

Black Duck Action Team March Meeting Minutes
March 30, 2021 | 1 pm – 3 pm
Conference Call

Ben Lewis (VA DWR)	Alicia Berlin (USGS)	Megan Ossmann (CRC)	Chris Guy (USFWS)
Christine Conn (MD DNR)	Bill Jenkins (EPA)	Jake McPherson (DU)	John Coluccy (DU)
Devin Mendez (USGS Contractor)	Bill Harvey (MD DNR)	Chris Williams (UDEL)	Gary Costanzo (VA DGIF)
Kirsten Luke (USFWS)	Jes Skillman (DU)	Josh Homyack (MD DNR)	Mitch Hartley (USFWS)
Mike Slattery (USFWS)	Patrick Devers (USFWS)	Mo Correll (USFWS)	

Welcome and Introductions

Ben Lewis (Virginia DWR) and Alicia Berlin (USGS), BDAT co-chairs

How can the BDAT and Habitat GIT help each other meet their goals?

Bill Jenkins (EPA) and Christine Conn (MD DNR), HGIT co-chairs

- Christine C: Lots of overlap with the Wetland Workgroup - both outcomes have tracking issues, though we are getting closer with the habitat-based outcome for black duck.
 - To address these issues, we are soliciting a 2-year funded position at the Bay Program to work with the jurisdictions to collect and translate data to look at wetland restoration in a more comprehensive way.
 - All the work that went into the DST will help make headway in tracking our progress.
 - New initiative at the Management Board (MB) to examine outcome attainability – we will likely not meet wetlands outcome by 2025, so a group of MB members and other partners are working to dive deep into this issue and find ways to accelerate implementation.
- Bill: With the new administration, we have a good opportunity and need to take advantage of the focus on climate change and coastal resiliency adaptation strategies. There will be money coming, so it would be good to start strategizing about project proposals.
 - Marsh migration is a big issue that is getting attention. The Wetland Workgroup is leading a GIT-funding project on the synthesis of shoreline, SLR, and marsh migration for wetland restoration targeting. The objective is to improve accessibility and ease of use of data/models related to marsh migration and demonstrate how to use this data to

target restoration and conservation decision-making by stakeholders in a geographic area.

- Want to make sure that we are keeping up with and tracking the science needs that you have identified as necessary.

Goals and Actions – Reviewing the Workplan

Ben Lewis and Alicia Berlin

- Ben: Not a whole lot has changed since the inception of the workplan.
 - When the agreement was signed, the goal was 100,000 overwintering black ducks. The biggest change was the change to a habitat-based goal. We used the DST to determine how much habitat we would need to support this population. Restoration goal is now about 150,000 acres.
 - We made progress on establishing the baseline of available habitat; the biggest challenge now is developing an accurate method of tracking progress towards this goal.
 - Our action to support scientific research efforts now includes specific USGS efforts.
 - Alicia: We have developed a dynamic viewer to portray info that we have collected over the years. It would be useful to have feedback to make it more useful for others. Our science is now evolving beyond black ducks to more waterbirds, bird distributions for a “bird layer” for the Chesapeake, a “food layer” based on benthic and SAV surveys, etc. We have a Theme 2 team that will be looking at how coastal habitats will change and what that means for birds and food availability in the future.

Efforts in Tracking Our Progress

Chris Guy (USFWS), HGIT Coordinator

- Chris: When I started as coordinator, the enhancement numbers jumped out at me – I know we have done more than that. I started to investigate and found that in general, if it’s not a BMP, it’s not being tracked by the Bay Program.
 - Worked with workgroup chairs to figure out why this was happening, and it got a lot of attention. I talked to each of the state reps that are responsible for reporting outcomes and they said a lot of the information is in the database but its going in as something else (ex: a stormwater project goes in as a stormwater BMP, but if there is a wetland associated it doesn’t get credit for the acres of wetland).
 - Brought this issue forward to the MB and requested someone to investigate the database and figure out how to fix these issues. We put forward a proposal for this position and it was approved but are still waiting to see if funding will be available from EPA (currently in EPA’s budget request). Whether or not it is funded, this is an HGIT priority and we will seek other methods of funding if necessary. The role of the workgroup is to support this data analyst with any questions about restoration in relation to black duck that they may have.

- Also wanted to bring up that there will potentially be some funding from Chesapeake WILD in 2022 – BDAT has a lot overlap with FWS priorities (salt marsh sparrow and black rail).
 - Mike S: The Bay Program’s focus on water quality has made it difficult to focus on habitat values. Chesapeake WILD is intended to build cohesion across the partnership and would complement the Bay Program in focusing on habitat.
- Jake M: Under ideal circumstances, what does the reporting system look like? What role does the workgroup play? Is it the sole responsibility of the states?
 - Chris: The reporting goes through a point of contact at each state. Part of this proposal is to make sure that these folks in the states are trained to ask the right questions and input the data into the system correctly. The main role of WG members is to verify the data (likely retroactively as well).
 - Jake: Organizations like DU are operating with our mission in mind. I’m happy to share our data with partners, but at the end of the day, I have no idea if that information gets to where it needs to go.
 - Chris: Yes, ultimately the goal is to be more transparent about this process and make sure that partners know that their work is being counted.

