

Habitat Goal Implementation Team Strategic Framework

Presented to the HGIT Workgroup Chairs in August 2024 and to the HGIT Membership in October 2024

Introduction

On May 1st and 2nd, 2024, the Habitat Goal Implementation Team (HGIT) held their semi-annual meeting at the DC Department of Energy and Environment Office in Washington D.C. On the first day of the meeting was a presentation of the management strategy and a survey that was provided to all the participants to identify concerns and ultimately actions that the HGIT should focus on over the next six months and beyond. The results of the survey, discussions held during this meeting, and discussions from the ongoing workgroup meetings were used to inform changes to this document. Based on this feedback we have renamed the management strategy to strategic framework. Two categories of topics have continued to be the focus from these ongoing discussions. These categories are identified as guiding principles and priorities:

Guiding principles are qualitative and describe how we do our work, ensuring that the quality of the work we do is inclusive and has considered all aspects of the human element. The guiding principles include:

- Infusing social science and ecosystem service evaluation into relevant outcomes.
- Ensuring that we have incorporated Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ) considerations into workgroup and HGIT decisions.
- Coordinating and working across the other five Goal Implementation Teams (GITs), STAR, STAC and federal, state, and local groups/efforts to ensure we are leveraging resources towards common goals.

Priorities are measurable elements relative to the HGIT outcomes and include:

- *Near-term priorities:*
 - Participating in the partnership process from the [Executive Council Charge](#) to Evaluate Progress Towards the 2025 Agreement and Develop a Strategy on How to Move Beyond 2025
 - Implementing the Wetlands Action Plan
 - Improve outcome tracking and reporting for the Wetland, Black Duck, Stream Health, and Brook Trout Workgroups
 - Supporting current and future workgroup activities and science needs
- *Long-term priorities:*
 - Social Science and Ecosystem Services
 - Cross GIT Coordination
 - Warm Water Stressors in Streams Action Items
 - Wetlands and shallow water habitat opportunities
 - Creating habitat in the more developed portions of our Watershed
 - DEIJ and Accessibility

Near-term priorities are the actions we must work on and will drive much of the schedule and time of the HGIT over the next 6 months. *Long-term priorities* are actions that we will participate in, and that the Near-term strategies will support.

Near-term Priorities

Meeting the Executive Council Charge to Evaluate Progress Towards the 2025 Agreement and Develop a Strategy on How to Move Beyond 2025

One of the outcomes of the October 2022 Executive Council (EC) Meeting was a re-commitment to using the best available science to restore the Chesapeake Bay as we approach the 2025 Chesapeake Bay Agreement deadline and anticipate continued progress post-2025 (the current [Chesapeake Bay Agreement](#) covers June 16, 2014, to December 31, 2025). Although the Agreement ends in 2025, the partnership will continue beyond this date.

[The Executive Council charged the Principals' Staff Committee \(PSC\)](#) to report back to the Executive Council at the 2023 annual meeting with recommendations on how to best address and integrate new science and restoration strategies leading up to 2025.

The PSC completed their work and identified a series of recommendations in a [Charting-a-Course-to-2025-Report](#). These recommendations were reported out and accepted by the Executive Committee on October 19th, 2023. This report outlines a critical path forward that the HGIT will use to focus efforts, including:

Accelerate investments.

- Thanks to the American Rescue Plan Act, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and increased state investments, the Chesapeake Bay Program will accelerate restoration activities with a particular emphasis on addressing lagging outcomes.

Integrate emerging science and monitoring.

- Recent scientific reports and findings have provided further understanding of how the Chesapeake Bay and its surrounding watershed are responding to the implementation of best management practices (BMPs), impacts from climate change and a rise in environmental stewardship, to name a few. The Chesapeake Bay Program is already investigating as to how the findings in such recent reports as the Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response ([CESR](#)), [Rising Watershed and Bay Water Temperature Report](#) Chesapeake Bay Partnership Activities by Integrating Social Science and Enhancing the Chesapeake Bay Program Monitoring Networks (note: this is not an exhaustive list) can be integrated into the partnership's work. These are significant scientific findings that recommend an increased focus on geographic targeting, social science, robust monitoring networks, the environmentally and economically important shallow waters of the Bay and addressing rising water temperature implications, and as such will take time and careful planning to be fully represented in the next phase of Bay restoration. Where appropriate and possible, the partnership will integrate this emerging science now.

Fast-track action plans.

- Over the past few years and in recent months, several action plans have been put into place across the partnership. The Chesapeake Bay Program will lean harder into the implementation of these plans moving toward 2025. These include, but are not limited to, the jurisdictions' Phase III WIPs, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ) Strategy and Implementation Plan, state riparian buffer action strategies, Wetlands Action Plan and Climate Change Directive Workplan.

