Chesapeake Bay Program
SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
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October 11, 2018

RE: STAC Fish Habitat Function Workshop Report

James Edward, Interim Chair, Chesapeake Bay Program Management Board
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
410 Severn Avenue, Suite 109
Annapolis, MD 21403

Cc: Management Board; Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team; Vital Habitats Goal Implementation Team

Dear Acting Director Edward,

Please see the attached STAC report entitled, "*Factors Influencing the Headwaters, Mainstem, Tidal, and Non-Tidal Fish Habitat Function in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed: Application to Restoration and Management Decisions*". This report contains specific recommendations identified by participants at STAC's April 25-26, 2018 workshop with a summary of workshop proceedings.

In support of the Chesapeake Bay Program's (CBP) Fish Habitat Outcome 2-Year Work Plan (2018-19), the Sustainable Fisheries and Vital Habitat Goal Implementation Teams (GITs) organized a workshop to pursue the development of a Fish Habitat Assessment Framework for the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed. Such an assessment could identify the primary drivers and impacts to fish habitat, better guide conservation and restoration planning and resources, develop specific habitat management objectives to support the productivity of fish stocks, and provide a tool based on user's needs.

The workshop's objective was to identify the necessary scientific information, analytical approaches, and decision support needs necessary to assess the condition and vulnerability of fish habitat in the watershed. Prior to the workshop, input was obtained from state and federal fishery managers and scientists, state, local and federal land use planners and managers, and non-governmental organizations interested in the conservation of fish and habitat services. The workshop was designed to 1) examine existing habitat assessment tools at the regional and national level, 2) identify opportunities to build upon existing assessments, 3) determine criteria for the selection and ranking of habitat condition and stressor variables, 4) identify and prioritize which of these variables have the greatest influence on habitat condition and vulnerability, 5) identify research gaps and priorities and 6) recommend a framework for developing such an assessment.

The workshop confirmed that there exists strong interest among Chesapeake Bay watershed managers, academia, and stakeholders for developing a fish habitat assessment for the watershed. Critical recommendations from this workshop supporting a regional Chesapeake Bay Watershed Assessment were as follows:

1) **Data gathering**: Identify lead agencies to build upon existing monitoring efforts. The efforts should support sustaining key existing data streams, and gathering, organizing, and assessing the availability, accessibility, and applicability of new biological and stressor data needed to support the development of a fish habitat assessment at a fine spatial scale (1:24:000 or finer).
2) **Pilot assessment**: Conduct a pilot level assessment in a representative waterway(s) as a proof of concept.
3) **Assessment metrics**: Fish habitat assessment metrics should target conditions supporting the life history needs of species assemblages. Develop select metrics for representative species to help communicate the condition and stressor of fish habitat by habitat type.
4) **Outreach and training to assessment users**: Develop a communication framework. Design outreach and training modules accommodating diverse users interested in applying a regional fish habitat assessment tool to ensure that its content meets user needs.
5) **Research**: Communicate prioritized research needs to science providers in the watershed. Encourage scientists to focus available resources on better understanding of fish habitat stressors that workshop participants identified as being high in severity and low in scientific certainty.

We hope that the Management Board, Goal Implementation Teams, and various workgroups will find these recommendations useful, and we look forward to your feedback. STAC respectfully requests a written response to the workshop findings and recommendations from the CBP Management Board Chair by January 10, 2019.

Please direct any questions regarding this report and its recommendations to Rachel Dixon, Coordinator of the CBP's Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee, or workshop chair Gina Hunt (gina.hunt@maryland.gov).

On behalf of the entire STAC, thank you for considering these recommended next steps, and we look forward to continuing this dialogue in the future.

Sincerely,

Brian Benham
Chair, Chesapeake Bay Program's Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee