



## Chesapeake Bay Program

*Science. Restoration. Partnership.*

### Fish Habitat Action Team

### Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, April 6th · 1:00-3:00 PM

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#### Attendance:

- Chris Moore (CBF)
- Justin Shapiro (CRC/NOAA)
- Clinton Morgeson (VDWR)
- Shannon Smith (VIMS)
- Lisa Havel (ASMFC)
- A.K. Leight (NOAA)
- Kelly Maloney (USGS)
- Kevin Krause (USGS)
- Tom Idhe (Morgan State PEARL)
- John Mullican (MDNR)
- Mike Slattery (FWS)
- Kristen Saacke Blunk (NFWF)
- Peter Tango (USGS)
- Steve Faulkner (USGS)
- Mary Groves (MDNR)
- Jamileh Souedian (CRC/NOAA)
- Stephanie Gordon (USGS)
- Marek Topolski (MDNR)
- Rachael Peabody (VMRC)
- Ken Hyer (USGS)
- Mary Fabrizio (VIMS)
- Joe Wood (CBF)
- Tom Parham (MDNR)
- Kevin Krause (USGS)
- Allison Colden (CBF)
- Forrest Vanderbilt (USGS)
- Gina Hunt (MDNR)
- Scott Phillips (USGS)

#### Regional Funding Opportunities: Supporting Fish Habitat Projects in the Bay and Watershed

*(Multiple presenters, 1 hour)*

- Background on current opportunities (25 min)
  - NFWF Small Watersheds Grant Program/ USFWS Chesapeake WILD
    - *Presenters: Kristen Saacke Blunk (NFWF Field Liaison) & Mike Slattery (USFWS)*
    - *Deadline: Thursday, April 21st*
    - *Resources:*
      - *Link to [RFP](#)*
      - *RFP overview [one-pager](#)*
      - *Link to [presentation](#)*
  - Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership General Habitat Conservation Proposals
    - *Presenter: Lisa Havel (ASMFC)*

- *Deadline: Rolling*
- *Resources:*
  - *Link to [RFP](#)*
  - *Link to [presentation](#)*

#### NFWF Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Fund (Small Watershed Grants/Chesapeake WILD)

- **Overview:** This year's RFP has outlined overarching priority areas that overlap with the USFWS Chesapeake WILD funding, hence the reason for a joint presentation. Future RFPs will more explicitly call out USFWS priorities. New to this year's RFP, is the inclusion of state governments/post-secondary institutions as eligible applicants, no requirement (but still recommended) for funding match, and 3x the funding that is traditionally available. This increase in funding means that NFWF (and its funding partners) are looking for a diversity of project concepts. The SWG/WILD funding opportunities are closely aligned with Bay Program priorities (habitat focus for oysters, brook trout, black duck, and river herring). A one-pager, attached above, provides a helpful overview of priorities, eligibility, and submission requirements. As a final note, Mike Slattery (USFWS) mentions that projects that may align with WILD priorities should be flagged for future benefit.
- **Questions/Discussion:**
  - Chris Moore (CBF): If someone is looking to lower pollution (improve water quality), and in turn, increase populations of key species, does that meet RFP priorities of habitat improvement?
    - Kristen Sacacke Blunk (NFWF): Yes! Linking eater quality and species/habitat improvement is highly supported by the stewardship grant.
  - Scott Phillips (USGS): Asks Mike Slattery (USFWS) for examples of habitat assessment work that could be funded through the WILD fund
    - Mike Slattery (USFWS): The FWS has previously supported State fisheries agencies asking for funding to complete high definition aquatic habitat characterization assessments(Delaware river). Another example to answer Scott's question is a project that was funded to install fiber-optic sensors to classify stream temperatures that enabled biologists to use temperature data to precisely identify spring upwelling locations in order to more precisely target coldwater fishery restoration projects.

#### Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnerships General Proposals for Habitat Restoration

- **Overview:** Lisa Havel (ASMFC) reviewed this newly-available opportunity to submit Mid-Atlantic habitat restoration projects focused on priority areas of SAV, shellfish beds, tidal vegetation, and riverine bottom. This opportunity does not have a deadline or any specific funding attached to it. The idea here is to establish a database of potential projects to be connected with funding sources as available. This ready-made list of priority habitat projects will be key as federal infrastructure dollars become available. Please contact Lisa Havel ([lhavel@asmfc.org](mailto:lhavel@asmfc.org)) with questions or project ideas.
- **Questions:**
  - Mary Fabrizio (VIMS): Can you provide examples of science and data projects that may be considered for funding?
    - Lisa Havel (ASMFC): Mentions a past project focused on modeling of

impervious surfaces.

