

# Habitat Goal Implementation Team and Workgroup Management Strategy

Presented to HGIT Chairs in March 2023, and to HGIT Membership in April 2023

## Introduction

On November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022, 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 continued to be the focus 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 evaluation into our work.
- Ensuring that we have incorporated 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:

- Strategic decision-making and shallow water habitat opportunities.
- Developing a strategy for achieving the Wetland outcome.
- 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.
- Improve outcome tracking and reporting for the wetland, black duck, stream health, and brook trout workgroups.
- Supporting current and future workgroup activities. Develop 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, submerged aquatic vegetation, streams, brook trout and fish passage.

Because of the decreased staffing capacity and complex nature of many of the actions discussed in the Fall meeting, the HGIT has developed two priority categories to manage the workload. Near-term priorities are the actions we must work on and will drive much of the schedule and time of the HGIT over the next 6 months. Long-term priorities are actions that we will participate in if time allows. The HGIT will make every effort to work on these long term priorities, but these priorities may have to be sacrificed or pushed back if we are falling behind on our near-term priorities. If an action is not identified in this plan, the HGIT will not take on the action as a new priority until one or more of the near-term priorities have been achieved.

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A second staffer will join the HGIT in March 2023. As the Staffer gets up to speed, we expect some of the Long-term items to shift back to near-term priorities.

### **Near-term Priorities**

The Near-term Priorities include:

- Structured Decision-Making (SDM) and shallow water opportunities.
- Wetlands Outcome Attainment and implementation of the Wetlands Workshop Action Plan.
- Improving outcome tracking and reporting for the wetland, black duck, stream health, and brook trout workgroups.
- Supporting current and future workgroup activities.

### **Structured Decision-Making (SDM)**

At the Spring 2022 HGIT Meeting, Mike Runge presented on how to use SDM for complex decisions. After Mike's presentation, we hosted small breakout groups to identify potential SDM projects that could be pursued through GIT Funding. Seventy-five ideas/issues were identified in the Spring Meeting that may be eligible for developing into GIT funded ideas. In August and September 2022, the HGIT developed a GIT funding proposal for consideration in the 2022 GIT funding cycle. Unfortunately, the proposal was not funded. HGIT is working with Mike Runge, Kristin Saunders, and Carin Bisland to find alternate sources of funding to support this effort.

### **Wetland Outcome Attainment Workshop and Action Plan**

Throughout summer 2022, the Wetlands Outcome Attainment steering committee developed and implemented an agenda for the 2022 Restoring the Wetlands of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Workshop. This workshop was held virtually on August 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>. The final meeting minutes for this event were distributed in September and have been posted to the [CBP webpage for the event](#). In the late summer and early fall the Steering Committee met to develop an Action Plan to implement the vision established in the workshop. In October and November, the HGIT hosted a series of 7 jurisdictional-specific Office Hours meetings each month to develop the State and Federal Appendices to the Action Plan. The HGIT, in conjunction with state agencies, presented the Wetlands Action Plan to the Management Board in December 2022. The Action Plan was finalized in January 2023 and has been posted to the main [HGIT](#) and [Wetland Workgroup](#) webpages. Based on the conversation that went on prior to during and after the workshop the HGIT felt there was a need to divide the work to tidal wetlands and nontidal wetlands. The HGIT has created two vice-chair positions for the Wetland Workgroup to better meet the unique needs of each wetland type. The non-tidal Vice-Chair will focus on achieving the wetland outcome in non-tidal wetlands in the watershed. The tidal Vice-Chair will focus on achieving the wetland outcome in tidal wetlands.

### **Improving outcome tracking and reporting**

The HGIT will continue to provide support to the EPA IT team and contractors to develop outcome tracking tools for HGIT outcomes. We have started with wetlands and black duck and are working

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with Ducks Unlimited and The Nature Conservancy to Beta test the new database and compare it to the outputs from the existing database and the Bay Barometer. We expect the tool to be live by the end of April 2023. The tool will later be expanded to other indicators as appropriate.

### **Supporting current and future Workgroup activities.**

The HGIT Chairs, Coordinator and Staffer(s) will continue to support routine workgroup meetings, SRS Review, and development of the Logic and Action Plan. In addition, the HGIT will continue to support the 2021 and 2022 GIT funding projects.

### **Long-term Priorities:**

As we approach full staffing, we will begin to explore ways to integrate more aggressively these Long-term priorities into the HGIT work.

### **Indirect priorities:**

#### *Social Science and Ecosystem Services*

- The HGIT Coordinator, Chairs, and Staffer(s) 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*” tool expected to be available by late summer or winter/spring 2023. 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.
- Use community-based science and social marketing around living shorelines and the SAV Sentinel Site Monitoring Program.

#### *DEIJ*

- Include relevant ideas as workgroups come up for workplan revisions and share findings.
- When drafting each workgroup’s 2-year workplan, whenever possible the workgroups should consider evaluation of DEIJ impact with an appropriate management action.
- 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 work plan revisions. Ensure that updates are provided to the workgroups as they become available. 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 working to address the

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issues they are facing, such as using bay wide and jurisdictional DEIJ tools and information sources.

- Explore how environmental literacy can help with incorporating social science, social marketing, and DEIJ into existing action plans.
- Working with the Diversity Workgroup and Citizens Advisory Committee to actively seek out pilot projects and explore funding options for underserved groups looking to focus on habitat restoration.
- Work with Communication office to make HGIT web page more accessible to people with disability.

### *Cross GIT Coordination*

- 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 information, 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, wetlands, and ecosystem services.
- 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 the Forestry Workgroup to find ways to integrate Forest Buffers and Tree Canopy outcome priorities with the wetland, stream, and brook trout outcomes.

### **Direct Priorities**

#### *Warm Water Stressors in Streams Action Items:*

- Utilizing STAC workshop recommendations, the HGIT will look for common strategies to reduce thermal loadings on streams. This work will continue and be expanded to integrate throughout other GITs.

#### *Wetlands*

- Participate in EPA’s coastal adaptation/blue carbon pilot. In addition, we hope to support more aggressively the four GIT funded projects and find ways to integrate these project results into the Living resource tracker database and Bay Program indicators

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### *Creating Habitat in the Urban Portions of our Watershed*

- Continue to 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.
- Continue to integrate social science work into the Bay Program to inspire behavior change and public constituency support. We will be looking for ways to communicate our outcomes or refine outcomes based on social science.
- Working with the Diversity Workgroup and Citizens Advisory Committee for sustainable habitats, we will continue to explore options to support horticultural and landscape job training to assist with wetland restoration and stream buffers. Looking for pilot projects and funding (this cross with DEIJ action above).