

**NOAA**  
**FISHERIES**

# NOAA's Habitat Conservation Initiatives:

## Supporting Robust Fisheries

**Lou Chiarella**

Assistant Regional Administrator for Habitat  
Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office  
Gloucester, MA

**Kara Meckley**

Office of Habitat Conservation  
NOAA Fisheries

Mid Atlantic Fishery Management Council  
Freeport, NJ  
June 10, 2014

# Council habitat accomplishments



- EFH described in 45 FMPs
- ~100 HAPCs identified
- Protected nearly 1 billion acres of vulnerable bottom habitats from fishing gear impacts
- Proactive deep-sea coral protection

# Challenges Remain...

- U.S. losing 80,000 acres of wetlands in coastal watersheds per year
- Similar downward trends for:
  - SAV
  - Mangroves
  - Coral reefs



# Recognition of the need for action



- Saltwater anglers prefer management strategies that protect and restore degraded fish habitat
- NMFS should invest in habitat research that connects habitat quality and quantity to stock productivity
- Councils are interested in increasing their engagement on non-fishing impacts to habitat
- NMFS and Councils should set clear objectives and establish metrics
- NMFS should provide guidance to implement EBFM



# Current Council habitat initiatives



- Mid-Atlantic Ecosystem Approaches to Fisheries Management Workgroup



- North Pacific Council MOU on non-fishing impacts



- Atlantic deep-sea coral management MOU

# Opportunities beyond MSA



- Habitat Blueprint
  - Place-based focus areas
  - Landscape-scale approaches
- Targeted fisheries habitat restoration
- National Fish Habitat Partnership
- Landscape Conservation Cooperatives

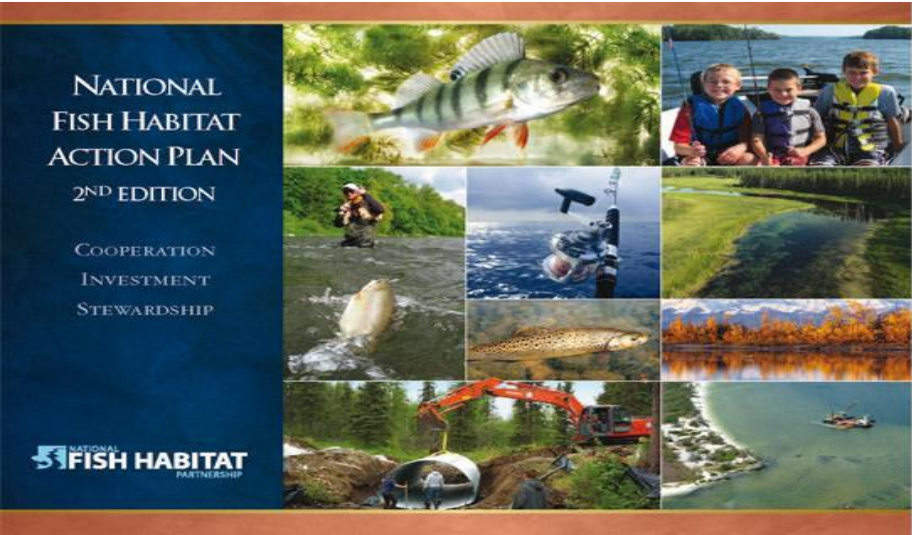


# Targeted Fisheries Habitat Restoration

- Focus on supporting sustainable fisheries
- Leverage federal funding with external funding
- Benefits for EFH, ecosystem level benefits (i.e., forage fish)
- Opportunity for Councils to guide restoration towards highest priorities



# National Fish Habitat Partnership



## Goals

- Protect and maintain intact and healthy aquatic systems
- Prevent further degradation of fish habitats that have been adversely affected
- Reverse declines in the quality and quantity of aquatic habitats to improve the overall health of fish and other aquatic organisms
- Increase the quality and quantity of fish habitats that support a broad natural diversity of fish and other aquatic species





# NFHP: Potential benefits & opportunities



## Benefits

- Directed habitat conservation in support of managed species
- Another voice on fisheries and habitat
- Leverage partner resources
- Fish habitat assessments can increase best available science

## Opportunities

- Council rep on Board can advocate your priorities and concerns
- Articulate objectives and priorities to regional FHPs
- Participate in FHP committees
- Endorse priority projects funded by the FHPs

# DOI Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs)

- Network of public-private partnerships
- Provide science to support sustainable natural resource management (including coastal habitats that support fisheries)





# LCCs: Potential benefits & opportunities

- Funding to fill science gaps
- Forum to incorporate fishery goals and threats into large scale management efforts
- Potential new partners to work on ecosystem level challenges
- LCC Steering and Science/Technical Committees
- LCC National Council



[www.lccnetwork.org](http://www.lccnetwork.org)

# NOAA Habitat Blueprint



- *A framework* to improve habitat for fisheries, marine life, and coastal communities
  - Improving the way we do business
- Built around Guiding Principles
- Implemented through place-based, science, and policy activities