- Scott Phillips (USGS): How does the database of projects created by ACFHP interact with the federal agencies with the previously mentioned infrastructure dollars?
  - Lisa Havel: The National Fish Habitat Partnership board provides updates on the movement of funding dollars, serving as a line of communication to the partnership.
- Chris Moore (CBF): When these submitted project concepts are entered in the database, is there a timeline for moving them forward?
  - Lisa Havel: No, but having projects ready to go will be key when infrastructure dollars arrive.
- A.K. Leight (NOAA NCCOS): Should certain geographic areas be targeted when submitting project concepts?
  - Lisa Havel: Yes, priority areas from the NFHP maps should be highlighted if applicable to the restoration area of interest (maps are linked above).
- Fish Habitat Action Team's strategy for supporting potential restoration projects (35 min)
  - *Presenters: Chris Moore (CBF)*
  - *Chris and Bruce will contextualize this habitat funding conversation by providing historical examples of FHAT-supported restoration projects and highlighting new potential project concepts that align with workgroup priorities. When developing the current Action Plan, the FHAT committed to supporting at least one near-shore restoration project (Action 5.2). This presentation will transition to a group discussion focused on identifying project concepts, defining the FHAT's "role" in supporting a project, and brainstorming additional partners that this team may be well-equipped to support.*
- **Discussion about potential funding opportunities:**
  - Allison Colden (CBF): The Maryland Coastal Conservation Association is putting forward another "reef ball" restoration project for funding (similar to work at Bill Burton pier that the FHAT supported in the last work plan). Is there interest from this team to support this next iteration?
  - Rachael Peabody (VMRC): Working on using existing cost-share projects to promote living shoreline. VA master plan has lots of projects that could be connected with. Ranging from just ideas to shovel ready. Maps for spatial planning have been collected, but have not really taken off in VA.
    - Mike Slattery (FWS): This project would fit WILD priorities

### **Project Update: USGS Watershed Fish Habitat Assessment (Kelly Maloney, USGS: 30 min)**

- **Presentation:** *USGS updated the team on the recently-completed freshwater assessment of fish habitat condition. This product/action dates back to the previous and Action Plan, and its innovative methods will be used to help guide the exploratory joint tidal/nontidal assessment in the Patuxent River (Action 2.2 of the current work plan). This Finer-scale assessment can better highlight locations where restoration/conservation investment should be targeted, a core focus of this Bay Program Action Team. Community metrics and species predictors were both explored. Results showed community metrics and species suitability agreeing for one of the key sensitive species of interest, brook trout. Both approaches are generally aligned with NFHP prioritized habitats, although with variability. Future work will include migration to a finer-scale framework, as well as incorporating climate and land use scenarios to the assessment.*
- **Follow-up:**
  - A summary webpage can be accessed [HERE](#)
  - The presentation, with detailed results, can be accessed [HERE](#)
  - Kelly, and the USGS team, surveyed the group about how to best present results on a web-based application. There seemed to be consensus on utilizing an ArcGIS online story map and dashboard for users. Members also agreed that any web-based tool to guide decision makers should include both data layers and model predictors. The team will keep the FHAT informed as web development is pursued.

### **Mussel Conservation and Restoration Update (Joe Wood, CBF: 20 min)**

- **Presentation:** *The current Action Plan highlights FHAT interest in exploring regional mussel conservation/restoration efforts (Action 3.1). CBF provided an update on regional work and opportunities for workgroup collaboration. Joe provides a number of reasons why mussel restoration should be a stronger focus of the Chesapeake Bay Program effort. Importantly, he notes that a watershed-wide index of mussels does not yet exist and could be a major goal moving forward (with ChesWILD funding on the way, maybe mussel priorities can be addressed).*
- Link to [presentation](#)
- **Discussion:**
  - Joe Wood (CBF): Next week NFWF, MDNR and others will be talking about mussel restoration investment during a workshop.
  - Chris Moore (CBF): Are certain species in the watershed declared as endangered? Have populations been lost altogether?
    - Joe Wood: There are endangered species in the watershed, and one species in Virginia is extinct.
  - Mike Slattery(FWS): Notes that certain mussel species will be prioritized for future ChesapeakeWILD funding and will be a development to follow in the future.
  - Mary Fabrizio (VIMS): Notes that with so many Blue Catfish in Virginia tributaries, understanding where restoration can/will be successful will be key. Blue catfish prey on mussels, and may be impacting our understanding of population levels in the freshwater tributaries .
    - Perhaps future coordination with the Fish GIT's Invasive Catfish workgroup would make sense.

- Steve Faulkner (USGS): There is also a connection to the USACE Sustainable Rivers Program designed to develop ecological flow regions at their river infrastructure locations and mussels are one of the important guilds.