**Habitat Goal Implementation Team Fall 2016 Meeting**

**November 14, 2016**

**National Conservation Training Center**

**Shepherdstown, West Virginia**

Participants

Present:

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| Christine Conn, MD DNR (Co-Chair) | Mike Lovegreen, Upper Susquehanna Coalition |
| David Whitehurst, VA DGIF (Co-Chair) | David Thorne, WV DNR |
| Jennifer Greiner, FWS (Coordinator) | Kieran O’Malley, WV DNR |
| Paige Hobaugh, CRC (Staff) | Chris Burkett, VA DGIF |
| Kyle Runion, CRC (Staff) | Ben Lewis, VA DGIF |
| Nick DiPasquale, EPA | Chris Ruck, Fairfax County |
| Laura Free, EPA | Matt Meyers, Fairfax County |
| Carol Petrow, EPA | Denise Clearwater, MDE |
| Steve Fuller, NALCC | Catherine Krikstan, UMCES |
| Bridgette MacDonald, NALCC | Kristin Saunders, UMCES |
| Bridgette Costanzo, NALCC | Brooke Landry, MD DNR |
| Mike Slattery, FWS | Gina Hunt, MD DNR |
| Tim Jones, FWS | Dave Goshorn, MD DNR |
| Scott Phillips, USGS | Anne Hairston-Strang, MD DNR |
| Steve Faulkner, USGS | Joan Smedinghoff, CRC |
| Jake Reilly, NFWF | Kara Skipper, CRC |
| Tom Ihde, ERT | Scott Scarfone, TU |
| Margaret Enloe, Waterfowl Chesapeake | Matthew Pennington, LGAC |

Remote:

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| --- | --- |
| Charmaine Dahlenburg, National Aquarium | Angie Sowers, USACE |
| Emily Horan, NY DEC Bureau of Fisheries | Ann Jennings, CBC |
| Mary Andrews, NOAA | Howard Weinberg, UMCES |
| Tony Watkinson, VA MRC | Cathy Haffner, PA Game Commission |
| Nancy Butowski, MD DNR | Rebecca Golden, MD DNR |
| Erin McLaughlin, MD DNR | Seth Coffman, TU |
| Lora Lattanzi, FWS | Josh Burch, DC DOE |
| Marian Norris, NPS | Alan Weaver, VA DGIF |
| Ben Lorson, PA FBC | Emilie Franke, ERT |
| Sally Claggett, USFS | Tom O’Connell, USGS |

**Action & Decision Items**

* **ACTION**: Within the next year, the Habitat GIT will collaborate with interested partner organizations to get a project started using the RCOA tools and work with the CBP communications office to show how these tools are effective for holistic decision making.
* **ACTION**: Develop a list of members of other GITs who might be interested in using these tools within regions of priorities and work with them to find local implementers.
* **ACTION**: Phillips will work with Fuller to bring in water quality maps to the RCOA toolkit to take advantage of the water quality focus and try to include habitat benefits in the Phase III WIPs.
* **ACTION**: HGIT staff will prepare a letter of appreciation to thank the NALCC for assistance on the RCOA project.
* **ACTION**: Any feedback to help develop the scope of the Fish Habitat project should be sent to Kara and Paige, [kara.skipper@noaa.gov](mailto:kara.skipper@noaa.gov), [Hobaugh.paige@epa.gov](mailto:Hobaugh.paige@epa.gov)
* **ACTION**: The HGIT Coordinator will communicate to workgroup and action team leads when in the two-year timeframe they need to be prepared to complete the template and report progress.
* **ACTION**: This winter, Reilly will liaise with the Habitat GIT to gather insight on the goal/outcome-setting, identify restoration/conservation and monitoring strategies, and understand geographic priorities (including RCOA tool applications).
* **ACTION**: NFWF will present their refreshed Chesapeake Bay Business Plan in early 2017 for Habitat GIT and workgroups comments in late spring 2017.