The HGIT supports this effort by looking for opportunities to implement the recommendations from the [Charting-a-Course-to-2025-Report](#) in several ways. Any funding opportunities are sent through e-mail to all appropriate workgroups. If workgroup members identify projects the HGIT leadership works to champion those efforts e.g., writing letters of support and providing technical support whenever possible. The HGIT also provides in-depth discussion on emerging science topics e.g., [CESR](#) discussion at the Fall HGIT meeting. Finally, the HGIT continues to be a leader in fast tracking the wetlands workshop Action Plan. (See Wetlands Outcome Attainment Workshop Action Plan Below).

At the 2024 annual EC meeting, the PSC will respond to the EC charge and report recommendations that continue to address new advances in science and restoration, along with a focus on our partnership for going beyond 2025. The Beyond 2025 (B25) Steering Committee was formed to take on this task of providing recommendations to transform the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership policies, programs, and projects to address existing and emerging challenges including the impact of climate change, development and nutrient sediment loads on the watershed and people across generations.

The B25 Workgroup completed a [draft report](#) that was available for public review from July 1st, 2024, through August 27th, 2024. Revisions may be made by the B25 Steering Committee after this period and a final B25 Steering Committee report will be provided to the PSC for consideration at their October 25, 2024, meeting. The PSC will use these recommendations to inform their decision and formal recommendations to EC in December 2024.

This report is broken down into two parts. In Part I of this report, the Steering Committee recommends that the EC affirm its continued commitment to meet the goals of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement and direct the PSC to consider amendments to the agreement's vision, principles, preamble, goals and outcomes to be considered at future meetings. It also recommends identifying ways to simplify and streamline the partnership's structure and processes. To further progress while addressing the latest scientific data and emerging challenges, the Steering Committee has identified several additional recommendations for improving efforts in the areas of Science, Conservation and Restoration, and Partnership. These additional recommendations, found in Part II of the report, require more detail and, in the Steering Committee's view, merit further exploration by the partnership. Many of the recommendations proposed by the Steering Committee in Part II can be pursued within the partnership's existing processes for prioritizing and

strategizing efforts.

Wetland Outcome Attainment Workshop and Action Plan

Throughout the summer of 2022, the Wetlands Outcome Attainment Steering Committee developed an agenda and conducted the *2022 Restoring the Wetlands of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Workshop*. This workshop was held virtually on August 2nd and 3rd, 2022. The final meeting minutes for this event were distributed in September and have been posted to the [CBP webpage for the event](#). In the late summer and early fall the Steering Committee met to develop an Action Plan to implement the vision established in the workshop. In October and November, the HGIT hosted a series of 7 jurisdictional-specific Office Hours meetings each month to develop the State and Federal Appendices to the Action Plan. The HGIT, in conjunction with state agencies, presented the Wetlands Action Plan to the Management Board in December 2022. The Action Plan was finalized in January 2023 and has been posted to the main [HGIT](#) and [Wetland Workgroup](#) webpages. Based on the conversation that went on prior to, during, and after the workshop, the HGIT felt there was a need to divide the work to tidal wetlands and nontidal wetlands. The HGIT has created two vice-chair positions for the Wetland Workgroup to better meet the unique needs of each wetland type. The Nontidal Vice-Chair will focus on achieving the wetland outcome in nontidal wetlands in the watershed and the Tidal Vice-Chair will focus on achieving the wetland outcome in tidal wetlands.

Improving Outcome Tracking and Reporting

The HGIT will continue to provide support to the EPA IT team and contractors to develop outcome tracking tools for HGIT outcomes. A new habitat analyst was hired in March of 2024 to specifically help with data analysis in the Habitat tracker. These tools will be used to update Chesapeake Progress. Chesapeake Progress was updated in January 2024 for wetlands using this tool. We are exploring how to expand this effort to incorporate Stream Health, Black Duck, and Brook Trout outcomes.

Supporting Current and Future Workgroup Activities

The HGIT Chairs, Coordinator and Staffer(s) will continue to support routine workgroup meetings, SRS Review, and development of the Logic and Action Plans and priorities outlined in the November 29th and 30th 2023 HGIT meeting workgroup updates (see meeting notes from the November 29th and 30th 2023 meeting notes). In addition, the HGIT will continue to support the 2021 and 2022 GIT funding projects.

