**Habitat Goal Implementation Team and Workgroup Management Strategy**

March 2022

**Introduction**

On November 9th and 10th 2021, 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 their energy on over the next six months and beyond. Two categories of priorities have emerged from these ongoing discussions at the semiannual meeting. These categories are identified as indirect priorities and direct priorities.

*Indirect priorities* are qualitative in 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 indirect priorities include:

* Infusing Social Science and Ecosystem Service valuation into our work
* Ensuring that we have considered 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

*Direct priorities* are measurable quantities relative to the HGIT outcomes and include:

* Shallow water habitat conflicts
* Incorporating climate change into workgroup activities (e.g., thermal changes in streams, wetland impacts due to sea level rise)
* More focus on creating habitat in the urban portions of our watershed
* Improving outcome tracking and reporting for wetlands, black duck, stream health, and brook trout workgroups
* Developing actions/strategies to enhance the scope and scale of conservation/restoration actions and coordination with relevant decision makers who can help mitigate watershed-scale drivers of detrimental impacts to wetlands, black duck, and brook trout

**Indirect priorities**

*Social Science and Ecosystem Services*

The consensus from the spring 2021 HGIT meeting was to support incorporating social science and ecosystem services into the workgroup products. However, there was also clear concern that the workgroups did not necessarily have the skill set that would allow them to be successful in this task without additional assistance. Most of the items below are still in development and we will provide updates at the HGIT Spring 2022 Meeting as they are available.

*Social Science and Ecosystem Services Action Item*

* The HGIT Coordinator, Chairs, and Staffers 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” expected to be available by late summer or early fall 2022. 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.
* Develop an analysis or process that allows the integration of ecosystem services, social science and outcome issues into workgroup actions/decisions.
* 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.
* Identify expertise that can help the workgroups understand how to use these products and support the Wetland Workgroup-led STAC workshop systems-approach to BMP crediting. Use community-based science and social marketing around living shorelines and the SAV Sentinel Site Monitoring Program.

*Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ)*

On August 18th, 2020, the Executive Committee signed the DEIJ Action Plan. As part of this plan the Bay Program has put a team together to develop a strategy for incorporating DEIJ throughout the Bay Program. The HGIT has embraced this challenge and has agreed to identify strategies to infuse DEIJ issues into our work.

*DEIJ Action Item*

The HGIT Coordinator, Chairs, and Staffers will engage with the Bay Program to continue DEIJ trainings and discussions within the workgroups as information becomes available. (<https://www.chesapeakebay.net/who/group/diversity_equity_inclusion_and_justice_action_team>)

* Work with the DEIJ Action Team to identify steps to incorporate DEIJ strategies into workplans, and provide guidance to workgroups on how to bring this and social science into physical science-based workplans.
* Include relevant ideas as workgroups come up for workplan revisions and share findings.
* When drafting their 2-year workplans workgroups should consider evaluation of DEIJ impact with an appropriate management action, whenever possible.
* 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 workplan revisions. Ensure that updates are provided to the workgroups as they become available after February 2022. Aid the workgroups in incorporating these updates in their work.
* Ensure that HGIT workgroups continue to engage the DEIJ Action Team and CBP ecosystem service team to determine ways to integrate products to make progress on both fronts, including identifying underserved communities and the issues they are facing, such as using bay wide and jurisdictional DEIJ tools and information sources (e.g., Chesapeake Bay Environmental Justice and Equity Dashboard) available in MD, PA, and other geographies.
* Explore how environmental literacy can help with incorporating social science, social marketing, and DEIJ into existing action plans.
* Working with the Diversity workgroup and Citizen Advisory Committee to explore funding options for underserved groups looking to focus on habitat restoration. E.g., integrating formerly incarcerated people into horticultural and landscape training to assist with wetland restoration and stream buffers. Looking for pilot projects and funding.

C*ross GIT Coordination*

The HGIT Coordinator, Chairs, and Staffers will engage with the Bay Program to continue to look for and identify opportunities for Cross GIT collaborations.

*Cross GIT coordination Action Items:*

* 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 (especially new ones) and projects to target for various purposes and to create collaboration opportunities, e.g., GIS data and tools, Healthy Watersheds and Fish Habitat Assessments, Chesapeake Conservation Atlas, Structured Decision Making, USGS Chesapeake Science Strategy (Theme 2) and assessment of climate impacts on SAV (GIT-funding project) and wetlands.
* 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 Forestry workgroup to find ways to integrate Forest Buffers and Tree Canopy outcome priorities with wetlands restoration, stream and Brook trout restoration outcomes.