**Minutes**

**Introductions and Workgroup Updates**

* **Black Duck:** The Black Duck Action Team has been working with the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture to develop Black Duck energetics maps, which are now under final data review. Ben Lewis has recently taken a leadership position with the action team.
* **Brook Trout**: Steve Faulkner has stepped up as the Brook Trout Action Team lead. The team is advancing aspects of the two year workplan and looking into developing a Brook Trout indicator for the Chesapeake Bay Program
* **Fish Passage**: Members of the Fish Passage Workgroup are continuing to focus on dam removal projects, particularly the Bloede Dam. Culvert assessments for fish passage potential have begun in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. The workgroup plans to hold their next meeting in December.
* **SAV**: The third Technical Synthesis (TS3) of Chesapeake Bay SAV research is nearing completion and should be released in the early spring. The workgroup has sponsored a GIT funding project aimed to equip watershed groups with SAV monitoring programs for reaches outside of the extent of the aerial survey using citizen science.
* **Stream Health**: A refinement of the Basin-wide Index of Biotic Integrity is nearing completion, with a report under review by the technical advisory group working on this action. The workgroup, along with the Chesapeake Bay Trust and Alliance for the Bay, continues to focus on developing a pooled monitoring approach for each state and eventually the watershed. Sub-committees for the workgroup have developed for specific actions in the workplan and started to work towards completing these actions. Developing guidelines for a streamlined permitting process is a priority for the workgroup.
* **Wetlands**: The Wetlands Expert Panel, tasked with developing nutrient and sediment retention efficiencies, is preparing to release their final report around Thanksgiving. A brief comment period will be open until December 7th, with final approval sought by the Habitat GIT, Wetland Workgroup (December 13th meeting), and other partnership groups by the end of 2016. A GIT funding project from the Wetland Workgroup aims to consolidate wetland restoration programs available to agricultural landowners into a central online clearinghouse to increase awareness and accessibility of these programs.

**Welcome from Nick DiPasquale, Director of the Chesapeake Bay Program**

The 2014 Watershed Agreement has helped consolidate the many different drivers of our program and helps us understand more comprehensively what we are working towards. The Bay Program has been able to direct funding to support the goal teams, resulting in projects such as those described from the SAV and Wetlands workgroups, as well as projects inspecting corollary benefits of BMPs on restoration aspects other than nutrients and sediments and developing 1-meter resolution land cover data. We hope that these projects as well as partnerships developed with the Bay Program, such as the NALCC, can help members accomplish their own goals as well as those shared with the Bay Program.

**Resource Conservation Opportunity Areas (RCOAs) Overview**, Steve Fuller

* A team of partners from 13 north Atlantic states, the North Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative, USFWS, NGOs, and universities worked together to align priorities and map opportunities for conservation across the Northeast. The vision of the project is a connected network of resilient and ecologically intact habitats that will support biodiversity under changing conditions of which groups use to inform decisions.
  + [Detailed overview webinars are available here](http://rcoa.cicapps.org/news-and-info/). Four overview webinars and five different topical webinars reached over 25 organizations in nine states.
* The regional conservation design builds on a host of datasets and assessments that can be organized into four objective areas: core habitat areas, imperiled species of greatest conservation need (SGCN) habitats, restoration, and connectivity.
  + The core habitat network is based on both terrestrial and aquatic habitats and shows alignment of the Index of Ecological Integrity, TNC resiliency work, representative species, and state natural communities.
  + Through examining important SGCN habitats, we found that riparian habitats were involved in a strong patter of importance.
* Restoration tool allows managers to develop custom prioritization scenarios for interactive conservation planning. <http://rcoa.cicapps.org/data-tools/>
  + Maps available for download include core areas, connectors, important habitats, and aquatic networks.
  + The restoration tool allows for users to select targets, weighted metrics, and NRCS conservation practices for download as a PDF or CSV file while can join with a HUC 12 map.
  + Regional analyses can be zoomed in to HUC 6, HUC 12, and catchment size watersheds.
  + A scenario building process can be done to refine objectives by targeting species or habitat, identifying desirable habitat conditions, honing in on specific actions and opportunities, and providing limiting factors for project parameters.
* RCOA data and materials have helped influence State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs), which in turn defines some of the land conservation areas.