# Blueprint: Habitat Focus Areas

**West Coast:**  
Implementation planning and execution started in Russian River Watershed

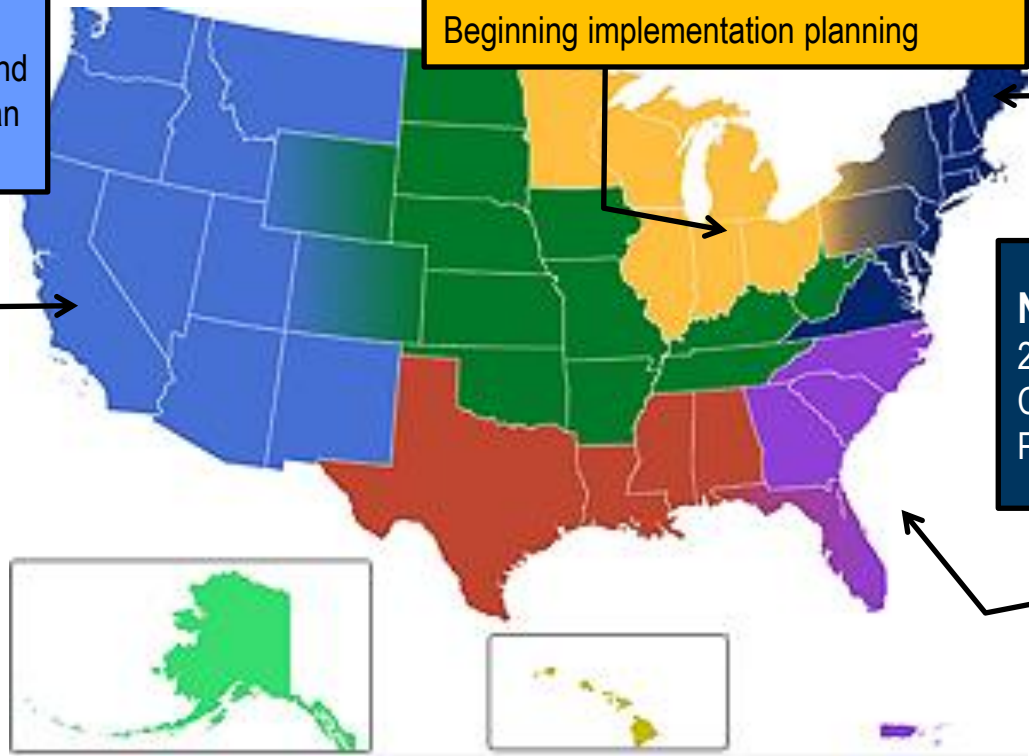
**Great Lakes:**  
Two Areas selected  
Beginning implementation planning

**North Atlantic:**  
2 Areas Selected  
Choptank Watershed -DE,MD  
Penobscot Watershed - ME

**Southeast/Caribbean:**  
Selection expected late spring / early summer

**Pacific Islands:**  
Two Areas selected  
Beginning implementation planning

**Alaska:**  
Selection expected in March



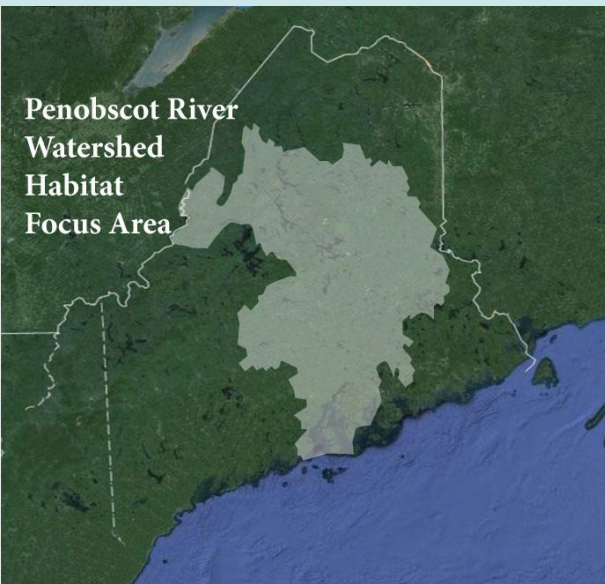
# Blueprint: Potential benefits & opportunities



