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CHESAPEAKE BAY

Editorial: The costs of restoring the Chesapeake are worth it

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The Chesapeake Bay.

Getty Images

On Tuesday, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) released the findings of its annual report, "The State of the Blueprint."

The Chesapeake Clean Water Blueprint was established in 2010 after years of failed efforts and halfhearted attempts to reduce pollution and restore the bay's water quality. Under the blueprint, Washington, D.C., and the six states in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed worked with the Environmental Protection Agency to establish and implement individual, achievable goals. The blueprint gave each locality until 2025 to meet its goals.

Tuesday's report assessed the progress being made by the three states responsible for 90% of the pollution entering the bay — Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania. There's good news and bad. The bay is becoming healthier. Grasses are returning, the dead zone has gotten smaller and the blue crab population is on the rise. But, according to the study, none of the states are completely on track to meet their 2025 goals, although Virginia and Maryland are close.

Virginia could meet its 2025 goals if the commonwealth accelerates efforts to reduce pollution from agricultural sources and urban areas and continues to reduce runoff from wastewater treatment plants. Maryland also is on track to meet its goals if it continues to upgrade sewage treatment plants and farm management practices.



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Pennsylvania, however, is not faring well at all. The report calls its actions woefully inadequate. It has seen no reduction in nitrogen runoff. "A chain is only as strong as its weakest link, and that is also true for the partnership working to restore water quality across the region," CBF President William C. Baker said. "Today, unfortunately, Pennsylvania's link is not only weak, it is broken."

The CBF says it will be making recommendations as to what the states can do in areas where shortfalls were identified. We hope the states follow them. We understand the process is costly and cumbersome, but the Chesapeake Bay is not only a scenic gem beloved by boaters, swimmers, fishermen and tourists, it is home to 3,600 species of plant and animal life, including about 350 species of fish. It's also a major food source and economic powerhouse: More than 500 million pounds of seafood are harvested from its waters every year. The costs of restoring the bay to health are well worth it.

— Robin Beres

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