



BLACK DUCK OUTCOME

HABITAT GIT/ BLACK DUCK ACTION TEAM

2014 WATERSHED AGREEMENT: GOAL & OUTCOME LANGUAGE

BLACK DUCK OUTCOME:

By 2025, restore, enhance and preserve wetland habitats that support a wintering population of 100,000 black ducks, a species representative of the health of tidal marshes across the watershed. Refine population targets through 2025 based on best available science.

VITAL HABITATS GOAL:

Restore, enhance and protect a network of land and water habitats to support fish and wildlife, and to afford other public benefits, including water quality, recreational uses and scenic value across the watershed.

OUTCOME DISPOSITION ADVICE TO MANAGEMENT BOARD:

RECLASSIFY

We recommend the Black Duck Outcome be **reclassified as an output** to the Wetlands Outcome and broadened to **incorporate other waterbirds, not just black ducks**. There are surveys and data currently available to inform these metrics. This will allow for all stakeholders to work toward a common goal and for the output to support all types of wetlands. These species would still provide a species representative metric for the health of tidal marshes across the watershed.

Recent surveys indicate that the Chesapeake Bay watershed supports substantial bird populations. The 2025 Midwinter Waterfowl Survey reported approximately 705,300 waterfowl in Maryland's portion of the Bay, an increase from 593,200 in 2024 and above the five-year average of 624,300. This survey counted species such as mallards, black ducks, and Canada geese. However, broader studies have highlighted concerning trends in bird populations across North America, including the Chesapeake Bay area. Factors contributing to these declines include habitat loss, climate change, and other environmental pressures. Despite these challenges, the Chesapeake Bay remains a vital habitat for a wide variety of bird species, making it a prime location for birdwatching and hunting activities.

While specific harvest data for the Chesapeake Bay region is limited, national trends provide context. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2021 report indicated a rise in waterfowl hunter numbers to 1.04 million during the 2020–2021 season, up from 989,500 in the previous season. Correspondingly, the duck harvest increased by 15%, totaling approximately 11.14 million ducks. These national trends, combined with regional population increases, suggest that the Chesapeake Bay area continues to be a significant hub for waterfowl hunting. Hunters in the region benefit from the diverse and abundant waterfowl populations that the Bay supports. Funding from waterfowl hunting licenses contributes to wetland restoration in the Chesapeake Bay area, primarily through state-level initiatives. However,

specific statistics detailing the exact acreage restored solely from hunting license funds are not readily available. These funds are often pooled with other resources to support broader conservation efforts.

Since our last SRS review the BDAT has been meeting congruently with the Wetlands Workgroup to encourage synergies between the two outcomes. With these joint discussions it has been recognized that endemic wetlands species, such as black duck and other waterbird guilds, are important indicators of the wetlands outcome and ecosystem health. Waterbirds should be considered an output in the logic mapping framework for the Wetlands Outcome. For this reason, we recommend reclassifying a modified Black Duck outcome as an output within the Wetlands outcome.

What is the value add of the Bay Program involvement?

- Waterbirds as an output helps prioritize where wetland protection and restoration efforts are focused to provide maximum benefits.
- Forum for key stakeholders/managers in one place for cross coordination.
- Increases synergies and efficiencies across jurisdictions
- A living resource metric of the Bay Program that ties to public interests and values.

What is the value to the public?

The Chesapeake Bay region is a renowned destination for birdwatching, offering a diverse array of bird species and numerous hotspots for enthusiasts. The area provides habitat for over 200 species of birds, including waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors, and songbirds. The Chesapeake Bay region, particularly Maryland's Eastern Shore, has long been a vital area for waterfowl hunting, attracting numerous species of ducks, geese, and swans. Recent surveys indicate fluctuations in waterfowl populations, which directly impact hunting activities.