

Chesapeake Bay Watershed Region Freshwater Mussel Partnership

Steering Committee Meeting Summary for Friday 07/25/2025 | 09:00 to 10:00

Meeting Agenda

No.	Description
1.	Welcome/Introduce new & recent members
2.	FWM Partnership newsletter
3.	Chesapeake Bay watershed FWM taxa list
4.	Chesapeake Bay Program Beyond 2025 – FWM as Outcome in non-tidal Fish Habitat GIT; and,
5.	News/Announcements

Attachment: DRAFT (rev 07/24/2025) C/B Watershed FWM Taxa List

Meeting Summary

Participants: Brian Watson/VA DWR; Ashley Hullinger, John Lancaster, Scott Heidel, Tyler Trostle/PADEP; Lance Butler /Philadelphia Water Department; Joe Wood/CBF; Matt Ashton/MDNR; Jamie Shallenberger/SRBC

1. New & Recent Members

At suggestion of Danielle Kreeger, Lance Butler the chief scientist for Philadelphia Water Department's Mussel Hatchery and watershed restoration center joined us in June. FYI, the July 2025 Newsletter includes information about PWD's FWM research including projects that reintroduce FWM to urban watershed settings.

New members who were not present included: George Doumit from DNREC and Kevin Eliason from WV DNR.

2. FWM Partnership newsletter

The second issue newsletter was distributed by email to ~165 recipients. The newsletter is accessible on the FWM Partnership webpage (part of SRBC.gov) and also is promoted through SRBC's social media apparatus (LinkedIn, Instagram).

❖ Action Item:

Steering committee members are encouraged to share/promote the Newsletter & Partnership to colleagues as well as via their organization's outreach mechanisms. Steering committee members are requested to suggest/provide future content, if inclined.

3. Chesapeake Bay Watershed FWM Taxa List

There's abundant complexity inherent in developing a FWM list for the Chesapeake Bay watershed, including incomplete historic survey records, uncertainty for identification, changes in taxonomic classification, and shifting expectations from SRBC such as Native vs. Non-native status and invasive designations.

Matt expressed view that others supported which is to establish basic parameters for this list, including eliminate sub-watershed classification and limit consideration to just Unionid Mussels. Brian suggested the list include both Native and Naturalized (but not invasives – which also are excluded by limiting to Unionid). Joe asked whether restoration is/would be proposed for “naturalized” FWM and Brian confirmed that for Virginia, certain naturalized FWM are restored in certain settings and the group concurred that naturalized FWM are appropriate as a parameter.

Consensus was reached to place final discretion for each jurisdiction's taxa list with the person/people in position(s) to be most knowledgeable about each jurisdiction.

Brian described *Utterbackia imbecillus* (Paper Pondshell) as likely to occur in all Bay jurisdictions, but it tends/-ed to be omitted from FWM surveys because its habitat preference (lacustrine, soft substrate) is contrary to most Unionid FWM, so we ask each jurisdiction to confirm its status in light of Brian's comments.

SRBC updated the “confirmed” draft taxa list spreadsheet during the discussion to capture Unionid mussel occurrence for: VA, MD, DC, and WV.

❖ Action Item:

The updated draft taxa list spreadsheet is attached and includes highlighted columns for NY, PA, and DE to indicate the jurisdictions for which we lack status confirmed by an authoritative source. By way of this meeting summary, SRBC requests that Annie Stupik (NY), Nevin Welte (PA), and George Doumit (DE) review, update as warranted, and confirm Unionid mussel occurrence for their respective state by the August Partnership meeting on Friday 08/22.

4. Chesapeake Bay Program Beyond 2025 – FWM as Target Outcome in non-tidal Fish Habitat GIT

Jamie mentioned the Newsletter and the email message used to distribute it both emphasized the Watershed Agreement Beyond 2025 Revision and public comment period that ends September 1st. The current draft Outcome statement targeted to FWM within the Fish Habitat Goal that reads:

“Develop Freshwater Mussel conservation plans for five tributaries and begin to implement by 2035.”

With the Newsletter, SRBC actively solicited the Partnership's broad membership to consider the above statement and enter individual comments/opinions/alternate recommendations regarding a FWM target formally using the public comment process. Jamie also stated that members of the Conowingo Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) work group requested him to participate in an upcoming meeting to discuss FWM targets that would be more meaningful to the “mussel biologist community” than the above draft statement. The basis for the Conowingo WIP work group's request is to support & inform their own set of public comments.

Matt asked whether the Conowingo work group had preconceived FWM targets in mind? Ashley, a member of the Conowingo work group, replied that MDE's Matt Rowe initiated the request for input from the FWM Partnership and that Matt Rowe's request was made to better understand what the mussel community professionals believed were meaningful targets. Matt A. answered that receiving funding to implement FWM restoration was necessary, particularly given his agency's recent reductions in funding, staff, and a hiring freeze. There was discussion and questions as to whether the Conowingo WIP work group would focus narrowly/exclusively on nutrient reduction potential for FWM and the answer was WQ/pollutant reduction was not the sole or perhaps even primary focus, rather ecosystem restoration is the goal. Ashley invited Matt to join the Conowingo WIP work group discussion [Thu 08/07 from 8 to 9 am].

The group also discussed whether interest exists within the FWM Partnership steering committee members to develop our own Public Comment and if so, who is willing to include their name and/or affiliation. Matt questioned what would be "the ask"? Jamie acknowledged characterizing the current draft target (e.g., 5 cons plans by 2035) as "luke warm" and as discussed during the previous two steering committee meetings, several examples were provided for targets that appear to hold greater meaning/value that "5 cons plans by 2035".

Ashley stated that the PADEP contingent of steering committee is interested in participating in and entering the Public Comment realm, as did Joe and Jamie. Joe stated he sees benefits from a "beefed up ask" within the Watershed Agreement due to the visibility that accompanies Outcomes & Goals in the Watershed Agreement, including at levels of state government that prioritize availability of funding and other resources. Jamie reminded the group about conversation with NFWF's Jake Reilly wherein NFWF will commit grant resources to FWM-related targets that appear in the Watershed Agreement. NFWF also stated that its commitment regarding FWM conservation and restoration transcends merely the Watershed Agreement.

Joe suggested that FWM target enhancements beyond "5 cons plans by 2035" could include companion resources that derive from Conservation Plan recommendations or the resources necessary to develop conservation plans.

❖ **Action Items:**

- SRBC staff to coordinate a Public Comments discussion, either as a near-term virtual meeting (next week or week thereafter) or via circulation of a draft document, with those interested & available.
- If you have content ideas/suggestions for targets, please furnish to SRBC.

5. News and Announcements

A FWM and Riparian Buffer Symposium sponsored by Chesapeake Bay Foundation and the James River Association will take place Tuesday August 12 in Goochland, Virginia. Joe said they've got ~50 participants registered.

More info is available here:

<https://events.cbf.org/mandbsymposium>

Steering Committee Meetings are scheduled for 9 to 10 am on the 4th Friday of each month:

Next Meeting is 8/22

If you have questions, comments, adjustments to this summary, or suggestions for an upcoming agenda, please contact Jamie, Ellyn or Tyler.

Thank you for your time and insight.

James Shallenberger

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