Case Use Scenarios

* Where should we restore/protect brook trout habitat to increase long term occupied patch size?
  + Looking for areas that are near current occupied Brook Trout patches with high potential (stream gradient, size, and temperature) where conservation practices such as riparian buffers may be effective (high agricultural stress)
  + Prior to completing the RCOA project, we had collaborated with the Brook Trout Joint Venture, WVU, and Downstream Strategies to develop the [Fish Habitat Decision Support Tool](http://www.fishhabitattool.org/).
    - The tool can show current conditions and conditions without various stressors.
    - One subwatershed in the Chesapeake with good habitat and significant habitat stress is the lower west branch of the Susquehanna, PA.
      * Low quality current habitat, good predicted conditions in the absence of stress, high agricultural stress, and next to a brook trout patch.
    - A futuring tool can predict what will happen after successful restoration in both the target catchment and downstream catchments.
      * E.g. riparian restoration shows habitat quality after reduction of agricultural lands by 10% through installing riparian forest buffers.
* Where should we restore forest buffers in order to increase ‘flow’ for terrestrial/aquatic wildlife?
  + Focus on key factors to identify forest riparian buffers for SGCN
    - A list of variables was generated and weights applied to: high quality wetlands/streams, soils, low forest cover, and poor local but high regional connectivity potential. The analysis identified potential project sites for riparian forest buffer restoration in the lower Susquehanna.
    - After priority areas are identified, we can further refine based on NRCS implementation history.
  + Datasets such as sedimentation or pollution rates could easily be incorporated into the tool to further refine the target area for restoration.
    - Scarfone: TU in the Upper Gunpowder has project data that would fit nicely. The regional group (NALCC) has provided a great tool, now it is the responsibility of groups at the local implementation level to incorporate data and utilize the tool.
    - Whitehurst: Having CBP staff familiar with the tool and able to help local groups may be necessary for efficient use of the tool.
  + Slattery: The FWS regional office has identified the Chesapeake as a priority area for such tools. The NALCC will have a team of contractors to assist users in integrating data and provide a set of trainings for the tool. This team will include the Chesapeake Conservancy who can help merge their 1-meter resolution land cover data with our different scales of resolution so we can prioritize by watersheds then find actual project areas. We are also in discussion with NFWF to influence priority areas and practices that we can invest in which benefit water quality parameters as well as habitat restoration.
* Where should we target NRCS practices to preserve potential marsh migration corridors adjacent to high value black duck wintering/nesting habitat?
  + Thanks to the Black Duck Joint Venture for providing BD forage availability data.
  + Site conditions considered for this scenario are high quality wetlands, highly productive land, wet flats indicating possible drained wetlands, and marsh migration potential. Looking for areas with low forest cover, low terrestrial IEI, highly agricultural land use, and not currently protected.
    - The energetics model can be combined with landscape conditions to prioritize areas.
* Various expert build decision scenarios are available and can be uploaded from the restoration tool website.

Discussion

* Faulkner: Wants to ensure caution regarding the uncertainty of the tool is brought up to the users. Some relationships displayed are much stronger than others and this is not articulated in the tool.
  + Fuller: Agree, there is a wide range of reliability of this best available data. Our recommendation to implementers is to use the to perform site visits before making and decisions.

