Section 202b: Focusing Resources to Restore and Protect the Chesapeake Bay and its Tributary Waters

Executive Summary

The Chesapeake Bay ecosystem is a national treasure, a place of deep historical and cultural values, and a long-standing partner shaping the development of the region and the Nation. Agriculture has been a component of the Bay landscape since development, providing a reliable source of food, feed, and fiber. But it has also has had unintended impacts, delivering nutrients and sediments that have contributed to the decline in Bay water quality. Yet, maintaining a healthy, sustainable agriculture is an essential component to protecting and restoring the Chesapeake Bay and successes have been documented. Through an aggressive voluntary conservation approach, we will work to sustain and enhance agricultural and forest landscapes that provide local products to rural and urban communities alike, increase carbon sequestration, and contribute to a healthy Chesapeake Bay ecosystem and economy.

The Chesapeake Bay Watershed stretches over 44 million acres in six states and the District of Columbia. Agriculture and forest land accounts for 75 percent of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, which also has the largest land to water ratio of any estuary (14:1). Consequently, the stewardship of these lands has a tremendous influence on the quality of natural resources in the watershed.

About 25 percent of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed is used for agriculture, producing a diverse array of fresh vegetables, fruits, grain, dairy, beef, poultry, and much more. Agricultural lands also anchor rural communities and provide important open space, wildlife habitat, and other amenities important to the fabric of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. While agriculture is an important component of the landscape and economy, it is also a major source of nutrients and sediment that adversely affect the quality of the Bay and its tributary waters. Through a long-standing partnership approach, the agriculture sector has reached nearly 50 percent of its goals for nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment reduction, yet much more remains to be done.

While agriculture and forest lands remain the predominant land uses in the Bay watershed, they are under increasing pressure from development. Among the consequences of losing these agricultural and forested areas are declines in access to local, fresh foods; reduction in the capture of carbon in soils and plants; and increased runoff from roads, roofs, and parking lots. Consider that a

one-acre parking lot produces about 16 times the volume of runoff that comes from a one-acre meadow. Once these impervious surfaces cover more than 10 percent of a watershed, rivers, creeks, and estuaries begin to degrade biologically.

The challenge ahead is substantial, but one thing is clear – losing farms and forests is not in the best interest of the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem. Maintaining a healthy, sustainable agriculture is an essential component to protecting and restoring the Chesapeake Bay. While our focus is on water quality, the approach must include dimensions of increasing farm viability and rural wealth, strengthening and building markets for local foods and ecosystem services, and protecting the natural heritage that makes the Chesapeake Bay Watershed a national treasure.

An aggressive, voluntary partnership approach is called for, working with farmers, forest landowners, and other private land managers to continue to improve water quality while sustaining agriculture as a valued component of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. This report presents five major recommendations with specific action areas:

- **Focus on the highest priority watersheds** by identifying the watersheds and their most critical acres for immediate conservation action in order to better protect the Bay and its tributary waters. Defining the highest priorities to focus public and private actions offers the best opportunity for success.
- **Focus and integrate Federal and State programs** by focusing programs on priority conservation practices, better coordinating USDA and EPA resources for voluntary conservation, and delivering programs and assistance most effectively. Strong partnerships with states and local governments, communities, and the private sector are essential to achieve the environmental objectives for the Bay.
- **Accelerate conservation adoption** by working with partners to increase incentives, simplifying program participation, and encouraging private sector investment in conservation actions to restore the health of the Bay. Coordinated programs that empower voluntary actions through incentives, and technical and financial assistance are a fundamental part of improving the Bay.
- **Accelerate development of new conservation technologies** by increasing public-private research partnerships and focusing Federal funding to foster and promote innovation to expand the “conservation toolbox.” New technologies that increase revenue opportunities for farmers and their communities will also increase rural wealth and sustain the restoration of the Bay.

- **Implement a sound accountability system** by establishing environmental outcomes; tracking, monitoring, and assessing progress; ensuring that federally supported conservation measures are applied and maintained; and using science to adapt and improve the strategy to protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. This system of accountability has many parts starting with ensuring that public agencies deliver their resources and assistance effectively to restore and protect the Bay.

The initiative set forth by this Executive Order comes in a 'perfect storm' of public and private interest in sustainable solutions to the long-standing plight of the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem. Never before have agriculture and forestry been as central to current national policy issues – climate change, water resources, renewable energy, and rural America's role in creating a 21st century economy. This momentum will be sparked by the richness of new data and analytical tools that can be used to build sound, science-based conservation policies and program approaches. We are committed to a new spirit of collaboration with multiple stakeholders and integration of Federal resources to accelerate actions *"to protect and restore the health, heritage, natural resources, and social and economic value of the Nation's largest estuarine ecosystem."*

Table 1. Summary of Recommendations and Proposed Actions

Recommendation / Action	Recommended Timeframe	Responsible Federal Partner	Key Federal Programs *
Recommendation: Focus on the highest priority watersheds			
Identify high priority watersheds	Immediately for USDA programs	USDA, USGS, EPA, State Agencies	
Identify critical acres	Immediately for USDA programs	USDA, USGS, EPA, State Agencies	
Recommendation: Focus and integrate Federal and State programs			
Focus conservation programs on priority practices	Immediately for most programs; Fall, 2010 for CSP Additional federal programs – 2010 State programs based on annual funding.	USDA, Chesapeake bay restoration partners, States,	
Coordinate USDA-EPA	Immediately	USDA, EPA	

voluntary programs and resources			
Deliver programs most effectively	FY 2011; FY 2012 proposal	USDA, State Agencies	
Recommendation: Accelerate conservation adoption			
Increase incentives through partnerships	FY2010 – State programs based on annual funding	USDA, State Agencies, NGOs and Private Investment Organizations	
Simplify program participation	By 2011	USDA	
Build ecosystem markets	Begin FY 2010	USDA Office of Ecosystem Services and Markets State Agencies Public/Private Investment Companies.	
Recommendation: Accelerate development of new conservation technology			
Increase public – private research partnerships	2009	NRCS, NIFA (ARS, CSREES), Industry Representatives	
Foster and promote innovation	2010	NRCS, FS, EPA	
Recommendation: Implement a sound accountability system			
Establish environmental outcome measures	Developed by 2012	Partners	
Create a conservation practice implementation database	Begin 2009, In place by 2012.	USDA, State Agencies, USGS, Chesapeake Bay Program Office	
Monitor and assess progress in priority watersheds	In place by 2012	US Geological Survey, Chesapeake Bay Program Office. USDA ERS, ARS	
Use science to adapt the strategy	In place by 2012	USDA, USGS	

* Programs to be identified