

## Chesapeake Bay Watershed Region Freshwater Mussel Partnership

Revised Steering Committee Meeting Summary for Friday 05/23/2025 | 09:00 to 10:00

### **Meeting Agenda**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Description</b>
1.	Tactics to integrate with Chesapeake Bay Program framework   Build upon prior discussions and discuss recent request for input from Gina Hunt/Chair of Fish Habitat Goal Implementation Team related to a Target Outcome for Freshwater Mussels
2.	Summary/report from attendees at recent Freshwater Mollusk Conservation Society conf
3.	Status, updates, requests for support or coordination regarding current field season
4.	FWM Partnership newsletter; and,
5.	News/Announcements

### **Meeting Summary**

Participants: Joe Wood/CBF; Ashley Hullinger/PADEP; Annie Stupik/NYSDEC; John Lancaster/PADEP; Brian Watson/VA DWR; Matt Ashton/MDNR; Nevin Welte/PFBC; Ellyn Campbell – Jamie Shallenberger/SRBC

1. Gina Hunt/MDNR Tidal Fisheries reached out 5/13 to some of us on very short notice with request that we “react” to two draft statements Gina developed that would create a FWM Target Outcome within the Fish Habitat GIT. Gina acknowledged that her request arrived with very limited time constraint and she knew that few people in our group would have opportunity to comment at the initial stage; however, as “Beyond 2025” unfolds this calendar year, there will be future opportunities for more considered input on part of FWM Partnership members. Joe Wood provided a response that modified Gina’s drafts considerably. Jamie and Gina spoke on the topic and Gina expressed gratitude for being made aware of the FWM Partnership and reiterated that ample opportunity in future will exist for our group to revise/refine the Target Outcome statement for FWM. Below are the iterative statements:

GH original drafts: (i) Advance mussel conservation and scientific understanding and development of biodiversity metrics for purpose of maintaining ecosystem services. (ii) Improve our understanding of current mussel diversity and abundance and the influence of mussel species on water quality improvements.

JW suggestion: Develop FWM conservation plans/tributary strategies for X (5-10?) tributaries and begin implementation by 2035. Conservation plans shall include watershed mussel surveys, identification of key species of conservation need, establishing propagation strategies, critical habitat designations and strategies to develop eDNA survey techniques for species of highest conservation need.

Fish Habitat GIT current draft: Develop FWM conservation plans for 5 tributaries and begin implementation by 2035.

Steering committee discussion focus areas:

**A. Recognition for FWM as a Target Outcome in the Fish Habitat GIT incorporates FWM in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement** and that factor may deliver funding for analysis-type activities as well as elevate profile for FWM as part of the Bay/Watershed cleanup effort. Gaining recognition in Bay Agreement places FWM into a realm of consideration and accountability for high-level decision makers throughout the Bay jurisdictions and such status may leverage funding and other resources for those who “do FWM work”.

Mussel ecologists expressed acceptance and agreement with merits of FWM recognition in the Bay Agreement, yet cautioned that agency malacologists currently are “at-capacity” with existing priority activities. If gaining Bay Agreement status translates into additional requests for their time/expertise, then state malacologists should receive resources commensurate to accomplish new and existing expectations and priorities. Moreover, if the Bay Agreement framework incorporates FWM-related Target Outcomes (e.g., develop X conservation plans), then there is justification to expect the resources to not only deliver X conservation plans, but also to at least kick-start resources required to implement X plans.

Bottom Line: Incorporating FWM as a formal Target Outcome in the Bay Agreement is a good/welcome concept for the possibility of gaining greater accountability from leaders in the Bay Jurisdiction framework; however, there is a Return On Investment (ROI) consideration for those individuals/agency staff who are tasked to set aside current priorities in order to address <fill in request> yet have seldom seen their programs benefit from similar investments in past.

**B. Dilemmas surrounding Measurable Outcomes** and the inherent desire to adopt discrete metrics “on paper” without recognizing or adjusting to challenges that arise in practice. In particular, adopting discrete metrics “on paper” without committing dedicated resources in forms of money, staff, and time to enable the achievement of specific measurable outcomes.

Bottom Line: Activities such as development of conservation plans/tributary strategies is already underway in multiple state agencies as well as other organizations; therefore, to some, it feels redundant to merely “take credit” for planning actions that already occur. Of greater value would be for the Bay jurisdiction leadership to commit resources commensurate to achieve measurable Target Outcomes.

