



FISH HABITAT OUTCOME

SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES GIT/FISH HABITAT ACTION TEAM

2014 WATERSHED AGREEMENT: GOAL & OUTCOME LANGUAGE

OUTCOME:

Continually improve effectiveness of fish habitat conservation and restoration efforts by identifying and characterizing critical spawning, nursery and forage areas within the Bay and tributaries for important fish and shellfish, and use existing and new tools to integrate information and conduct assessments to inform restoration and conservation efforts.

SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES GOAL:

Protect, restore and enhance finfish, shellfish and other living resources, their habitats and ecological relationships to sustain all fisheries and provide for a balanced ecosystem in the watershed and Bay

OUTCOME DISPOSITION ADVICE TO MANAGEMENT BOARD:

UPDATE & CONSOLIDATE

2. Consider if the Outcome is SMART, and specifically, whether the current outcome meets the definition of an outcome, as described in the 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement (“Agreement”), or if that outcome is an output or indicator.

This outcome scored poorly in meeting the criteria of a SMART goal according to ERG. The Fish Habitat Action team agreed with this assessment because the outcome was not very focused, it was too large in geographic scope and did not link to a specific management need. Nor was it timebound. However, high functioning fish habitat is important to fishery production and therefore local economies. As such, we believe it should remain an outcome but with more specific and measurable objectives.

3. Consider aspects of “what makes a good Outcome”.

More work needs to be done to make this outcome a “good outcome”, specifically by providing a clear objective and linking work to management needs. This outcome was challenging as the issues it raised (stressor to fish habitat and restoration needs) are outside the control of fishery managers. Therefore, to be successful this outcome required champions outside fishery management organizations and needed support from across the CBP partnership (for example, land use planners, water quality leads, local land owners). Through this outcome we were able to improve the science linking habitat change and conditions to fish impacts. We developed quantitative thresholds for hardened shorelines and ecological decline but are still working to get the research results applied to policy and planning decision making processes. Tying updated outcome language more directly to the TMDL and to specific key fish species could lead to clearer champions, partnerships, public involvement, and cross bay program collaboration.

4. Consider the challenges to and opportunities for achieving the outcome.

As noted, there were challenges connecting the science and new information on how changing habitat conditions affect fish to other management activities such as water quality improvement, restoration

projects and natural shoreline protection. There are also some gaps in the availability of fish and habitat data across the bay and particularly in shallow water. Either new data or other approaches to assess fish habitat given the data gaps are needed to better link fish habitat conditions with priority living resources and people. Additional resources to improve the science and to implement restoration projects is uncertain. There is an opportunity to advance this outcome through priority project proposed to the Management Board by the Water Quality and Sustainable Fisheries GIT. The project would score each of the 92 tidal Bay segments using fish and habitat criteria and could be used to guide water quality and habitat restoration actions. If approved, this project would likely be an output to an updated fish habitat outcome that could support enhancements to habitat condition, fish productivity and engage the CBP partnership more broadly in developing management strategies that seek to conserve and improve fish habitat.

5. Consider how the outcome relates or could relate to the Bay Agreement mission, vision, and themes/pillars.

Depends. If it focuses on just habitat then it could fall under Abundant Life and Vital Habitats Goal. If the focus becomes habitat to support fish productivity then it could remain under Sustainable Fisheries with connections to Vital Habitats, Water Quality and Climate Change.

6. Consider the timescale for completing the outcome (5, 10, 15 years). Determine if achieving the outcome is an incremental step or is it a final outcome.

Habitat loss across the bay is ongoing as a result of multiple stressors. The changes in fisheries as a result is less certain & may play on different timescales depending on the life history & habitat needs of different species. The approach here would be incremental. Step 1: (2-5 yrs) use existing science & assessment approaches to identify critical species & score habitat condition. Step 2: Communicate results & implications & integrate with other parts of the CBP partnership (3-7 yrs). Implement water quality & habitat conservation and restoration projects to address “high priority” areas (5yrs-longterm).

7. Consider resource needs and availability (high, medium, low).

Medium to High. Medium if the outcome is focused on science and information and high if it includes planning and implementing habitat restoration projects that enhance priority living resource areas. Additional resources are uncertain.

8. Consider the risk or unintended consequences of removing the Outcome.

Lower priority on assessing fish habitat. Less science-based guidance on where water quality & habitat restoration projects can best support living resources & potential decline in number of fish Bay produces.

9. What value is added by having the Chesapeake Bay Program work on the outcome?

Connections to other outcomes and priorities such as water quality and climate change. Using science results to guide restoration efforts. High functioning fish habitat is important to fishery production, and local economies, but conserving and restoring it in a strategic way is within the Bay program purview.

10. Consider how the Outcome, as written, benefits the public. Does the outcome reflect public input already received and have the potential to galvanize public support/engagement?

The outcome was never really connected to the public or management objectives. If it was more directly tied to other outcomes such as water quality or to specific species (e.g. striped bass, red drum, invasive species) it could galvanize more interest. New information on the value nearshore habitats provide to the public could be used to update the outcome and better engage people.