**Applying Tools/Funding to Local Implementation**, Mike Lovegreen

* Communities and stakeholders in local implementation may have very different sets of values than do the conservation organization and having their involvement and support is critical for execution of our projects. These tools are great at a regional perspective to help target efforts, but if we don’t have strong conservation organizations within the watershed of the region advocating for conservation it likely won’t happen.
* Scarfone: Next focus of this group should be to get these tools into the hands of users to help deliver project options. Communicate the story to these grassroots organization and help them begin to formulate a project.
* Pennington: Another benefit this group could provide is communicating indicator species and how protecting the indicator species also means protecting the resources and self.
  + Fuller: This communications strategy can work in many different ways. Restoration efforts for a riparian buffer can be promoted as soil health, water quality, habitat restoration depending on any audience’s interest.
  + Whitehurst: If you can convey to a community that a place is special, a huge change in attitude can be made. Landowners will take responsibility and be stewards for the land and wildlife.
    - Clearwater: As long as the TMDL credit is given to modeling nutrient and sediment, that’s where the focus will be. Using pollutant reductions as a surrogate for habitat reduces the importance and the opportunities within.
      * Greiner: The Water Quality GIT is currently undergoing project to look at co-benefits of BMPs to each of the CBP outcomes. This will help show habitat benefits within the WQ focused BMPs.
      * DiPasquale: There has been a recognition that we need to connect locally; sometimes WQ by itself doesn’t sell it. For example, Prince George’s County in MD recently started a Public, Private, Partnership (P3) Initiative and promoted it on jobs and economic development. Packaging is important as you can convince people based on what they are interested in locally.
    - Costanzo: The “special place” communication is a great conversation starter but the next step needs to be to ask their capacity. Many areas don’t have the capacity to perform the restoration and we want to be efficient in implementing.
  + Burkett: The new SWAPs have become more locally focused and shows the multiple benefits to habitat restoration. This connection has been made the group should look back to the SWAPs rather than reinvent the wheel.
* Slattery: The LCC continues to offer technical assistance on the implementation of these tools. It would be helpful to know who, across the GITs, could be an early adopter for us to strategically target assistance and possibly hold a workshop for this audience.
  + Scarfone: The NPS has a technical assistance program that may be a resource here.
* **ACTION**: Within the next year, the Habitat GIT will collaborate with interested partner organizations to get a project started using the RCOA tools and work with the CBP communications office to show how these tools are effective for holistic decision making.
  + Lovegreen: Upper Susquehanna Coalition is currently working under NFWF funding on seven HUC 12 watersheds selected based on the interests of the local communities. The RCOA tools could be incorporated into these communities’ decision making moving forward with the projects.
  + Landry: Riverkeeper organizations would be another great partnership here.
    - Slattery: The Campbell Foundation has offered to provide assistance financially for riverkeeper organizations.
* **ACTION**: Develop a list of members of other GITs who might be interested in using these tools within regions of priorities and work with them to find local implementers.
* **ACTION**: Phillips will work with Fuller to bring in water quality maps to the RCOA toolkit to take advantage of the water quality focus and try to include habitat benefits in the Phase III WIPs.
* Fuller: This meeting is the second time we’ve talked about the planning process; it seems an appropriate time to shift from topical planning topics to geographic organization.
* **ACTION**: HGIT staff will prepare a letter of appreciation to thank the NALCC for assistance on the RCOA project.

**Habitat & Fisheries Goal Teams Collaboration**, Kara Skipper & Paige Hobaugh

* Gina Hunt was introduced as the new Fish Habitat Coordinator. Gina brings an extensive background in fisheries management to her detail from MD DNR to the Bay Program. She will focus on support to the Habitat, Fisheries, and Healthy Watersheds GITs in revitalizing the Fish Habitat Action Team. Welcome, Gina!
* Kara and Paige are beginning a project to strengthen the knowledge of tidal wetland and shoreline impacts on the Chesapeake Bay and the species that inhabit it.
  + Tidal wetlands and shoreline habitat provide numerous ecosystem services to both native species and humans. They are economically and culturally important, especially so with climate change.
  + Tidal wetlands are a shared topic amongst a number of different workgroups and action teams. CBP’s Fish Habitat Action Team is in a position to convene and focus collaboratively on tidal wetlands to spotlight the importance of this habitat.
* Project scope:
  + Reach out to agencies currently conducting tidal wetland studies for relevant literature
  + Identify important results and utilize to form recommendations
    - An example is SERC’s shoreline hardening and watershed land use study
  + Provide results and recommendations to targeted audiences
  + The intended audiences include the Local Government Advisory Committee (LGAC), the CBP Management Board, Chesapeake Bay Sentinel Site Cooperative, and Coastal Zone Management.
* Discussion:
  + Hairston-Strang: In areas where wetlands are sparse, woody debris from forest buffers can be an important habitat.
  + Scarfone: The cost effectiveness of each of the habitat restoration types examined could be considered and would add to the project.
  + Landry: The SAV TS3 will include a synthesis chapter that will provide much of the legwork for SAV; an application of this information is developing a communication strategy to disseminate this further.
  + Conn: Verified Carbon Standard recently issued methodologies for generating carbon credits for tidal wetland restoration and will soon be examining the potential of living shorelines to prevent tidal wetland loss. These would be great additions to the literature review.
  + Jones: Should include thin layer deposition and BMP practices for managing lands immediately behind tidal marshes.
  + Clearwater: Encourages collaboration with the Wetland Workgroup and state regulatory agencies.
  + Whitehurst: VA MRC and VIMS present good collaborative opportunities.
  + Other agencies that should be involved: USGS, USACE, DoD, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution
  + Other target audiences: Climate Resiliency Workgroup, Chesapeake Bay Commission, Coastal States Organization, commercial or recreational fishing organizations,
* **ACTION**: Any feedback to help develop the scope of the Fish Habitat project should be sent to Kara and Paige, [kara.skipper@noaa.gov](mailto:kara.skipper@noaa.gov), [Hobaugh.paige@epa.gov](mailto:Hobaugh.paige@epa.gov)