**C. Resource Constraints and Capacities for agency malacologists to Absorb Actions** with respect to conservation planning as a Target Outcome was discussed in terms of recent/current projects. Matt stated that MDNR allocated \$150,000 over 2.5 years to develop 1 large and 2 small conservation plans in Maryland. Brian stated that VADWR budgeted \$400,000 over 2 years to develop state-wide plan. The James River Association received ~\$52,000 NFWF grant for a plan specific to James River in Virginia.

Bottom Line: Developing conservation plans relies on the availability of existing data sets (FWM occurrence, in-stream habitat, watershed traits, etc.) as well as investments in time (= money) by skilled teams. Depending on scale and complexity for the few examples above, plan development is budgeted in terms of multiples of ~0.5 annual share of Full-Time Employees

(FTE). Of note, the resources invested in planning provide a deliverable document only and the realized benefits of planning occur through implementation of the plan.

❖ **Action Items:**

- Jamie to contact Gina Hunt and discuss next steps with respect to Target Outcome in Fish Habitat GIT
  - Jamie & Gina spoke on 6/3: the Principals Staff Committee (PSC) met 5/23 and voted to accept all outcomes as they were provided. A public comment period will begin circa July 1 and the FWM Partnership as group, as well as individual members, are encouraged to provide comments. Gina clarified for Jamie, that inclusion in the Bay Agreement does not inherently come with funding directly from Chesapeake Bay Program; however, listing FWM formally as a Target Outcome is expected to align spending by the jurisdictions to Bay Agreement priorities. Moreover, as a Bay Agreement priority, various agencies and entities (e.g., The Nature Conservancy, USGS, NFWF) may prioritize funding. Additionally, recognition within the Bay Agreement also is expected to provide opportunities for FWM to be included in existing GITS, work groups, etc where co-benefits exist.
- Jamie to contact Jake Reilly and discuss opportunities/possibilities for NFWF to set-up FWM-dedicated funding mechanism that aligns or directly ties to Target Outcomes in Bay Agreement. Also discuss opportunity for FWM Partnership to recommend FWM-oriented funding strategic priorities.
  - Jamie reached out to NFWF and is awaiting reply

2. Freshwater Mollusk Conservation Society 2025 Symposium | May 12 – 16 Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti, MI

Matt shared this link to a virtual tour of North Carolina State University's Yates Mill Aquatic Conservation Lab (and it's fantastic!): <https://www.thinglink.com/view/scene/1973804582580519780>

3. Status, updates, requests for support or coordination regarding current field season

Brian said his group plans to do surveys in Upper Rappahannock River main stem as well as complete rapid surveys in the Potomac River Basin around Manassass, VA and Broad Run watershed targeting Brook Floater.

Matt said his group, funded through NFWF Central Appalachia Habitat Stewardship, is partnering with ICPRB, USGS, VDWR, and others to survey ~20 sites in Potomac River between Dam no. 5 and Cumberland, MD and to pilot a silo study w/ juvenile FWM.

Nevin (Pennsylvania) and Annie (New York) stated their respective agencies do not have surveys currently planned for this season.

SRBC plans to survey Conodoguinet Creek and possibly 1 or 2 other tributaries to Susquehanna River in the vicinity of Harrisburg, PA this season with crew led by Eric Chapman of Western PA Conservancy.

❖ **Action Item:**

- Brian to coordinate with Jamie/SRBC as schedule and other details emerge regarding outreach within the Partnership for volunteers to participate in survey activities in Virginia

- Tyler to solicit volunteer participants within the Partnership for surveys in Harrisburg, PA region.
- Any other representative who may develop or recognize a need for support, contact SRBC and we'll broadcast solicitation on your behalf.

#### 4. FWM Partnership newsletter

The Partnership issued a Newsletter in November 2024 and SRBC is willing to draft another for circulation with intent to keep our broader Partnership members apprised of steering committee activities and to spread news about FWM.

#### ❖ Action Item:

- SRBC staff to draft and circulate a newsletter prior to the June 27<sup>th</sup> Steering Committee meeting

#### 5. News and Announcements – nothing further

**Steering Committee Meetings are scheduled for 9 to 10 am on the 4<sup>th</sup> Friday of each month:**

**Next Meeting is 6/27**

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.