**Direct Priorities**

*Outcome tracking and Reporting*

HGIT Steering Committee is working with EPA Bay Program to develop a tracking system to meet HGIT outcomes. The Wetlands Workgroup is the first workgroup to try this effort. Once we have a draft of the newly developed reporting tool, we will share with the Brook Trout, Stream Health, and Black Duck workgroups to modify the product to meet each workgroup’s reporting outcomes.

*Shallow Water Habitat, Conflicts, and Uses*

One of the conflicts that was discussed in the meeting was the shallow water habitat conflict between marshes, living shorelines, submerged aquatic vegetation, and Aquaculture. Sometimes there is competing interest and greater understanding of the issue is needed to help decision makers to prioritize when necessary.

The HGIT will host a cross-workgroup/GIT (SAV and Wetlands) meeting to discuss specific conflict issues and prioritize restoration areas for competing interest, potential unintended consequences, and co-benefits across the watershed. Identify specific conflicts and approaches to resolve them. We will be looking to work with workgroups to identify conflicts and potential solutions by spring 2022.

*Climate Change*

1. *Warm Water Stressor in Streams*

Increasing temperatures of streams has been a concern that several of the work groups have shared, including the Brook Trout Workgroup, Fish Passage Workgroup, Stream Health Workgroup, and Wetlands Workgroup. The Healthy Watersheds GIT is investigating strategies to reduce thermal loadings of streams as well.

*Warm Water Stressor in Streams Action Items:*

* + The first part of a STAC workshop titled *Rising Watershed and Bay Water Temperatures—Ecological Implications and Management Responses* was held on January 12th, 2022, with some participation on the project team from HGIT workgroup chairs. When available, report and recommendations from the workshop should be shared with the HGIT and workgroups to determine if there are actionable recommendations.
  + Utilizing STAC workshop recommendations, the HGIT will host a meeting between interested workgroups and the Healthy Watersheds GIT to look for common strategies to reduce thermal loadings on streams by the fall of 2022.

1. *Wetlands*

Concerns over climate change impacts to both nontidal and tidal wetlands are growing. Hydraulic and hydrologic changes related to precipitation patterns, and the effects of SLR, subsidence and shoreline protection practices, will be altering the presence, type, and functions of wetlands in the Bay watershed.

*Wetlands Action Items:*

* HGIT is helping to prepare workshop(s) to identify and overcome barriers that are preventing us from attaining the outcomes. The workshops are scheduled for July 2022, and as part of these workshops, the barrier of understanding and implementing successful marsh migration techniques as a solution to climate change and sea level rise will be a topic.
* Should we add the coastal adaptation/blue carbon project in here?

*Urban Opportunities for Habitat Restoration*

Many of the outcomes tied to Bay Program goals for habitat are on agricultural and rural lands. There may be untapped potential for achieving some of these outcomes through urban habitat restoration.

Urban Opportunities for Habitat Restoration Action Item

The HGIT will solicit interest from workgroup members (and other GITs) to identify potential opportunities for habitat restoration in urban areas, and what tools and data are available to identify places, issues, and groups to work with. This will need to include many of the aspects of DEIJ, social science and ecosystem services.

* Use the Baltimore Rivers to Harbor Urban Refuge as a model to see if we can enhance habitat restoration in other urban areas. Coordinate federal, state, and local efforts for habitat restoration.
* Integration of social science into the Bay Program to inspire behavior change and public constituency support
* Working with the Diversity workgroup and Citizen Advisory Committee to explore options for integrating formerly incarcerated people into horticultural and landscape training to assist with wetland restoration and stream buffers. Looking for pilot projects and funding (this crosses with DEIJ action above).

**Other items for Workgroup Chairs to consider:**

1. Monitoring – Scott suggested the time is ripe for Habitat GIT to pull together its monitoring needs since the focus seemed to be more and more on WQ.
2. Others?

*APPENDIX: POTENTIAL STRATEGIES* (**tbd)**

* How to take better advantage of partnerships/networks; or start new ones?
* The need to better coordinate federal, state, and local efforts for habitat restoration
* Integration of social science into the Bay Program to inspire behavior change and public constituency support
* Utilization of upcoming federal funding to drive habitat goals – Chesapeake WILD, EO 14008, American Jobs and Rescue Plans
* Cross-GIT/outcome collaboration to better utilize available resources and make connections among priorities and research needs:
  + Healthy Watersheds Assessment and Fish Habitat Assessment
  + USGS Chesapeake Science Strategy (Theme 2) and assessment of climate impacts on SAV (GIT-funding project)
  + Aligning HGIT monitoring needs with assessment/improvement of monitoring networks
  + How do we utilize the multiple available tools to target for different purposes?
    - Working session with GIS experts to try out these tools
* The creation of partnerships and networks, especially among technical service providers, and with people/communities who have historically been excluded from this work and not had “a seat at the table” (DEIJ efforts)
  + Need to consider costs and funding for collaborative work