



Landscape Level Conservation in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed

The mission of the Upper Susquehanna Conservation Alliance (USCA) is to promote the conservation of natural resources in the headwaters region of the Susquehanna River in New York. The USCA is an alliance of agencies, organizations, academic institutions, and individuals who are working collaboratively to conduct green infrastructure planning, implement restoration and maintenance of high quality waters and habitats, protect and restore species of greatest conservation need, reduce impacts of flooding, and promote sustainable working landscapes for the people of the watershed.

The USCA was formed in 2010 under leadership of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, New York Field Office (NYFO). Today, over 176 members from over 50 diverse agencies, organizations, academic institutions, and individuals make up the USCA, and its efforts continue to draw new collaborators.

Alliance members are encouraged to join or create work groups (see right panel for current work groups) which target specific conservation priorities. The groups convene on an ad hoc basis to accomplish self-identified goals and objectives such as conducting surveys, implementing conservation work on the ground, and educating the public on USCA conservation plans. Once or twice per year, members gather in Cortland, NY, to provide updates on the status of ongoing projects, discuss issues, priorities, and funding opportunities within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.



In 2014, the NYFO provided \$49K to support research, habitat restoration, education, and land protection. An additional \$50K was provided in 2015.

If you are interested in learning more about the USCA or joining our alliance, please contact

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Work Group Ongoing Efforts:

Landscape/Conservation Planning Work Group

Despite large areas of habitat and natural resources, the watershed contains contamination, flooding, and other threats. This work group will:

- Use GIS to identify important habitat connectivity areas and diverse landscape areas for restoration and protection
- Determine best spatial land and water areas for species research and contaminant sampling
- Assist with easements and restoration projects led by USCA partners by supporting them with parcel-level analysis
- Provide stewardship of GIS data for all work groups and share data as needed among partners

Flood Work Group

Floodplains provide critical services such as flood attenuation and water filtration. To support resilient floodplain management, this work group will:

- Provide educational support for training including the Upper Susquehanna Coalition training on Emergency Stream Intervention
- Identify priority floodplain areas for protection
- Promote flood resiliency through outreach
- Serve as a forum for exchange of information and ideas

Eastern Hellbender Work Group

The largest salamander in North America is declining due potentially to water quality issues and lack of habitat. Its presence indicates areas with good water quality. This work group will:

- Conduct surveys to identify suitable habitat for hellbenders and areas for habitat restoration
- Use environmental DNA and other detection methods to conduct presence/absence surveys
- Identify areas for habitat restoration
- Develop a management plan including husbandry and captive rearing techniques

Pearly Mussel Work Group

Freshwater mussels are one of the most imperiled aquatic species and are largely misunderstood. This work group will:

- Conduct presence/absence surveys of species of greatest conservation need and close data gaps
- Evaluate species diversity and richness
- Identify fish hosts used in reproduction (including American eels) and mussel beds under threat of contaminated surface water runoff
- Determine restoration and preservation opportunities

Eastern Brook Trout Work Group:

Brook trout populations are in decline due to loss of habitat and water quality issues. This work group will:

- Identify and implement restoration and habitat improvement projects to support sustainable brook trout populations
- Determine streams warranting water classification revisions
- Work with partners to identify barriers to fish migration

Fields to Young Forests Work Group

Early successional forests are important habitat for a number of animals including the American woodcock. This work group will:

- Identify partners and project opportunities in the watershed that will benefit woodcock and other species that utilize early successional habitat

Outreach Work Group

This newly-formed group will work together to produce outreach materials for internal and external partners. This group will:

- Facilitate internal communication by establishing online work group pages
- Distribute information to interested audiences and potential conservation partners via online and printed materials

Work groups are formed to address identified priorities and member interests. They are subject to change and addition.