

Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team (Fisheries GIT) Meeting
Potomac River Fisheries Commission – Colonial Beach, VA
June 17-18th, 2013

Meeting Report

Background

On June 17-18, 2013 the Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team (SFGIT) of the Chesapeake Bay Program met at the Potomac River Fisheries Commission in Colonial Beach, VA for its 7th biannual meeting.

The SFGIT is composed of the state fisheries managers from around the Bay and chaired by the director of the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office. The Fisheries GIT draws together a diverse group of managers and scientists to improve management and recovery of oysters, blue crab, menhaden, striped bass, and alosines in the Chesapeake Bay. It focuses on advancing ecosystem-based fisheries management by using science to make informed fishery management decisions that cross state boundaries. Through this approach, the Fisheries GIT is focused on ecosystem-based fisheries management to encourage sustainable Chesapeake Bay fish populations that support viable recreational and commercial fisheries and provides for natural ecosystem function.

Meeting Objectives

The objectives for this full Fisheries GIT meeting were:

1. Highlight issues that require full GIT discussion and resolution to identify actionable next steps, and management priorities. These topics included the 2013 Blue Crab Advisory Report, the coordination of science and management, fisheries outcomes for the Chesapeake Bay New Agreement, the connection between land use planning and fisheries sustainability, and the Invasive Catfish Task Force draft report recommendations.
2. Present the latest science on oyster ecosystem services, food web-based nutritional reference points for striped bass, and use of acoustic technology (telemetry arrays) to track migratory behaviors of key fish species.

Summary and Outcomes

Review of Recent GIT Activity

In December 2012, The Fisheries GIT developed a “top 7” work plan to guide their recent actions and priorities. They have begun addressing many of these priorities:

- CBSAC finished the 2013 Blue Crab Advisory Report, including developing male blue crab conservation triggers, and the GIT Executive Committee endorsed the report
- Priority tributaries have been selected for oyster restoration in both Maryland (Harris Creek, Little Choptank) and Virginia (Lynnhaven, Lafayette, Elizabeth); restoration efforts and application of the oyster metrics continue to move forward

- The Invasive Catfish Task Force is drafting a report including policy and management recommendations to address invasive catfish in the Bay

In addition to the “top 7” list, the GIT has been addressing land use development and potential impacts on ecologically important areas. The GIT sent a comment letter to Charles County Board of County Commissioners in March 2013 regarding the pending comprehensive plan, and the potential negative effects of development pressure on fisheries. The GIT also applied for STAC funding for a workshop aimed to identify key drivers in local land use decision making and the implications for resource managers.

2013 Blue Crab Advisory Report

CBSAC expedited the completion and release the 2013 Blue Crab Advisory Report, and the GIT Executive Committee has endorsed the report. The 2013 report established male conservation triggers that will help signal managers to implement male conservation measures. The report also finds that the current blue crab population in the Bay is not overfished, and overfishing is not occurring. The full GIT discussed that although the abundance of female crabs is well above the overfished threshold, it is not at the target abundance. The team also discussed possible reasons for the large decrease in juvenile abundance from 2012-2013. Further, the GIT discussed interest in an economic analysis of the blue crab fishery (for example should more large size male crabs be an objective of the fishery), and how/if management could address this economic and market issue.

- *Next Steps*
 - *CBSAC will prioritize identified research and data gaps including coordination between MD and VA population surveys, and access to summer survey data. CBSAC will use this discussion to establish a 2013-2014 work plan and where applicable identify potential sources for funding.*

Fisheries Science Coordination

The idea of a Fisheries Science Committee under guidance of the SFGIT was put forth as a means to improve the flow and application of science based products into management decisions. Groups under this new committee would be ad hoc as necessary to address management priorities for single species and advance ecosystem approaches to management. There could be a Blue Crab Stock Assessment group, as well as an oyster and catfish group, for example. Another critical aspect of this discussion was the need for a monitoring coordination body to ensure data delivery needed for product development.

- *Next Steps*
 - *Revise the proposed science coordination model under the SFGIT to include changes discussed by the full GIT*

New Chesapeake Bay Agreement

The full GIT discussed their role in the larger Chesapeake Bay Program. The team reviewed their overall goal, and their blue crab and oyster outcomes. The team then discussed whether to add additional fisheries outcomes to the New Agreement, and what these outcomes would be. The team considered adding outcomes to target specific forage fish species, invasive species, habitat goals for fisheries, and/or an outcome targeting multi-species management. In terms of targeting specific species, the team discussed the possibility of developing Bay-specific targets, or using existing ASMFC targets for some species. The full GIT also acknowledged potential collaboration with other GITs like the Habitat and Watershed GITs.

