

Virtual Meeting: Chesapeake Bay Watershed Region Freshwater Mussel Partnership

5/25/2023 9:30 to 11:00 am

**Summary notes:**

Approximately 30 attendees were logged in.

Slide Deck file attached.

Summary prepared by: J. Shallenberger/6/8/2023

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**Agenda Item | slide deck pp. range | Summary Comments**

1. *Recap of milestone events* | pp. 3 – 7 | events discussed: 2020 STAC work group; 2022 NFWF/MD work group; Feb 2023 NFWF/MD virtual committee meetings separated into (a) FW mussels as living filters and (b) FW mussel biodiversity conservation and restoration.

With acknowledgement that majority of participants share overlapping interest in FW mussels in terms of ecological science, surveys to characterize population occurrence & status, education/outreach, and advocacy for their existence in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed region, SRBC asked participants to confirm fundamental purpose of two separate Partnership interest focus areas as: (a) *“Advance conservation & restoration to maintain mussel biodiversity.”* And, (b) *“Assess mussels as a water quality best management practice to control nutrient & sediment.”* Participants affirmed both fundamental interests. Moreover, support was expressed by multiple attendees for the following quote entered into the chat: *“Linking mussel restoration to measurable water quality improvements is like linking stream restoration to species recovery. You just do not see the examples even though most stream restoration work is meaningful. Can't over sell what mussels can do in the real world given the vast impacts within watersheds.”*

2. *Chesapeake Bay Restoration & Partners Framework* | pp. 8 – 13 | this discussion was longest of meeting and meant to suggest *value* [i.e., benefits – especially to the biodiversity conservation & restoration focus group] of aligning the FW mussel partnership with CBP objectives as well as demonstrate *necessity* [i.e., requirement – BMPs in the Watershed Model must undergo and be approved by rigorous CBP process].

Several prominent voices confirmed value for the **biodiversity cons & restore** group to align with CBP while also emphasizing that the FW Mollusk Conservation Society and scheduled updates to State Wildlife Action Plans due in 2025 also are powerful allies and tools to tie into. The slide deck (pp. 13) and related discussion included recent BMP Expert Panel recommendations for Oysters as a BMP thru selected protocol with mention that, although vastly different from FW mussels in important ways (e.g., unlike FW mussels, oysters inhabit estuary, can grow in immense colonies, and are harvested from the waterway), the process proponents underwent to gain acceptance for oysters as a BMP in the Watershed Model framework must be replicated in order to evaluate whether FW mussels warrant consideration as a BMP.

3. *Suggested Structure for the FW Mussel Partnership* | pp. 14 – 17 | as Coordinator, SRBC proposed a possible hierarchical structure for this partnership (refer to chart on pp. 15) with a Steering Committee

driving overall progress for the Partnership; two work group leadership teams that direct and focus on goals of **biodiversity cons & restore** and **living filters/BMP**, respectively; and, a series of action teams performing the work of specific near-term priorities. This agenda segment included discussion about possible near-term priorities shared by both groups as well as unique for each (pp. 16).

The group discussed various priorities – (a) regarding aggregated mussel survey data, primary questions asked were: (i) What type(s) of data are we requesting? and (ii) What is purpose/what is wanted from aggregated data? There was general acknowledgement that b/c high proportion of FW mussels are classified as *imperiled*, each jurisdiction is sensitive about disseminating locations of specific colonies. (b) one participant commented that Eastern Brook Trout (EBT) Restoration Initiative has enunciated clear-cut goals using aggregated watershed population data as a metric and the FW Mussel Partnership should develop comparable goal(s). (c) others commented that FW mussel conservation plans exist/are being developed and should be promoted by the Partnership. Similarly, the 2025 deadline to update the State Wildlife Action Plans is an opportunity to be seized. (d) the capacity to augment natural mussel occurrence thru propagation/stocking was mentioned while some cautioned that parallel to augmentation, guidance needs to be developed regarding how to control intro/spread of disease and how to suppress genetic “pollution” among hatchery/introduced stocks.

4. *Summary of April 2023 Survey* | pp. 18 – 20 | refer to charts in slide deck; the purpose of this agenda item was to show that participants have varied skills, experience, and perspective; hail from throughout the Bay Watershed region; and, many expressed willingness to participate in leadership and/or action items.

5. *News & Announcements* | pp. 21 | the following resource links were added to the meeting Chat by participants.

Chesapeake Bay Program Science & Technical Advisory Committee Publications  
<https://www.chesapeake.org/stac/publications/>

Northeast Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies – State Wildlife Action Plans and Regional Information/Resources  
<https://www.neafwa.org/publications-reports.html>

6. *Next Steps* | pp. 22 – 24 | SRBC will launch a FW Mussel Partnership webpage week of 6/20/2023; SRBC as Coordinator, will circulate the meeting slide deck to participants (refer to email sent 5/26/2023); there will be follow-up communication from SRBC this summer regarding leadership team(s) [timing: TBD]; next partnership meeting is expected fall 2023; a Symposium will take place late winter – early spring 2024.