

DRAFT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

FISH HABITAT

GOAL: Sustainable Fisheries

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.

CURRENT EFFORTS

- Existing information such as *The Habitat Requirements for Chesapeake Bay Living Resources* (1991), state wildlife action plans and various spatial tools include general maps of fish habitat for many species. However, the maps do not characterize the “quality” of these areas.
- A primary component of the management approach is to build on existing efforts by developing criteria that describes high-quality fish habitat. The criteria can be used to identify areas that meet the criteria, quantify the areas and target them for management action.
- Each of the jurisdictions has projects underway to assess fish habitat for respective priority species. This strategy will draw on those ongoing efforts to build a more comprehensive plan to fill the following gaps.

MANAGEMENT APPROACHES

- Identify and prioritize threats to fish habitat at the jurisdictional and Bay wide scale and propose actions to manage the threats.
- Compile and identify available data on habitats, habitat vulnerabilities, and fish utilization at different life stages to develop a set of criteria for identifying areas of high-value fish habitat.
- Map and target high-value fish habitat for improved conservation and restoration. Develop spatial tools for priority habitats and species to inform management decisions. Develop thresholds (a minimum area of fish habitat by region) to set clear fish habitat conservation targets.
- Communicate importance of fish habitat to general public and local community leaders by engaging in a conversation about the tradeoffs associated with competing uses of land and waters.
- Evaluate ways to enhance fish habitat protection by reviewing examples from other regions and actively engaging with the Atlantic Coast Fish Habitat Partnership.

GAPS

Science

- Need a better understand how habitats contribute to fisheries production
- Assessing how environmental factors affect fish spawning, larval development, and recruitment of adults to the fishery
- Identifying and quantifying areas of “high-quality” fish habitat suggesting which waters are most important to critical life stages for fish
- Integrating and synthesizing existing data and understanding into decision support tools and models
- Valuation of ecosystem services and value of habitats supporting high-priority species
- Understanding the limits of restoration

Management

- Multiagency coordination, including at the local level
- Clear regional and local goals and metrics
- Regulatory authority to protect critical fish habitat
- Public communication on the threats posed by loss of habitat
- Involvement of local communities, specifically inclusion of fish habitat protections in local planning efforts



For the full draft management strategy, visit: www.chesapeakebay.net/managementstrategies