Decision Support Tool Overview and Update

John Coluccy (Ducks Unlimited)

*The presentation slides can be found [here](#)

Questions/comments:

- Jes S: It’s not available yet but if anyone wants to take a look at it and provide feedback, please let me know.
- Ben: Have you already removed the Habitat Capability Index?
 - John C: Yes, it’s not included in this version.
- Jake M: When you click on one of the HUCs does it translate the energy availability to acres?
 - Jes S: The restoration and protection goals are in hectares.
 - John C: There are objectives at two different levels – the long-term average and the 80th percentile, or top 20% of high populations. We will be providing habitat objectives based on both of those.
 - Jake M: How do you factor in energy availability based on different habitat types into the objectives?
 - Jes: With the NWI, we calculated how many acres there are of each type of habitat. We have a table with the average kcal per hectare per habitat type. We took that info and created a weighted mean kcal per hectare based on the amount of habitat type per hectare, which was then used to determine restoration goals and objectives.

- Chris W: We base deficits and surpluses on average values for habitat types – this assumes that black ducks use all that landscape equally. I wonder about relative changes of use from coastal to interior areas, and how important that is?
 - John: The NAWMP objectives are stepped down based on harvest data, so they are using the inland areas. We have received some pushback when prioritizing inland areas, but this is what the energy availability model is telling us. We had to make some assumptions.
 - Jes: We don't have a habitat capability index in here, but we did add an urban layer, because places were lighting up where restoration was not possible, so we masked out highly developed areas and that has provided better results.
- Mitch H: In the original version of this, it was suggested to weigh things by impact to the population. Maybe we need a way to view the HUCs when color shading was weighted by density or abundance.
- Pat D: These are inputs to help someone make a decision - all the other inputs we are talking about are not necessarily needed to determine which areas are best to prioritize.
 - Ben: Looking at a state level, this is a tool to help guide conservation. If we have a finite amount of money to put towards waterfowl habitat, this is a great tool to look at to weigh areas to where funding would go.
- Alicia B: What is the long-term plan for maintaining this with updated info?
 - John: I don't have the answer unfortunately.
 - Jes: Mike Mitchell (who has been doing the coding) has been really focused on documentation, so the hope is in the future that people can download the model and tweak it themselves to update it with minimal effort.
- Chris W: Is there any plan to break this model and maps down by species?
 - John: There's species-specific NAWMP objectives built into the model. Right now, this model assumes that these species use similar habitats and forage on similar foods, so they are modeled together as competitors.

ACJV Black Duck Conservation Plan

Mitch Hartley (USFWS)

*The presentation slides can be found [here](#)

No questions/comments.

Feedback on Dynamic Viewer

Alicia Berlin

Link to the viewer: [Black Duck Dynamic Viewer](#)

Please send any feedback to Alicia at aberlin@usgs.gov.

Round Robin Updates on Habitat/Research Work and Opportunities

BDAT Members

- Ben: We are looking to fill our wetland biologist position, which has put some of our restoration work on hold. The position closes on Friday. Our biggest acquisition project has been the land on the eastern shore, and we have some projects coming up with Ducks Unlimited in the future on some of our wildlife management areas.
- Bill H: We've acquired property over the years with some opportunities for wetland restoration, and have completed several projects working with DU. The Black Duck telemetry project also can help provide insight into which habitats black ducks are using.
 - Ben: What Bill is referring to is a pilot project of using telemetry on black ducks to learn more about habitat use throughout the life cycle.
 - Josh H: A lot of birds we have released have gravitated right towards these protected areas.
- Jake M: In PA – our biologist just secured a grant for work at Middle Creek. In MD – we're working with DNR on WMA projects; just finished a project at Cedar Point; we also have projects at Wye Island; and partnerships with land trusts on the eastern shore. We also have an active private lands project. We recently completed a floodplain reconnection project in DE in partnership with DE Wildlands. In VA – a shoreline protection project at Hog Island.
- Chris W: We just had a paper come out about SLR effects on dabbling duck energetic carrying capacity in the DE Bay. Working on a manuscript with Jake M. about refining energetic multipliers of behaviors at Patuxent. We also have two papers coming out about quantifying black duck breeding habitats in NC and genetics and hybridization with mallards. We also have some research in NC about habitat use from broods and survival of chicks.
- Mitch H: We have a new science coordinator, Mo Correll so we have some more capacity and will rely less on John and Jes.
- Chris G: Had a call with USACE out of Norfolk about putting some sand in Tangier. We would like to redesign some of this habitat for black duck, black rail, and salt marsh sparrow. They were amenable to that idea, and I'm wondering if anyone would be interested in joining in on these discussions.
 - Jake M: I would be interested and would like to float some ideas before they get too far into planning. In the DE river, NFWF is allowing dredge material to be used as a match, which can allow you to leverage a lot of federal money for other parts of the project. I would include Ethan Massey too, will send you an email.
- Gary C: I would be interested as well and will send you an email.

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