



NORTHEAST MID-ATLANTIC PARTNERSHIP FOR
FORESTS & WATER

PARTNERSHIP CHARTER

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1.0 Partnership Basics

1.1 Founding of the Partnership

Founded in 2023, the Northeast Mid-Atlantic Partnership for Forests and Water (“The Partnership”) is an interagency, multi-partner collaborative to enhance concerted, science-based restoration of priority forest landscapes to improve water quality and quantity in 13 states in the Northeastern and Mid-Atlantic United States.

The Partnership’s footprint encompasses Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Ohio. The region’s numerous streams, lakes, and reservoirs provide drinking water to 66 million people, or around 40% of the American population. Approximately 25% of U.S. forests are located in the Northeast and Midwest regions, with a total of 89,680,169 forested acres. Forests filter sediments and other pollutants before they reach water sources, providing clean water that is vital to communities and habitats. Forest cover is also linked to reduced drinking water treatment costs. These regional characteristics provide a unique opportunity for the development of a partnership that encourages and supports concerted collaboration between the forestry and water sectors.

1.2 Case for Collaboration in Conservation

Regional collaboration is needed to mitigate the multiple pressures that threaten forests (e.g., fragmentation, invasive species, abiotic disturbances). Highly effective coordination across states, multiple levels of government, and non-governmental partners is essential, considering the multiple entities with responsibility for management related to forests and water. Because resources to manage forests and water supplies are often limited, particularly at the state and local levels, alignment of management objectives and communication can maximize investments and outcomes. Sharing lessons learned also improves program delivery and outcomes.

Collaboratives prove to be powerful tools for change – forest management and conservation for water quality is done better at scale when coordinated and collaborated. For example, the Southeastern Partnership for Forests and Water has succeeded in conserving 15,000 acres in the Savannah River Watershed for increased water quality. In another example, the America’s Longleaf Restoration Initiative celebrated fifteen years of conservation success in November 2023 by signing a memorandum of understanding to renew partnership efforts for another fifteen years. We look to organizations like these, as well as the Appalachian Trail Partnership, the White Oak Partnership, and others, as we utilize this Partnership to achieve our goals.

1.3 Vision

Resilient and well-managed forests that improve water resources and create healthy watersheds.

1.4 Mission

To create a collaborative network that leverages resources to manage, restore, and conserve forests and protect water resources.

1.5 Values

The following values reflect the Partnership's commitment to ensuring implementation of proper forest management practices that promote forest sustainability, increased source water quality, and improved human and environmental health.

- **Intentional collaboration:** We unite the interests of partners and communities and promote cross-agency initiatives from forest and water professionals to improve overall water quality and protect forested landscapes. The Partnership is most successful when we bring together agencies (federal, state, and local), the general public, and industry/utilities/NGOs/corporate stakeholders.
- **Community-based efforts:** We recognize the importance of input and engagement from on-the-ground contributors to enact meaningful impact. Working with private forest landowners and producers with forested lands is a key focus of our work.
- **Public engagement:** We prioritize increasing public awareness of where water comes from and engaging with public stakeholders, including universities.
- **Nature-based solutions:** Our efforts are inspired by following natural systems as the ultimate green infrastructure.
- **Collective learning:** We seek expertise and insight from our partners and members to increase collective knowledge and partnership capacity.
- **Equity and representation of all community members:** We recognize historical structures have disproportionately affected communities in the region today. We also recognize that healthy forests are diverse forests, and so we value diversity in backgrounds and opinion to create a more equitable landscape for the future.

1.6 Goals

These four goals are long-term goals for the Partnership. Annual objectives and strategies to meet these goals will be set based on grant requirements, partnership needs, and opportunities to best address these goals.

1. **Foster Collaboration between the Forestry and Water Sectors:** Foster effective, sustainable partnerships focused on northeast forests, water, and conservation. Leverage these partnerships to align the forestry and water sectors in their efforts to achieve water quality goals using state forest action plans.
2. **Build Capacity to Increase Work in the Region:** Build partner capacity through training and increased coordination to accelerate implementation of state, watershed, and

regional-scale projects that increase technical assistance and deliver on the ground improvements.