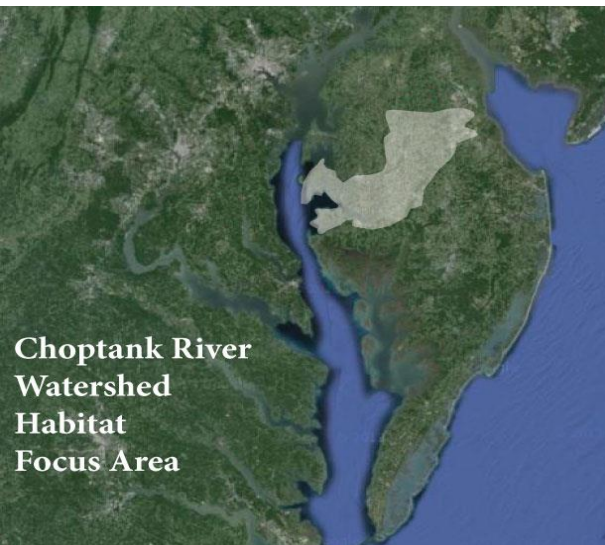
- Increased focus on habitat conservation for managed fisheries
- Opportunity to highlight habitat science and conservation needs
- Access to broad network of NOAA assets
- Habitat Focus Areas:
  - Provide input into selection process
  - Participate in development of implementation plans once Focus Areas are selected
- Identify key habitat science gaps/needs or policy issues



# Habitat Focus Areas in the North Atlantic



The Penobscot River is New England's second largest river, and eleven migratory fish species are found in the watershed, including three listed under the Endangered Species Act. The largest run of Atlantic salmon in the United States occurs on the Penobscot. With a rich cultural history of commercial, recreational and sustenance fishing, it is home to the Penobscot Indian Nation.



The Delmarva/Choptank River watershed, which includes the Choptank and Little Choptank Rivers, is located on Maryland's Eastern Shore. The Choptank River is the longest river on the Delmarva Peninsula. This area is a treasured part of the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem, representing critical habitat for spawning striped bass and river herring, and historically abundant oysters. Residents of the watershed were traditionally employed in agriculture or commercial fishing.

# Threats



## Penobscot River

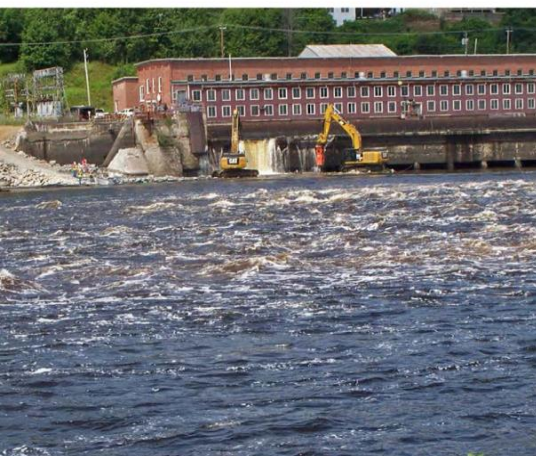
- Loss of Atlantic salmon, river herring and their habitats
- Dams and culverts
- Water pollution
- Overfishing
- Loss of recreational fishery for Atlantic salmon

## Choptank River

- Continued population growth and development
- Loss of wetlands, climate change and sea level rise
- Loss of coastal and riverine habitats
- Loss of oysters due to overfishing, habitat loss and poor water quality



# Penobscot River Objectives



*Veazie Dam: built in 1912, taken down 101 years later, in 2013.*

## **Focus Area Objectives at a Glance**

### **3-5 years**

**Sea-Run Fish** – Identify priority areas for fish passage to increase access to habitat

**Prey Species** – Remove dams or construct fishways to allow access to thousands of acres of spawning habitat for alewives, which are food for commercially important groundfish

**Atlantic Salmon** – Replace culverts in coldwater habitat

**Ecosystem Monitoring** – Continue pre- and post-dam removal project monitoring

**Forecasting** - Provide accurate and timely river flow forecasts for river-based recreational activities

### **Long-term**

Improve river flow and restore sea-run fish

Increase fishing and recreational activities, generating jobs and revenues for Maine communities and preserving the cultural heritage of the Penobscot Indian Nation





# Choptank River Objectives

## *Focus Area Objectives At a Glance*

- Restore degraded oyster reef habitat and significantly increase native oyster populations
- Rebuild and sustain important fish populations (including striped bass, shad, herring, American eel, and other species)
- Document and quantify the benefits oyster reefs and associated habitats provide
- Improve the decision-making and resilience of coastal communities by improving the delivery of NOAA's habitat and climate science



# Next Steps – Implementation Plan

5 functions to advance the Habitat Focus Area's objectives:

1. Describes activities to be undertaken over the next 3-5 years
2. Describes the sequencing and interdependencies of projects
3. Presents indicators or metrics to measure progress
4. Demonstrates the cross-line office coordination
5. Outreach tool for communicating and engaging stakeholders, partners, and NOAA leadership to identify shared interests and leverage support.

# Next Steps – Implementation Plan

## Implementation Plan Schedule

1. Form Implementation Planning Team.....2-4 wks
2. Develop Implementation Plan.....8-12 wks
3. Engage Partners, Stakeholders,Public.....4 wks
4. Implement Plan.....3-5 yrs
5. Report Progress.....Every 6 mo



# Take home messages



- The habitat challenges we face are complex and not easily solved.
- NOAA Fisheries is working on habitat strategies beyond MSA
- Lots of opportunities for Councils to convey habitat needs and priorities



# Questions?

