

# Habitat Goal Implementation Team and Workgroup Management Strategy

Presented to the HGIT Chairs in March 2024 and to the HGIT Membership in May 2024

## Introduction

On November 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023, the Habitat Goal Implementation Team (HGIT) held their semi-annual meeting at the USGS Eastern Ecological Science Center at Leetown Research Laboratory in Leetown West Virginia. 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 on over the next six months and beyond. Two categories of items have continued to be the focus from these ongoing discussions at the semiannual meeting. These categories are identified as guiding principles and priorities:

*Guiding principles* are qualitative and describe 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 guiding principles include:

- Infusing Social Science and Ecosystem Service evaluation into relevant outcomes.
- 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.

*Priorities* are measurable elements relative to the HGIT outcomes and include:

- *Near-term priorities:*
  - Meeting the Executive Council Charge to Evaluate Progress Towards the 2025 Agreement and Develop a Strategy on How to Move Beyond 2025
  - Implementing the Wetlands Action Plan
  - Improve outcome tracking and reporting for the Wetland, Black Duck, Stream Health, and Brook Trout Workgroups
  - Supporting current and future workgroup activities
- *Long-term priorities:*
  - Social Science and Ecosystem Services
  - Cross GIT Coordination
  - Warm Water Stressors in Streams Action Items
  - Wetlands and shallow water habitat opportunities
  - Creating habitat in the more developed portions of our Watershed
  - DEIJ and Accessibility

*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, and that the Near-term strategies will support.

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### Near-term Priorities

#### ***Meeting the Executive Council Charge to Evaluate Progress Towards the 2025 Agreement and Develop a Strategy on How to Move Beyond 2025***

One of the outcomes of the October 2022 Executive Council (EC) Meeting was a re-commitment to using the best available science to restore the Chesapeake Bay as we approach the 2025 Chesapeake Bay Agreement deadline and anticipate continued progress post-2025 (the current [Chesapeake Bay Agreement](#) covers June 16, 2014, to December 31, 2025). Although the Agreement ends in 2025, the partnership will continue beyond this date.

[The Executive Council charged the Principals' Staff Committee \(PSC\)](#) to report back to the Executive Council at the 2023 annual meeting with recommendations on how to best address and integrate new science and restoration strategies leading up to 2025.

The PSC completed their work and identified a series of recommendations in a [Charting-a-Course-to-2025-Report](#) . This report outlines a critical path forward that the HGIT will strive to achieve including:

#### ***Accelerate investments.***

- Thanks to the American Rescue Plan Act, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and increased state investments, the Chesapeake Bay Program will accelerate restoration activities with a particular emphasis on addressing lagging outcomes.

#### ***Integrate emerging science and monitoring.***

- Recent scientific reports and findings have provided further understanding of how the Chesapeake Bay and its surrounding watershed are responding to the implementation of best management practices (BMPs), impacts from climate change and a rise in environmental stewardship, to name a few. The Chesapeake Bay Program is already investigating as to how the findings in such recent reports as the A Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response, Rising Watershed and Bay Water Temperatures, Enhancing Chesapeake Bay Partnership Activities by Integrating Social Science and Enhancing the Chesapeake Bay Program Monitoring Networks (note: this is not an exhaustive list) can be integrated into the partnership's work. These are significant scientific findings that recommend an increased focus on geographic targeting, social science, robust monitoring networks, the environmentally and economically important shallow waters of the Bay and addressing rising water temperature implications, and as such will take time and careful planning to be fully represented in the next phase of Bay restoration. Where appropriate and possible, the partnership will integrate this emerging science now.

#### ***Fast-track action plans.***

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- Over the past few years and in recent months, several action plans have been put into place across the partnership. The Chesapeake Bay Program will lean harder into the implementation of these plans moving toward 2025. These include, but are not limited to, the jurisdictions' Phase III WIPs, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ) Strategy and Implementation Plan, state riparian buffer action strategies, Wetlands Action Plan and Climate Change Directive Workplan.