3. **Increase Implementation of BMPs:** Conserve, restore, and enhance forest landscapes in priority watersheds through implementation projects that target riparian restoration and forestry pollution abatement.
4. **Align Communication and Outreach:** Align communications between the forestry, water, and conservation sectors and develop and disseminate coordinated messages and provide training and outreach to forest owners, members, and other stakeholders.

2.0 Partnership Governance Structure & Function

2.1 Partnership Structure and Responsibilities

The Partnership works with state partners to achieve the desired future conditions for water quality outlined in their State Forest Action Plans. The Partnership encourages regional, cross sector collaboration and aims to align the forestry and water sectors to facilitate impactful outreach and landscape-scale conservation efforts, such as increasing the quality and coverage of natural habitats across the associated states.

The Partnership is comprised of a **steering committee, workgroups**, an assembly of **members**, including **advisors and supporters**, and a **coordinator**. An organizational structure diagram is included in the [Appendix](#).

- The steering committee will steer the Partnership and be responsible, alongside the coordinator, for sustaining the Partnership.
- The Partnership will also include several workgroups, including local implementation workgroups and a research work group. Other groups will be established based on the needs and direction of the Partnership.
- Partnership members will contribute feedback and input to support Partnership efforts, receive regular updates about the Partnership, and are able to serve on workgroups. Members include advisors who are individuals that helped build the Partnership from the ground up and who are called on to provide additional direction and advice to the steering committee and coordinator when needed. Members also include supporters who are organizations that are called on to provide letters of support and show public support for the partnership mission and goals. Members can also participate in the Partnership without being designated as advisors or supporters.
- The coordinator will be responsible for facilitating communication between partners, documenting and propelling project progress, developing timelines and setting deadlines, and providing administrative, scheduling, and outreach support to the Partnership.

Each group within the Partnership will be assigned specific roles, tasks, and responsibilities that will contribute to the overall progress and success of the Partnership. Partnership group tasks and responsibilities may also be subject to change depending on the needs of the Partnership.

2.2 Steering Committee

2.2.1 Tasks

The steering committee will provide input to the coordinator as it develops the goals, objectives, and policies of the Partnership. It will also develop a common agenda that includes the vision and mission statements of the Partnership, draft a list of the outcomes and materials the Partnership is looking to produce, determine the collaborative strategies to be implemented among the partners to achieve these outcomes, and identify the general guiding principles that will steer the Partnership in the direction of its goals.

For the purposes of maintaining financial support of the Partnership, members of the steering committee will bring potential funding opportunities (federal, state, and private) to the attention of the steering committee partners. The committee will also support the development and the review of any grant applications completed by Partnership organizations that will assist in moving the Partnership closer to its goals and objectives.

2.2.2 Responsibilities

The steering committee will provide support by helping to connect interested parties to the Partnership members for more information about joining, participating, and supporting the Partnership. The committee will be responsible for providing oversight, guidance, and feedback to the workgroups, partners, and coordinator, and will act as the planning team for workshops and other events. The committee will also be responsible for organizing and facilitating Partnership meetings.

2.2.3 *Expectation of Level of Engagement*

Steering committee members are expected to serve for at least two years and attend all virtual Steering committee meetings. Steering committee members may forfeit their seat on the committee if they miss three regularly scheduled Steering committee meetings. However, accommodations will be made for sabbaticals, personal emergencies, family leave, and other reasonable circumstances and will be at the discretion of the coordinator.

Members will be expected to respond to communications from the coordinator in a timely manner and communicate between steering committee meetings to advance the Partnership's mission. Committee members will also prepare for and actively participate in regularly scheduled events, participate in the review, approval and updating of Partnership guidance documents and strategic plans, and participate in consensus decision-making to approve recommendations.

The steering committee is responsible for securing sustained funding for Partnership coordination and project implementation (through a variety of mechanisms over time) that are sufficient to administer the Partnership. However, this does not require that the participating organizations expend, obligate, or transfer any funds, or involve the United States in any obligation for the present or future payment of money in excess of appropriations authorized by law and administratively allocated for future work related to this effort.

