Sustainable Fisheries GIT Executive Committee
Meeting Minutes

September 24, 2018 from 10:00am-12:00pm

Participants

Lynn Fegley	Rob O' Reilly	Nancy Butowski	Marty Gary
Dave Blazer	Pat Geer	Bob Beal	Sean Corson
Bruce Vogt	Sara Coleman	Morgan Corey	

Decisional

- **GIT funding update**
  - Discussion:
  - The Fisheries GIT supported three cross-GIT projects for EPA funding through the Chesapeake Bay Program and each was selected to receive funding
  - Total funding for Fisheries GIT projects $220,000 out of $860,000 available this year
    - "*Support for inventory & evaluation of biological response data for fish habitat assessment*" ($90,000) will result in an inventory of data with habitat, stressors, and biological data, and a metadata analysis conducted in partnership with USGS and NOAA to inform and prioritize location for pilot fish habitat assessment. This project is part of a larger national effort to relate habitat to fish populations as there are other regional fish habitat assessments ongoing, and is a critical next step towards a regional scale fish habitat assessment tool for the Chesapeake Bay.
    - "*An ecosystem approach to living shorelines project design*" ($50,000) will result in a project design to restore oysters and seagrass using repurposed marine debris on the lower York with siting, partner development, and work-plan for monitoring ready for implementation. This project will clarify the relationship between oyster reef and seagrass habitats, and will require future funding to continue build out for the restoration site, possibly in partnership with USACE as a priority area identified in the Chesapeake Bay Comprehensive Plan.
    - "*Pilot a cost effective, real-time dissolved oxygen vertical monitoring system for characterizing mainstem Chesapeake Bay hypoxia*" ($80,000) will result in a pilot technology design for vertical profiler system to reduce uncertainty and better monitor hypoxia volume in real time, to inform NOAA hypoxia modeling long-term.
      - PRFC has been discussing how hypoxia may be affecting distribution of striped bass on the Potomac River, and has observed no fish present in low oxygen areas anecdotally. This project will help to support these observations with more data.

- **Blue Crab meeting update**
  - Discussion:
  - Intention of the meeting was to catch up on progress of the blue crab stock assessment update, which reviewed data inputs, included updated data as of 2017 terminal year, and ran sensitivity analyses to stress test the stock assessment model
    - Found that there were no substantial changes in estimated reference points or in status of the stock

        - Next steps include additional sensitivity runs, may include male/female ratio information and add a tuning index from MD observer program CPUE data, and produce a written report
    - Given the update results, group reached the consensus that a new benchmark stock assessment is not needed at this time
        - Another next step would be to develop decision rules with if/then triggers for both female and male components of the fishery using estimates of abundance and reference points to provide clear direction when action is needed or not (example: when 2014 population fell below overfished line but was not overfished, unsure in that situation of how to proceed with management actions)
        - No major structural changes to model or input data, so no need for external review

- **Telemetry array status**
    - Discussion:
    - Navy sent notice to federal agencies regarding plans to disband telemetry array in lower Chesapeake Bay 80+ receivers used for tracking endangered sturgeon movements and a other tagged species
    - Since the array will no longer be maintained by the Navy, are we interested in pursuing options to maintain the array? How are agencies currently using the telemetry data? Is this type of information valuable to management?
        - General feeling that the array is highly critical for providing data and informing bay-wide conservation efforts along the Atlantic coast, including inter-jurisdictional work done by the ASMFC and MAFMC
        - We have been involved in setting up Mid-Atlantic Acoustic Telemetry Observation System (MATOS) and SERC is taking on coordination of database associated with telemetry network, so we can likely make a strong case to the Navy as a common voice with ASMFC, MAMFC, Chesapeake Bay Commission, NEFSC, etc.
        - This issue is important, but as a decentralized network is more challenging to address, and would be a major long-term cost as a permanent monitoring system with maintenance and operating costs
    - Need to gather more information about timeline for removal, cost for maintenance under different scenarios, and possible options to transfer ownership of some or all receivers
    - Actions:
        - Survey fishery managers, researchers, and agencies to better understand importance of the array and current users of the data
        - Produce a 1-2 page fact sheet outlining value of the array for managing key species
        - Look into Section 6 funding for endangered species
        - Continue communications with Carter Watterson on a federal agencies meeting with the Navy