Long-term Priorities:

Social Science and Ecosystem Services

- Incorporate Structured Decision-Making (SDM) into appropriate workgroup and HGIT decision process.
- The HGIT Coordinator, Chairs, and Staffer(s) will engage with the Bay Program to continue Social Science and Ecosystem Service training and discussions within the workgroups as information becomes available. Fostering Chesapeake Stewardship (GIT 5) will be developing a “*Chesapeake Bay Program Social Science Assessment and Integration Road Map Development*” tool. The road map will assist the workgroups in the integration of

social science with work plans. As this progress proceeds, we will ask that workgroups provide time on their agenda to receive updates and provide input into the development of this plan. In addition, the HGIT is exploring social science efforts at the bi-annual HGIT meeting.

- Work with Bay Program partners, including the CBP Ecosystem Service Team to incorporate appropriate recommendations/finding from the STAC Ecosystem Services Workshop report “[Using Ecosystem Services to Increase Progress Toward, and Quantify the Benefits of Multiple CBP Outcomes](#)” into our workgroups activities.
- Use community-based science and social marketing around living shorelines and the SAV Sentinel Site Monitoring Program. SAV workgroup GIT funding to support the development of a Sentinel Site monitoring using community led science.
- Fostering Chesapeake Stewardship (GIT 5) will be leading an ongoing project on “*Cultivating and Strengthening Partnerships with Underrepresented Stakeholders*” which should also be informative for work plan revisions within the HGIT. We will ensure that updates are provided to the workgroups as they become available and aid the workgroups in incorporating these updates in their work. The HGIT is currently working with Colmenar Consulting to identify ways of integrating underrepresented stakeholders in our work plans and meetings Colmenar Consulting is Bay Program contract to support DEIJ efforts in the Bay Program GIT’s and workgroups.

Cross GIT Coordination

- Look for and/or initiate action to improve the monitoring network, specifically to work with the STAR Team and Kristin Saunders to identify opportunities to leverage work and cross-GIT funding among all the GITs; identify workgroup monitoring needs to add to the “*Strategic Science and Research Framework*”; and align HGIT monitoring needs with assessment/improvement of monitoring networks.
- Work with other GITs and CBP partners on understanding and utilizing the multiple tools, information, and projects to target for various purposes and to create collaboration opportunities, e.g., GIS data and tools, Healthy Watersheds and Fish Habitat Assessments, Chesapeake Conservation Atlas, wetlands, and ecosystem services.
- Look for opportunities to reduce workgroup workload by leveraging actions across workgroups and GITs such that the HGIT is not relying on only a few active participants for all the work.
- Utilization of upcoming federal priorities and funding to drive habitat goals – Chesapeake WILD, EO 14008, American Jobs and Rescue Plans, and the Infrastructure Bill.
- Work with the Forestry Workgroup to find ways to integrate Forest Buffers and Tree Canopy outcome priorities with the Wetland, Stream, and Brook Trout outcomes.

Warm Water Stressors in Streams

- Utilizing STAC workshop recommendations, the HGIT will look for strategies to reduce thermal loadings on streams. This work will continue and be expanded to integrate throughout other GITs.
- Develop Brook Trout Pilot projects in Maryland and Pennsylvania to evaluate Brook Trout Refugia, including a potential STAC workshop.

Wetlands and Shallow Water Habitat

- Participate in EPA's coastal adaptation/blue carbon pilot.
- Support more aggressively the three GIT funded projects and find ways to integrate these project results into the Living Resource habitat tracker database and Bay Program indicators.
- Develop SAV sentinel site monitoring program, and support Sentinel Site Workshop

Creating Habitat

- Continue to use the Baltimore Rivers to Harbor Urban Refuge as a model to enhance habitat restoration in other urban areas. Coordinate federal, state, and local efforts for habitat restoration.
- Develop Social science strategy around recalcitrant dam owners to identify Fish Passage opportunities.

DEIJ and Accessibility

- Connecting people to nature by working to create habitat in more densely populated areas as well as rural landscapes, ensuring Equity and Inclusion across all communities and tribes in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.
- Ensure that HGIT workgroups continue to engage with the Diversity Workgroup to determine ways to integrate products to make progress on both fronts, including identifying underserved communities and working to address the issues they are facing, such as using bay wide and jurisdictional DEIJ tools and information sources.
- When drafting each workgroup's workplan, whenever possible the workgroups should consider evaluation of DEIJ impact with an appropriate management action.
- Explore how environmental literacy can help with incorporating social science and DEIJ into existing outcome workplans.
- Working with the Diversity Workgroup and Stakeholder Advisory Committee to actively seek out pilot projects and explore funding options for underserved groups and tribes looking to focus on habitat restoration.
- Work with the Communications Office to make the HGIT webpage more accessible to people with disabilities.