

NOAA is happy to be a member of the Citizen Stewardship workgroup and we look forward to partnering to see this work move forward. In addition to those opportunities already listed in the Citizen Stewardship work plan for the NOAA Choptank Habitat Focus Area, dual benefits could be served by using the Choptank region as a specific geography to first test different scales of social indicators and behavioral surveys, and innovative credited outreach and engagement efforts. NOAA has been actively engaging with conservation organizations in the Choptank region to better understand and align their efforts by creating a shared vision for projects for the area. A key part of this effort will be to better understand and engage with different sectors and communities in the Focus Area.

Outreach and engagement efforts, especially behavior change initiatives and behavioral surveys, are particularly location-specific. The Choptank region offers a focused geography based on one major river basin that can be scaled up or down to multiple levels: regional, county, municipality, river basin and sub-river basin, and from river headwaters in Delaware to main stem in Maryland creating multi-state stewardship evaluation opportunities. The Choptank region also offers several different community sectors that are important within the Bay watershed for testing new behavioral index and outreach methodologies, including watermen, farmers, varying ethnicities, rural land owners, and stakeholders in the tourism and recreation sector.

The Choptank Habitat Focus Area work is in partnership with several Chesapeake Bay Program partners, conservation organizations, universities, local governments, and businesses. This factor would benefit the Citizen Stewardship Workgroup by allowing them to form a case study in a historically significant region to the Chesapeake Bay in gathering information on what stewardship engagement efforts have occurred, which of them have proved successful or unsuccessful, form recommendations on how to improve those efforts, and use this information to inform the Stewardship Index.

With a focus on community assessments to inform outreach and engagement opportunities to achieve a more measurable and intentional collective impact by all agencies and organizations working in the region, the Choptank Habitat Focus Area could experience significant added benefit from the implementation of Stewardship Index, outreach, and volunteer cultivation efforts by the Citizen Stewardship Workgroup. NOAA's commitment to the Choptank Habitat Focus Area is guaranteed only for the next 3 to 5 years, and it would benefit from the Workgroup geographically focusing their work in the Choptank region during the same time period.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,
Shannon

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