New Agreement Public Comments (Feb-Mar 2014)
Fisheries GIT Response
April 3, 2014

POSSIBLE CHANGES TO FISHERIES LANGUAGE

Key:
Black text=current Agreement language
Red=changes proposed by public, Ex Comm, or Fisheries GIT Staff
Blue=Origin of proposed changes

Introductory Language:
Habitat loss, poor water quality, non-native and invasive species, toxics and fishing pressure continue to threaten the sustainability of the Chesapeake Bay's fisheries. Sustaining fish and shellfish populations contributes to a strong economy and maritime culture and supports a healthy ecosystem for all Bay watershed residents.

Rationale:
-Above addition suggested in the public comments.

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.

Rationale: No change.

Blue Crab Abundance Outcome:
Maintain a sustainable blue crab population based on the current 2012 target of 215 million adult females and continue to refine population targets through 2025 based on best available science.
*Evaluation and refinement of the population target will align with Baywide stock assessments that are conducted approximately every five years subject to available resources.

Rationale:
-Multiple public comments suggest adding language that specifies how often the population target will be refined - *the Fisheries GIT Executive Committee will consider whether this information is necessary in the outcome statement or if just appropriate for the Management Strategy.

Blue Crab Management Outcome:
Improve the ability to manage for a ~~stable~~ viable and productive crab ~~population and~~ fishery by working with the industry, recreational crabbers, and other stakeholders to improve commercial and recreational harvest accountability. By 2018, evaluate the establishment of a Bay-wide, allocation-based management framework with annual levels set by the jurisdictions for economic vitality and harvest accountability. ~~that will provide stability for crabbing businesses and accountability of the harvest for each jurisdiction.~~

Rationale:
-The Ex Comm agreed that the outcome language should be revised to more accurately reflect the intent of the outcome. DNR provided the above revision.
-Fisheries GIT staff suggest removing "population" from the language as this outcome is for the fishery specifically. The population is addressed in the separate abundance outcome.
-Multiple public comments suggest including a specific timeframe or deadline in this outcome. Fisheries GIT staff propose 2018 to complete the allocation framework evaluation. This would allow 3.5 years after the Agreement is signed.

Oyster Outcome:
Restore native oyster habitat and populations in 10 tributaries by 2025 and ensure their protection to recover the benefits of fish habitat and water quality improvements that healthy oyster reefs provide. *Restoration efforts are currently guided by the Oyster Metrics that define success and by a tributary-restoration strategy originally adopted in the Chesapeake Bay Executive Order.

Rationale:
-Multiple public comments stated that this outcome should state how restoration success would be measured - *the Fisheries GIT Executive Committee will consider whether mention of the Oyster Metrics is necessary in the outcome statement or if just appropriate for the Management Strategy.
-Public comments suggest adding language to emphasize the protection of existing oyster reefs. Fisheries GIT staff propose committing to protect the newly restored reefs.

Forage Fish Outcome:
By 2016, develop a strategy for assessing the forage fish base available as food for predatory species in the Chesapeake Bay.

Rationale:
-No change.
-Multiple public comments suggest that this outcome focus on menhaden specifically, but the Fisheries GIT agreed that this outcome should focus on a broader suite of species that comprise the forage fish base. These conversations took place last year when this outcome was developed and at the December 2013 full Fisheries GIT meeting.

Fish Habitat Outcome:
~~Continue to~~ By 2018, identify and characterize critical spawning, nursery and forage areas within the Bay ~~and tributaries~~ watershed important for fish and shellfish so that management strategies can be enhanced to improve fish health and recreational opportunities. ~~and use existing and new tools to integrate information and conduct assessments to inform restoration and conservation efforts.~~

Rationale:
-The Fisheries GIT Chair and Coordinator worked with USFWS/Habitat GIT and USGS to revise this outcome to be more inclusive of CBP partner and public comments to address freshwater health.
-Public comments in this outcome and suggest adding a timeframe/deadline for a more measurable outcome. 2018 was suggested as a deadline for completing habitat and fish health assessments.
NOTE: This outcome would be a joint effort of the Fisheries and Habitat GITs.

Freshwater Fish Outcome:
(Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper; Stewards of the Lower Susquehanna)
Dedicate needed resources to find the causes of the disease and declines in freshwater species in Chesapeake tributaries, including the recreationally valuable smallmouth bass. Implement solutions to these problems by 2020.

(Department of Interior) "Understand the causes of freshwater fish kills and disease so management strategies can be developed to increase their populations and improve health".

Rationale:
-Department of Interior and Lower Susquehanna stakeholder organizations expressed the need for a freshwater fisheries outcome and made the above suggestions.
-**Fisheries GIT staff, USFWS/Habitat GIT, and USGS recommend revising the fish habitat outcome (see above) to include freshwater health instead of adding a new freshwater fish outcome.**

Additional Considerations for the Fisheries GIT Executive Committee:

Outcome suggestions from public:

- Fishery managers develop policies, plans and a database to allow management of finfish species from an ecosystem perspective.
- Develop population targets for finfish species that support a robust Chesapeake Bay ecosystem.

Rationale:
-The above outcome suggestions were submitted by a public individual who wants to see specific mention of ecosystem-based management specifically for finfish species.
-Multiple public comments want to see specific mention of striped bass, shad, and herring in the Agreement because they are iconic Bay species.
-DNR comment: Perhaps we need an outcome addressing the management of important migratory species