



February 17, 2026

To: CESU Council

From: Federal Managers, Chesapeake Watershed CESU Research Network

- Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM)
- Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE)
- Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA)
- Department of Defense (DoD)
- National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
- National Park Service (NPS)
- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
- US Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE)
- US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
- US Forest Service (USFS)
- US Geological Survey (USGS)

Subject: Federal Managers Committee Review and Recommendation for 2026 Renewal, Chesapeake Watershed CESU Research Network

The federal agency managers of the Chesapeake Watershed CESU Research Network (CW CESU) have reviewed the Chesapeake Watershed (CW) CESU Self-Assessment Report, dated January 30, 2026, and we unanimously recommend renewal of the cooperative research network and joint-venture agreement for another five-year period. The Federal Managers were pleased with the 100% response rate to the survey that contributed to the report, repeating the same level of partner engagement realized in the 2021 Self-Assessment Survey and Report.

The host institution, the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science – Appalachian Laboratory (UMCES-AL), has met all the expectations of this committee and we recommend that UMCES-AL remain in its role during the next five-year period.

The CW CESU has experienced significant growth since the last renewal in 2021. The network processed 521 projects during this period, nearly doubling the volume of the previous five years. These awards reached nearly 75% of nonfederal partners, supporting vital research in service of the unique missions of the federal partners. We are excited to report that every federal and non-federal partner in the network (except for Gallaudet University) responded to the renewal inquiry and confirmed their interest in continuing membership.

Central to the success of this period was a commitment to the next generation of scientists. Projects funded through the CW CESU engaged 217 undergraduate and 258 graduate students in direct field research and mentorship, effectively bridging the gap between academia and federal careers. Partners highlighted mentorship models where graduate students trained undergraduates, as well as career development opportunities where students presented work directly to federal colleagues.

The CW CESU and host institution, UMCES-AL, maintained high engagement and strong administrative support throughout the assessment period. The host institution provided over \$122,000 in financial support to ensure stable operations, including staff time, faculty engagement, and tools such as subscriptions for communication efforts with partners. Additional administrative support from the National Park Service, National Capital Regional Office was also instrumental, allowing the network to maintain its website and databases despite challenges in federal funding allocation.

The network's communication and data infrastructure remain robust. The host maintained the Experts and Projects databases, which are vital for identifying collaborators and tracking the 521 recently executed projects as well as past projects. While the network previously utilized social media, it is now transitioning to other channels to reach partners more effectively. Engagement remained high, with a 91% average attendance at federal manager meetings and a 4.5/5 partner satisfaction rating in the self-assessment survey that was conducted in December 2025.

We expect the CW CESU Research Network to continue its collaborative impact over the next five years. We concur with the information and recommendations in the 2026 Self-Assessment Report. However, based on partner feedback and federal manager input, there are several areas the CW CESU needs to address during the next assessment period:

- Strategic Planning: Following the 2021 renewal, a committee was formed to draft a strategic plan, but it was not finalized. Moving forward, the CW CESU is focused on resuming this process to finalize a new strategic plan that aligns with current Executive Orders and Department of Interior Secretarial Priorities to enhance collaborative impact.
- Enhanced Networking and Engagement: Partners have suggested hosting virtual or in-person networking events, potentially in conjunction with the Annual Meeting. There is a desire for regional or affinity-group-based quarterly meetings to allow researchers, especially those at smaller institutions, to network directly with federal agency leads.
- Broadening Participation: While 75% of partners received funding, smaller institutions report challenges in obtaining funding due to limited resources or lack of graduate programs. To address this, the network aims to offer more undergraduate-focused or capacity-building research efforts such as collaborative partnerships with larger universities to increase involvement across the network.

In summary, the CW CESU Federal Managers Committee is very supportive of renewing the CW CESU Research Network and the corresponding joint-venture agreement for another five

years based on the growth and accomplishments listed in the Chesapeake Watershed (CW) Self-Assessment Report that examined this most recent rating period.

Respectively submitted,

//s// Chesapeake Watershed CESU Federal Agencies:

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