- *Next Steps*

- *Continue discussion of and identify the GIT's top preferences for additional New Agreement outcomes relating to fisheries*
- *Determine where collaboration is needed with other GITs*

Land Use Planning and Fisheries

The full GIT heard from a panel, including the President of the Charles County Board of County Commissioners, about how land use planners make decisions and how ecological issues are considered. The panel discussed land use planning at a local level with a specific example of Charles County, and the potential impacts of the pending comprehensive plan on Mattawoman. The panel also described planning tools to help jurisdictions take ecological issues into account, and they emphasized the need to make these planning tools available to local governments. The panel and the GIT discussed the fisheries-land use connection, and the potential role of the GIT in making this connection. The panel suggested that the GIT make their ecological priorities and support for specific habitat areas known to local jurisdictions.

- *Next Steps*
 - *Compile a briefing report of current land use planning tools and initiatives in the Bay to communicate what resources are available to planners and policy makers*
 - *Articulate a clear role of the SFGIT in addressing land use planning issues*
 - *Draft a set of guiding principles the Fisheries GIT will use to communicate priorities to local planners and policy makers*
 - *Identify and develop a tiered plan for coordinating efforts with other state, federal, and non-governmental partners*

Oyster Denitrification

After a presentation on the nitrogen removal potential of oysters, the SFGIT discussed future data needs to quantify oyster ecosystem services. Healthy oyster reefs can enhance denitrification rates, and oyster aquaculture can remove nitrogen from the water. However, these nitrogen removal relationships are spatially dependent, and relate to specific tributary conditions. Future research and monitoring is required for potential use of oysters for load reductions.

- *Next Steps*
 - *Spatially represent denitrification rates and oyster ecosystem services data for key tributaries*

Invasive Catfish

The Invasive Catfish Task Force presented their draft management recommendations and strategies to the full GIT. The Task Force acknowledges that eradication of invasive catfish from the Bay is not feasible, so they focus on reducing abundance, mitigating spread, and promoting public awareness and communication. The GIT discussed building a commercial market for blue catfish, while considering health concerns and the existing recreational fishery. The GIT agreed that one of the most important actions is to build strong public awareness regarding invasive catfish species. Various messaging content and strategies were considered.

- *Next Steps*
 - *Complete Invasive Catfish Report*
 - *Identify priority tributaries for pilot catfish removal programs*
 - *Identification of available tools and need for additional support mechanisms*
 - *Develop workshops with watermen to discuss management strategies*
 - *Agree on a public message and develop messaging materials*
 - *Develop implementation timelines and cost estimates for management strategies*

Striped Bass Nutritional Reference Points

The SFGIT discussed the use of nutritional reference points in management decisions after a presentation on the relationship between the diet of striped bass and their nutritional state. Being able to quickly assess the nutritional state of a fish can allow scientists to make connections to other species and environmental factors in the ecosystem.

- *Next Steps*
 - *Promote further research and consider management application of existing information on food web-based nutritional reference points for their use in ecosystem based and multi-species management*

Telemetry and Fish Tracking

The full GIT heard a presentation on the current telemetry arrays in the Chesapeake Bay, and their use in tracking migratory fish species. The GIT discussed priorities for future array locations and targeted fish species. The need for ongoing maintenance of the telemetry receivers was also addressed

- *Next Steps*
 - *Send a letter of support from the SFGIT to the U.S. Navy for their telemetry arrays in the Bay and their contribution to tracking migratory species*

Meeting Attendance

Peyton Robertson	Candice Quinn Kelly	Greg Garman
Tom O'Connell	Jennifer Greiner	Nick DiPasquale
Jack Travelstead	Joe Grist	Jim Uphoff
Bob Beal	Jorge Holzer	Bonnie Bick
Ellen Cosby	Paul Orlando	Mark Luckenbach
Larry Jennings	Fredrika Moser	Joe Love
Susan Conner	Mike Allen	Juliana Brush
Bob Greenlee	Howard Townsend	Karl Blankenship
Andy Lacatell	Troy Hartley	John Jacobs
Nancy Butowski	Nina Kruja	Dave Secor
Jack Frye	Ken Hastings	Patrick Campfield (teleconference)
Tom Powers	Margaret McGinty	Greg Allen (teleconference)
Jim Gracie	Jim Price	Geoffrey Smith (teleconference)
Laura McKay	Jenn Aiosa	Tim Wheeler (teleconference)
Emily Greene	Tom Miller	Cindy Bishop (teleconference)
Dan Baldwin	Christine Conn	Robert T. Brown (teleconference)
Bruce Vogt	Emilie Franke	
Andrew Turner	Sabra Bushey	