**CBP Biennial Strategy Review System,** Dave Goshorn

* The Enhance Partnering, Leadership & Management Goal Implementation Team (GIT 6) is working to develop a process to adaptively manage achievement of our Bay Agreement Outcomes. The 2014 Watershed Agreement committed us to re-evaluate biennially to update strategies as necessary.
* The Habitat Goal Team is responsible for six outcomes, which are all included in the Biennial Strategy Review calendar.
  + Starting in January 2017, Management Board (MB) meetings will be dedicated to the biennial review system quarterly. The majority of these quarterly meetings will be spent fostering integrated outcome discussions, keying in on evaluating progress towards a subset of outcomes.
    - The remainder of the monthly MB meetings will remain as topic oriented calls/meetings, with availability for timely outcome discussions.
    - The subset of outcomes will be chosen by strategically grouping similar outcomes and relating the timing of the meeting with relevant indicator data. Categories are based on themes to improve cross-GIT collaboration and spread workload on individual GITs. Each outcome is involved in the process once throughout the two-year process.
  + A two-day biennial review will kick off the two-year cycle to conduct a high level retrospective program wide review to identify successes and failures.
  + Workgroups will be provided with a template to start the conversation of a progress check. GIT 6 plans to present this process to the MB on December 8th.
    - **ACTION**: The HGIT Coordinator will communicate to workgroup and action team leads when in the two-year timeframe they need to be prepared to complete the template and report progress.
* Saunders: The hope is that this process allows for aid to be sought from the MB in addressing issues in implementation and policy.

**Updating NFWF’s Conservation Priorities for the Chesapeake Bay Region: Habitat GIT Input and RCOA Alignment,** Jake Reilly

* The NFWF Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Fund delivers about $10-15 million a year in grants for restoration and conservation work to support the Chesapeake Bay Program’s Watershed Agreement. The funding largely is awarded to water quality improvements but NFWF has developed organizational priorities focused on habitat restoration and searches for opportunities to connect these goals.
* The Chesapeake Bay Business Plan drives funding priorities and strategically sets goals. The Business Plan was adopted in 2012 and it currently undergoing a refresh to reflect present priorities. Specific goals with the update are to:
  + Establish a revised conservations outcome for brook trout, river herring/fish passage, birds/waterfowl
  + Refine/establish interim metrics and supporting species-level strategies and actions
  + Refine targeted geographic priorities based on next-generation GIS and decision support tools (such as RCOA)
  + Define monitoring strategies for priority species (utilizing existing programs if possible)
* **ACTION**: This winter, Reilly will liaise with the Habitat GIT to gather insight on the goal/outcome-setting, identify restoration/conservation and monitoring strategies, and understand geographic priorities (including RCOA tool applications).
* **ACTION**: NFWF will present their refreshed Chesapeake Bay Business Plan in early 2017 for Habitat GIT and workgroups comments in late spring 2017.
* NFWF’s Business Plan is related to the USACE Comprehensive Plan in that some geospatial analysis is shared but the capabilities and thus the priorities of the two groups differ.
* Slattery: NFWF has a track record of success with identifying species to focus on for conservation which have garnered interest from other funders. With this in mind we should be open to identifying species outside of our specific outcomes as the conservation/restoration work to benefit those species will also benefit our goals. Charismatic species such as the diamondback terrapin can make our jobs much easier.

**Next Steps**

The GIT will meet again in the spring (April/May). Anyone who would like to host the meeting should contact [Jennifer\_greiner@fws.gov](mailto:Jennifer_greiner@fws.gov) and [runion.kyle@epa.gov](mailto:runion.kyle@epa.gov). Please be on the lookout for GIT communications in the meantime.

**Meeting Adjourned**