

VITAL HABITATS GOAL

Black Duck Outcome



2025 PROGRESS
OFF COURSE

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.

PROGRESS AS OF 2021: The [Black Duck Outcome](#) is off course. While a target and baseline have been established, the data needed to track restored habitat is lacking. Data support is needed to identify a better tracking method to measure tidal wetland acreage (the primary habitat for black ducks). As this outcome is closely tied to the [Wetlands Outcome](#), any challenges associated with the restoration and implementation of wetlands also apply to the Black Duck Outcome. Therefore, it is assumed the trajectory is off course due to the lack of available data.

BACKGROUND: The Chesapeake Bay region supports the largest portion of eastern North America's wintering black duck population and preserving its habitat is critical to the species' long-term sustainability. Black ducks are an important indicator species, so restoration of their habitat will also benefit other waterfowl who winter in the watershed. The target of supporting a wintering population of 100,000 black ducks is based on the restoration target established by the [North American Waterfowl Management Plan](#) for the entire North American continent, which is 640,000 black ducks (established in 1990, revised in 2004). Experts agree that by achieving the restoration of habitat to support 100,000 black ducks will significantly contribute to the larger continental goal. The [Atlantic Coast Joint Venture](#) (ACJV) recently completed a [decision support tool](#) to help identify the exact number of acres to protect, restore or maintain at the small watershed scale. The tool allows land managers to identify the best way to achieve black duck goals throughout the watershed. This information is helping to inform a new habitat-based indicator (in addition to tracking population numbers when made possible by individual states) to better reflect the outcome language in the *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*.

BASELINE: From 2009 to 2011, 47,269 black ducks were noted in the Chesapeake Bay region, achieving 47% of the goal to support 100,000 black ducks. Based on the ACJV's decision support tool, and ongoing work to develop a new indicator, the available black duck habitat in 2014 measured 566,477 acres, while the amount needed to support 100,000 black ducks was estimated to be 717,749 acres.

DATA SOURCE: The abundance and distribution of black ducks in the Chesapeake Bay watershed are measured through the annual [Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey](#), conducted by state agencies. The survey was originally conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, but they discontinued data collection in 2016. Due to this, the long-term monitoring of black ducks within the Bay region is not possible. The Chesapeake Bay Program is working on developing an accurate method of tracking acreage of suitable black duck habitat as a new indicator.