

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) Goal Implementation Team (GIT) Funding Program



The Chesapeake Bay Trust has been designated to receive federal funds from the U.S. EPA as part of the CBP GIT Funding Program. The work funded by this initiative advances outcomes identified in the 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement. Each year, certain outcomes are chosen by the CBP as top priorities to address, and these stretch across all GITs and workgroups.

Project Title: **Facilitating Brook Trout Outcome Attainability through Coordination with CBP Jurisdictions and Partners**

Organization:
Trout Unlimited

GIT Supported:
Brook Trout Workgroup

Partners:
Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture



Project Summary/ Context:

The objective of this project was for Trout Unlimited and the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture to work with the EPA Data Center team, the brook trout work group (BTWG), and other partners and stakeholders currently collecting data to populate a database to better evaluate progress on the Chesapeake Bay Program's Brook Trout Outcome. In short, the brook trout outcome is to increase occupied brook trout habitat within the Chesapeake Bay watershed by 8% by 2025.

The project outlines several opportunities and recommendations for the BTWG to collaborate with other Chesapeake Bay Program teams and various other stakeholders engaged in brook trout conservation projects.

This project also compiled a database of over 5,000 implementation projects completed between 2016 and 2022 that provides the framework for a brook trout tracking tool available in the Habitat Tracker.

Finally, we analyzed data from the 2016 and 2024 EBTJV brook trout assessments to attempt to quantify the progress towards the BTWG outcome of an 8% increase in occupied brook trout habitat.

The project provides numerous recommendations for the BTWG to increase collaboration and communication with other GITs and stakeholders as well as recommendations for tracking brook trout progress into the future.

Award #: 21499

Method:

- The 2016 EBTJV brook trout assessment served as the baseline for comparison with 2024 EBTJV assessment update to quantify gains in brook trout occupied habitat in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. We developed a logic flow model to categorize each catchment within the bay watershed and conducted reviews of the results with several state biologists to identify limitations within the dataset.
- Through outreach to over 100 stakeholders and a compilation of existing datasets, we compiled a dataset of implementation projects that were completed between 2016 and 2024. This database served as template for the development of a brook trout project tracking application within Habitat Tracker.
- We completed reviews of other GIT management plans, numerous meetings with other GITs and stakeholders throughout the watershed to identify area for collaboration.

Results:

- Based on the comparison of the 2016 and 2024 EBTJV datasets, we estimate a maximum increase in occupied brook trout habitat of 0.5%, however this is likely an overestimate based on the data limitations described in the final report.
- We were able to compile a database of over 5,000 implementation projects completed within the watershed from 2016-2022. Roughly 21% of the projects were completed in areas currently occupied by brook trout.
- The database was used to develop a brook trout project tracking tool within the Habitat Tracker database that may be used to track projects and progress in the future.
- We provide numerous recommendations for the BTWG to increase collaboration and data sharing amongst other CBP GITs as well as other stakeholders in the watershed responsible for brook trout project implementation.

Reflection/ Recommendations:

The results of this project demonstrate the difficulty of quantifying the brook trout outcome based on the limitations of the datasets available. It was clear through the development of the project database and the analysis of the EBTJV data that more focus needs to be directed towards pre- and post-project monitoring to better quantify this outcome. Recommendations are provided throughout the report to address these limitations.

Several opportunities were identified to increase collaboration and communication between the BTWG and other CBP GITs and stakeholders. The use of the Habitat Tracker will facilitate more accurate project tracking and assist in the development of meaningful monitoring plans.

