Commissioner Recommendation:
Commissioner Mark Belton

Recommendation Text:

The State of Maryland, through the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), should both increase Green Project Reserve (GPR) funding opportunities and adopt a Sponsorship Lending Program (SLP) through the Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund (CWSRF) as encouraged by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in such a way as to prioritize nonpoint source (NPS) projects that also include climate adaptation benefits. Doing so should be possible by MDE action using the annual CWSRF Intended Use Plan (IUP) public hearing process. While Maryland currently uses and often exceeds EPA's GPR funding guidelines, it is not listed as among the states offering a SLP to local governments.

Additional Context:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) was established by the 1987 amendments to the Clean Water Act (CWA) as a low-interest source of funding for a wide range of water infrastructure projects. The program represents a powerful partnership between the EPA and the states, as it has the flexibility to fund a variety of projects that address their highest priority water quality needs. The CWSRF can finance both wastewater treatment system improvements and nonpoint source (NPS) projects; however, many NPS projects lack a revenue stream, which makes it difficult to repay a CWSRF loan. Sponsorship lending helps to address this repayment issue for NPS projects, allowing critical water quality projects to move forward. Green infrastructure NPS projects often have benefits in addition to water quality, specifically including climate adaptation measures. Having this program in-place and performing outreach to MD jurisdictions regarding its potential will provide local governments another "arrow in their quiver" to address the challenges of climate change.

Pre-Submitted ARWG Recommendations:

1. State agencies (Health, Environment) should update the 2016 Climate and Health Profile Report as an online resource for planners, the public, policy makers, and local officials to incorporate updated health and climate impacts data that can be used in evaluating different mitigation and adaptation strategies and interventions. This activity should be in collaboration with academic centers that can assist with the modeling of health impacts associated with climate changes, as well as the development of tools and "plug and play" examples that make it easier to interpret and use climate and associated health data in decision making.
2. Create a workgroup (or subsection of ARWG/MD Resiliency Partnership) to assess what a community relocation program would look like in the State of MD. The reality is that worsening storms and flooding are going to necessitate the elevation, relocation, or moving out of houses, and it's best to have a standardized response developed for the state before a disaster, instead of after. Many flood planning site visits and presentations resulted in community members asking "is the state going to force us to move? Does the state want us to sell our house? Will the state help us move? Are you saying our house will be gone in x amount of years?" How is the state preparing to answer these questions

as we continue to develop flooding and sea level rise tools? NWF is proposing to create a relocation guidebook for state agencies, where we'd help states think about this, but I think it's important to be proactive about this before we become unfortunately, reactive.

3. Given that there have been more intense storms and weather events recently, what is the opportunity to connect what people are experiencing in their daily lives to climate education? How can we connect things like lots of mosquitoes to increasing precipitation and changing climatic patterns in a way that would engage the public and get them to care? This has me thinking about the MD Climate Leadership Academy, and what opportunities may exist to revamp some sort of climate change education program -- either at the state level or in partnership with external people. Climate webinars? Charismatic species that become wildlife champions for climate? Climate week in MD?
4. Formally adopt the Next Generation Adaptation Plan to demonstrate Maryland's commitment to climate adaptive actions that address current climate impacts to secure a healthy future for the state's natural, human, social, and economic systems. Develop a public facing tracker that promotes Maryland's progress on the climate adaptive actions.
5. Create a dashboard tracking progress on ARWG/NextGen metrics. See Washington dashboard as an example: https://dnr.wa.chariotcreative.com/.
6. Take actions to enhance Flood Risk Disclosures in property transactions to reduce exposure to hazardous conditions. Maryland currently has a D rating for flood risk disclosure according to the Natural Resources Defense Council; the existing disclosure form has many exemptions and does not contain information about flooding risk that may be essential for potential home buyers. Make state tools and resources available to property buyers to increase their understanding of potential flood risk.
7. Pilot a community liaison program to better understand and recommend improvements to the mechanisms to DBM that need to be established to elevate local participation in state initiatives.