

Draft

Habitat Goal Implementation Team and Workgroup Management Strategy

October 2023

Introduction

On April 25th and 26th, 2023, the Habitat Goal Implementation Team (HGIT) held their semi-annual meeting. At the end of each day, an open discussion of the day's events was held to identify concerns and ultimately actions that the HGIT should focus on over the next six months and beyond. Two categories of items have continued to be the focus from these ongoing discussions at the semiannual meeting. 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 six Goal Implementation Teams (GITs), STAR, 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:*
 - Meeting 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
- *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 if time allows. The HGIT will make every effort to work on these long-term priorities, but these priorities may have to be sacrificed or pushed back if we are falling behind on our near-term priorities.

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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 our 2023 annual meeting with recommendations on how to best address and integrate new science and restoration strategies leading up to 2025. At the 2024 annual EC meeting, the PSC will prepare recommendations that continue to address new advances in science and restoration, along with a focus on our partnership for going beyond 2025. To help the PSC with these charges, two steering committees have been formed; the first group will address the steps being taken to achieve the current goals and outcomes that are lagging, and the second group will provide recommendations on how to proceed beyond 2025 in the next Chesapeake Bay agreement.

The HGIT workgroups are working with the HGIT steering committee to complete data analysis and provide information to the steering committees to ensure that the Bay Program will represent the progress and needs of the HGIT and associated workgroups. Primarily, the workgroups will support this effort by evaluating where they are at relative to the outcome, and whether the outcome needs to be changed.

Wetland Outcome Attainment Workshop and Action Plan

Throughout summer 2022, the Wetlands Outcome Attainment Steering Committee developed and implemented an agenda for 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 Non-tidal Vice-Chair will focus on achieving the wetland outcome in non-tidal wetlands in the watershed and the Tidal Vice-Chair will focus on achieving the wetland outcome in tidal wetlands.

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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. These tools will be used to update Chesapeake Progress. We expect the update to be completed by October 2023. If successful, the tool will later be expanded to other indicators as appropriate.

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. In addition, the HGIT will continue to support the 2021 and 2022 GIT funding projects.

Long-term Priorities:

Social Science and Ecosystem Services

- Structured Decision-Making (SDM) looks for ways to incorporate the priorities into a GIT Funding proposal to consider shallow water habitat in all the workgroups.
- The HGIT Coordinator, Chairs, and Staffer(s) will engage with the Bay Program to continue Social Science and Ecosystem Service trainings 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.
- Work with Bay Program partners, including the CBP Ecosystem Service Team (led by Bo Williams), to identify when Bay Program ecosystem service projects are available. Incorporate appropriate recommendations/finding from the upcoming STAC Ecosystem Services Workshop report into workgroup activities.
- Use community-based science and social marketing around living shorelines and the SAV Sentinel Site Monitoring Program.
- 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. Ensure that updates are provided to the workgroups as they become available. Aid the workgroups in incorporating these updates in their work.

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,

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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.
- Synthesis/synergy across the various habitat/watershed assessment approaches – stream health, healthy watersheds, fish habitat assessment. Look for opportunities to pursue GIT-funded projects or STAC workshops.
- Identify a priority place to develop a GIT funding proposal for place-based habitat restoration/network building/social sciences/DEIJ.
- 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 common strategies to reduce thermal loadings on streams. This work will continue and be expanded to integrate throughout other GITs.

Wetlands and Shallow Water Habitat

- Participate in EPA's coastal adaptation/blue carbon pilot.
- Support more aggressively the four GIT funded projects and find ways to integrate these project results into the Living Resource tracker database and Bay Program indicators.

Creating Habitat in the More Developed Portions of Our Watershed

- 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.
- Continue to integrate social science work into the Bay Program to inspire behavior change and public constituency support. We will be looking for ways to communicate our outcomes or refine outcomes based on social science.

DEIJ and Accessibility

- Connecting people to nature by working to create habitat in 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.
- Working with the Diversity Workgroup and Stakeholder Advisory Committee for sustainable habitats, we will continue to explore options to support horticultural and landscape job training to assist with wetland restoration and stream buffers.

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- Looking for pilot projects and funding (this crosses with the DEIJ action above).
- 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.

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