation of the watershed is a result of landscape alterations that were initiated by European colonization. Deforestation and other land use alterations have resulted in waterway impairment in the watershed.

Past human activities have resulted in adverse impacts like conversion of habitats to developed land, ecosystem degradation, loss of natural hydrology, increases in stormwater runoff and localized flooding, impaired water quality, introduction of an array of pollutants, and a loss of ecologically, culturally, historically, or recreationally significant landscapes. Ecosystem degradation includes impacts to numerous resources such as fisheries, submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV), wetlands and terrestrial habitat, riparian forest buffers, and coastal habitats.

Climate change and projected increased populations in the future are anticipated to magnify existing problems.

Other future problems may include water supply competition for ecological and biological processes versus consumptive use of an industrialized society. Furthermore, flood risk, both riverine and coastal within the Bay proper, may increase over time.

The CBCP will identify problems based on existing and future forecasted conditions. Once ongoing and planned actions are evaluated, opportunities could be established for additional actions by USACE and others.

Needs

While over thirty years of efforts to restore and maintain the Bay and its watershed have made great progress, ecological health remains impaired due to (1) the magnitude of the human population and land cover change and (2) the scale and diversity of problems. Due to the scale and diversity of problems, there is a need to coordinate USACE efforts with others and leverage funding and capabilities to protect, restore, and preserve the Chesapeake Bay.

Opportunities

USACE, in partnership with its non-federal sponsor the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), and in coordination with stakeholders will examine a variety of issues facing the Chesapeake Bay through several of its mission areas such as ecosystem restoration, flood risk management, navigation, coastal storm risk management, and water supply. Opportunities also exist outside of USACE mission areas for federal, state, and local agencies and NGOs to address water quality, reduce pollutant loads to the Bay through implementation of best management practices to manage stormwater, and promote land use decisions that sustainably manage population growth and development (i.e., land acquisition for conservation).

Objectives

The objectives of the study will be largely defined by the analyses of the problems, needs, and opportunities, and founded in the four Principles and Guidelines screening criteria for water resources projects: completeness, effectiveness, efficiency, and acceptability.

Stakeholder Involvement

Stakeholder involvement and collaboration on the CBCP is critical. Within the authority of the CBCP, stakeholders will be encouraged to provide periodic feedback into the development of the problems, needs, opportunities and objectives of the study, beginning with the stakeholder workshop meeting scheduled on November 7, 2016.