Representatives on the steering committee are intended to serve as liaisons for their agency or organization's interests, and work to identify 1) alignment between their agency's mission and the Partnership goals, and 2) opportunities to collaborate. However, the opinions and perspectives they share as a member of the steering committee are their own and not a reflection of their agency or organization directly. If a member chooses to relinquish their position on the steering committee, the coordinator must be notified as soon as possible to best inform replacement of the member. Resigning members should not work independently to identify their replacements without consulting the coordinator and other members on the steering committee.

2.3 Workgroups

2.3.1 Tasks

Workgroups will be established to support a variety of efforts, including conducting research, advancing implementation, supporting communications and marketing, and more. The specific charge of the workgroup will determine their specific tasks and responsibilities. For example, a research workgroup may be required to review and summarize existing research and literature for communication and technical information about forest and sources of drinking water and investigate the current science and technical research around conservation of forests and watersheds, as well as programmatic and financial incentives that best encourage forest stewardship. Specialized research tasks may involve researching the regional climate market programs and ways to involve forest managers/owners and identifying the limitations and barriers that may prevent underserved communities from accessing them.

Other workgroups may be tasked with investigating ways to invest in and build capacity to plan for future forestry and source water workforce vacancies, as well as potentially develop positions and opportunities for future forest, watershed, and source water managers. They may also work to identify and assess existing regional conservation programs to better deliver, advocate for, and provide access to policies and programs that promote forestry and watershed conservation.

2.3.2 Responsibilities

Partnership workgroups will have different responsibilities depending on the tasks or focus area they are assigned to. At a minimum, all workgroups will be expected to hold and attend monthly workgroup meetings and develop a workgroup charge that is approved by the steering committee. Workgroups must also establish and adhere to timelines and a plan that details the strategies and milestones needed to complete specific projects. Workgroup members will be expected to regularly report on their progress, including quarterly reports to the coordinator and steering committee detailing progress against established goals and milestones, and annual presentations to the collaborative on workgroup efforts and general project progress.

2.3.3 Establishment

If a member or partner identifies the need for a new workgroup to support the efforts of the Partnership, the member or partner may bring this suggestion to the coordinator for further discussion with the steering committee. The specific charge of the workgroup will drive their tasks and responsibilities. With the consultation and guidance of the steering committee and the

coordinator, workgroups can be established to direct efforts, resources, and attention towards any number of focus areas.

2.4 Advising Members and Supporting Organizations

2.4.1 *Responsibilities*

The Partnership's assembly of members will have a number of roles and responsibilities that will help gear the Partnership towards success. Members will serve as advisors to the coordinator and steering committee, and will include founding members, supporting organizations, and additional thought partners identified by the coordinator or steering committee. They will provide public support for the Partnership (through letters of support and by other means), advise the Partnership in areas such as administration, financing, and communications and marketing, make recommendations and provide key background information and materials to the steering committee, and bring new data and ongoing lessons learned to the Partnership to inform future strategy development and promote adaptation among partners. Members will also serve a supporting role as an advocate or representative for the Partnership to communicate with the communities served and prospective partners, as well as provide feedback on products and initiatives, technical expertise, assistance, and training to workgroups, the steering committee, the coordinator, and other Partnership efforts.

In addition to these workgroup support roles, Partnership members will assist the steering committee in prioritizing charges when organizing and assigning workgroups to specific focus areas and tasks. To ensure that the Partnership secures sustained funding for Partnership coordination and for project implementation, Partnership members will also be responsible for bringing potential funding opportunities (federal, state, and private) to the attention of the coordinator and steering committee and support the development and review of grant applications completed by Partnership organizations that will assist in moving the Partnership closer to its objectives.

2.5 Partnership Coordinator

2.5.1 *Responsibilities*

The Partnership coordinator will be responsible for a variety of tasks that will help facilitate communication between partners and ensure the continued progress of work performed under the Partnership. Firstly, the coordinator will work with the steering committee to develop a strategic plan for the Partnership that details the goals, objectives, and strategies for the Partnership. The strategic plan will cover the first three to five years of the Partnership's timeline and will adhere to all grant requirements and be developed with significant input and feedback from a variety of partners.