- **Envisioning Next Steps for Fish GIT**
    - Presentation:
    - Bruce reviewed the past accomplishments and history of Fisheries GIT, with a focus on the value of the team and whether we are focused on the right things moving forward
        - Mission statement from 2015 Operations Charter states that we should be looking at “ecosystems” but does not mention the word “management” as our role is more to bring together fishery managers at a regional scale

        - Three of our outcomes (blue crab abundance and management, and oysters) are species specific with clear quantifiable targets and easier to track progress for; the other two outcomes (forage and fish habitat) are more broad "improve understanding" and difficult to quantify, more challenging to see progress but we have made progress through STAC workshops and GIT funded projects
        - In addition to blue crab and oysters, at one point we were more focused on striped bass, menhaden, and alosines ("big 5 species"), but less species-specific work has been done recently; this could change by incorporating striped bass into forage indicators and fish habitat considerations as key predator species
        - Examples of inter-jurisdictional issues we have focused on include invasive catfish and cownose rays, but these issues are somewhat unresolved; we could take a more active role and help reach decisions
        - Previously we published a Fisheries Ecosystem Plan (FEP) with single species briefs, this is still a relevant document that could be reviewed or updated
    - We would like to focus on what is most important to our GIT leadership, recognizing that we have limited time and resources to do more beyond our 2014 Agreement outcomes.
    - Discussion:
    - Climate is a difficult thing to address but necessary to consider (e.g. shellfish impacts from acidification); climate models generally focus on longer time frame rather than short-term models that are more useful for decision making
        - Fishery managers want forecasts, and most models for inshore do not perform as well as offshore models, so we need to think about developing better models for estuaries – possible NOAA Fisheries funding for a workshop
    - Finfish recruitment dynamics should be addressed with more quantitative measures given recent declines (e.g. striped bass and summer flounder low recruitment)
    - For invasive catfish and cownose rays we need to avoid a "hit and run" situation and make sure we revisit these issues and move them forward, especially if invasive catfish impacts to other species are hindering efforts to rebuild stocks
    - On the topic of fish habitat and striped bass, one major issue that has come up many times is legacy pollution from coal ash near a major striped bass spawning area on the Potomac River. In light of Hurricane Florence where toxic materials are coming in contact with groundwater resources and tributaries, we need to stay ahead of this issue and be prepared.
        - Likely will play out in legislation and regulations with EPA, but there are major logistical and financial challenges to removing and recycling (capacity at Morgantown facility) coal ash pollution
        - It would be helpful to know potential impacts of coal ash pollution to species like striped bass and sturgeon to best inform regulations
        - Actions:
        - Work with Marty to conduct a literature review and compile resources for coal ash impacts and critical habitat use by economically valuable species to inform decisions
    - Menhaden is a priority for ASMFC, and a Bay-specific harvest cap based on history and performance of the fishery is needed, ecological/biological reference points for Atlantic coast-wide cap – is there a way to coordinate the science as a GIT?
        - Stock assessment data gathering process is inefficient, starting from scratch each time with QA/QC (e.g. menhaden data files and database uncertainty)
        - Actions:
        - Work with Lynn and DNR to compile data needs, and better understand issues and challenges to streamline data gathering for stock assessments

- In terms of invasive catfish, it is appropriate for the GIT to coordinate among jurisdictions and plan for bay-wide management, given the competing interests of recreational and commercial fisheries, and ecosystem function; we do not yet have established goals for balancing fishery interests (e.g. reducing biomass enough to have ecosystem-level impacts while setting aside quota for fishery) – possibility for a future workshop
- Overall, we developed some good ideas for immediate issues to work on and long-term will continue thinking about 5 key species within an ecosystem context and emphasizing the importance of habitat and forage for striped bass
    - We will focus on coordinating and synthesizing science
    - Long-term issues to keep in mind as Fisheries GIT in the future:
        - Climate – models on an estuary scale forecasting, acidification for shellfish
        - Menhaden – Bay-wide cap, forage indicator
        - Invasive catfish
        - Mallows Bay fisheries issues

- **Ex Comm updates**
    - PRFC is optimistic as blue crab numbers bounced back for July and August this summer, tracking with recruitment data from winter dredge survey

Informational

- **Confirm upcoming Ex Comm meeting dates**
    - Monday, October 22, 2018 – ASMFC conflict October 21-25
        - Rescheduled for Monday, October 29, 2018
    - Monday, November 26, 2018
- **Confirm December GIT meeting dates**
    - December 3-4, 2018 (Monday-Tuesday) in Newport News, VA
        - May reschedule for December 17-18, 2018