These recommendations were reported out and accepted by the Executive Committee on October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

At the 2024 annual EC meeting, the PSC will prepare recommendations that continue to address new advances in science and restoration, along with a focus on our partnership for going beyond 2025. The Beyond 2025 (B25) workgroup was formed to take on this task of providing recommendations to transform Chesapeake Bay Program partnership policies, programs, and projects to address the significant ongoing and future impacts climate change, development and nutrient sediment loading will impose on the Bay, its watershed, and people across generations.

The HGIT continues to support both efforts by trying to find ways of implementing the recommendation from the [Charting-a-Course-to-2025-Report](#) in several ways. Any funding opportunities are sent through e-mail to all appropriate workgroups. If work group members identify projects the HGIT leadership works to champion those efforts e.g., writing letters of support and providing technical support whenever possible. The HGIT also provides in depth discussion on emerging science topics e.g., Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response ([CESR](#)) discussion at the Fall HGIT meeting. Finally, the HGIT continues to be a leader in fast tracking the wetlands workshop Action Plan. (See Wetlands Outcome Attainment Workshop Action Plan Below).

There are currently 5 small work groups feeding into the larger B25 Workgroup. These small groups include Climate, Healthy Watershed, Shallow Water, People and Water Quality. HGIT leadership is heavily involved in Healthy Watersheds, Climate, and Shallow Water small groups. Workgroup members are acting as technical experts in all small groups.

### ***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>, 2022. 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

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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 and 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. A new habitat analyst was hired in March of 2024 to specifically help with data analysis in the Habitat tracker. These tools will be used to update Chesapeake Progress. Chesapeake Progress was updated in January 2024 for wetlands using this tool. We are exploring how to expand this effort to more accurate Black Duck, and Brook Trout outcomes.

### ***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 Plans and priorities outlined in the November 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> 2023 HGIT meeting workgroup updates (see meeting notes from the November 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> 2023 meeting notes). In addition, the HGIT will continue to support the 2021 and 2022 GIT funding projects.

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

#### ***Social Science and Ecosystem Services***

- Incorporate Structured Decision-Making (SDM) into GIT Funding Proposal
- 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. 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. In addition, the HGIT is exploring social science efforts at the bi-annual HGIT meeting.
- 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. Incorporate appropriate recommendations/finding from the upcoming STAC Ecosystem Services Workshop report into workgroup activities.
- Use community-based science and social marketing around living shorelines and the SAV Sentinel Site Monitoring Program. SAV workgroup is currently exploring a STAC workshop for Sentinel Site monitoring using community led science.
- 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. We will ensure that updates are provided to the workgroups as they become available and aid the workgroups in incorporating these updates in their work. The HGIT is currently working with Colmenar Consulting to identify ways of integrating underrepresented stakeholders in our

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workplans and meetings.

### ***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, 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, and 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.

### ***Warm Water Stressors in Streams***

- 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.
- Develop Brook Trout Pilot projects in Maryland and Pennsylvania to evaluate Brook Trout Refugia.

### ***Wetlands and Shallow Water Habitat***

- Participate in EPA’s coastal adaptation/blue carbon pilot.
- 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.
- Develop SAV sentinel site monitoring program.

### ***Creating Habitat in the More Developed Portions of Our Watershed***

- Continue to use the Baltimore Rivers to Harbor Urban Refuge as a model to 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

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outcomes or refine outcomes based on social science.

- Develop Social science strategy around recalcitrant dam owners to identify Fish Passage opportunities.

#### ***DEIJ and Accessibility***

- Connecting people to nature by working to create habitat in more densely populated areas as well as rural landscapes, ensuring Equity and Inclusion across all communities and tribes in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.
- Ensure that HGIT workgroups continue to engage with the Diversity Workgroup to determine ways to integrate products to make progress on both fronts, including identifying underserved communities and working to address the issues they are facing, such as using bay wide and jurisdictional DEIJ tools and information sources.
- When drafting each workgroup's workplan, whenever possible the workgroups should consider evaluation of DEIJ impact with an appropriate management action.
- Explore how environmental literacy can help with incorporating social science and DEIJ into existing outcome workplans.
- Working with the Diversity Workgroup and Stakeholder Advisory Committee to actively seek out pilot projects and explore funding options for underserved groups and tribes looking to focus on habitat restoration.
- Work with the Communications Office to make the HGIT webpage more accessible to people with disabilities.