The coordinator will also be responsible for establishing the steering committee and workgroups to support projects and tasks identified by the Partnership. Preliminary steps to assist with this task will include designing and distributing surveys or polls to gather input from members on relevant topics (i.e., suggested committee membership, ongoing activities, and priorities). The coordinator

will provide ongoing support to Partnership efforts by means of scheduling, developing agendas for, and facilitating virtual meetings for workgroups and other members, documenting and communicating action items identified during meetings, and providing any other tools to support workgroups and members in their ongoing work.

In addition to this administrative support, the coordinator will be expected to track the progress of the various workgroups, partners, and the steering committee that operate under the Partnership. This will involve developing a metrics report twice a year to efficiently document and communicate progress across the Partnership. It will also develop communication, marketing, and design materials, including a communication strategy, a cohesive branding style with a Partnership logo, style guide, and preferred language, educational information and materials as required by the Partnership (i.e., factsheets, press releases and announcements, guidance documents, and an annual report), and outreach resources (i.e., a user-friendly website and a newsletter), as required by the Partnership.

To ensure the Partnership's consistent and efficient progress towards its goals, the coordinator will continuously assess and document project progress and performance, ensure that any projects undertaken by the Partnership stay within the scope of work and appropriate budget, and bring any necessary decisions regarding budget, scope, and timeline of projects undertaken by the Partnership to the steering committee. This will also involve providing coordination, logistical, and communications support to workgroups, the steering committee, and other Partnership groups, and reviewing, monitoring, and assessing the progress and performance of specific programs and tasks.

3.0 Commitment to Values in the Partnership

3.1 Values in Action

The values of the Partnership create the framework for making governing and operational decisions. We are committed to creating respectful spaces for intentional collaboration that allow for equitable input. In making all voices heard, we produce outcomes that are both community-informed and focused.

3.2 Consensus Decision-Making Process

3.2.1 *What It is and What It Means*

Members of the Partnership, including the Steering Committee and workgroups, meet regularly to share information, brainstorm ideas, receive updates, and review recommendations. Decisions are made by consensus.

3.2.2 *Tools and Process*

In-Meetings

Consensus is reached when each partner organization either supports a position or has a neutral stance. Tools we use to raise issues and come to a consensus as a group include emails, surveys, and meetings.

When consensus cannot be reached, the group may choose one of two options:

1. For items that are not time-sensitive, the decision can be tabled until the next meeting, at which point it will be re-discussed. When an item is tabled, the coordinator(s) will work with individual Steering Committee members to bring the group into consensus before the next regularly scheduled meeting.
2. When decisions are time-sensitive and consensus cannot be reached, or if a recommendation has been discussed at two previous Steering Committee meetings without resolution, a super majority vote will prevail if two-thirds of the partners in attendance vote for a decision. Each organization has one vote regardless of how many representatives are at a meeting. An organization does not receive a vote if they are not in attendance at the meeting.

Asynchronous

Consensus on partnership positions or decisions can also be reached outside of scheduled meetings by using asynchronous methods. The coordinator(s) will use responses from surveys and emails, as well as feedback from reviews of drafted proposals and products, to determine consensus among partners and members. Asynchronous methods for consensus decision-making will be utilized when responses are needed more quickly (i.e., emails), or when members and partners may need more time to adequately review and provide input on products, materials, and proposals (i.e., surveys). Partners and members will be given a specific timeframe in which to provide feedback on materials or submit/send responses to survey questions or emails. If a member or partner does not provide feedback or response within this timeframe, the coordinator will assume member or partner holds a neutral or positive position of the materials or position.

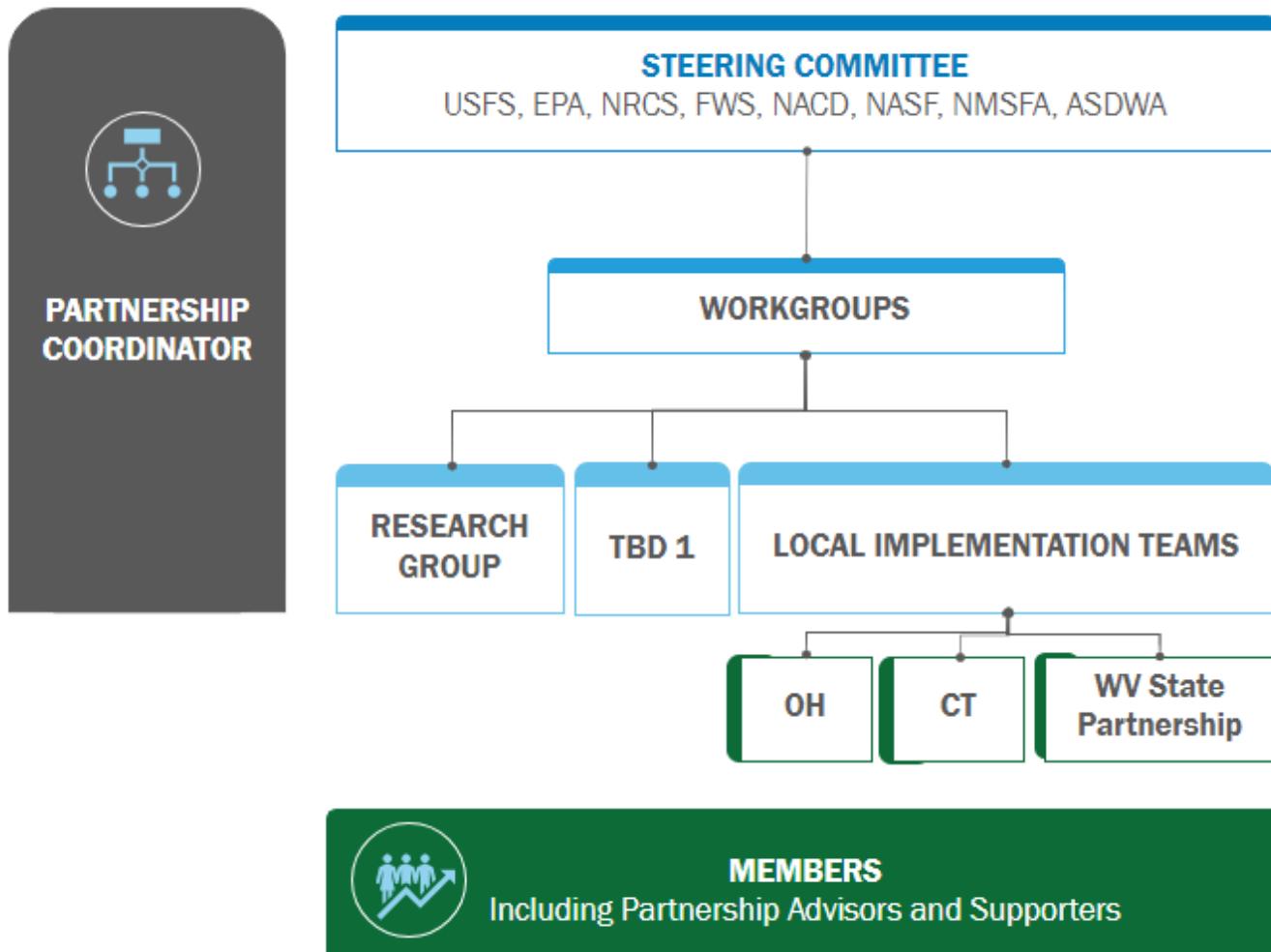
3.3 Recordkeeping

The Partnership has responsibilities as a grant recipient organization to track and report on items required for the grant. This is central to how the Partnership operates. There is a shared responsibility among all parties to meet the grant reporting needs.

Recordkeeping is also critical for knowledge retention and knowledge transfer as leadership roles in the Partnership change over time (e.g., steering committee roles last for two years). Thus, recordkeeping documentation is needed for the Partnership to operate sustainably and without interruption over time.

4.0 Appendix

4.1 Organization Chart



4.2 Region Map

NORTHEAST MID-ATLANTIC FORESTS
89,680,169 ACRES

