Chesapeake Bay Oyster EIS Executive Committee (EC) Meeting
Chesapeake Bay Environmental Center, Grasonville, MD
August 19, 2008

Meeting Attendees: US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) – Norfolk District: District Commander Col. Dan Anninos, Mark Mansfield; **Baltimore District:** Robert Pace
VA Dept. of Natural Resources: Sec. Preston Bryant
MD Dept. of Natural Resources: Sec. John Griffin, Eric Schwaab, Tom O'Connell
Potomac River Fisheries Commission (PRFC): A.C. Carpenter
US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): Bill Arguto, Mike Fritz
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA): Peyton Robertson, Jeff Shenot, Peter Bergstrom
US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS): Chris Guy
Maryland Environmental Service (MES): Phil Jones, Kate Meade, Josh Chapman
Versar, Inc./EIS Writing Team (Versar): Bill Richkus
Oyster Advisory Panel (OAP): Chairman Brian Rothschild, Jim Anderson, Mark Berrigan, Maurice Héral, Roger Mann, Eric Powell, Mike Roman

Resolutions/Action Item

- Versar will complete all edits to the draft PEIS by 9/12/08. The OAP will review the revised draft PEIS and provide final comments by 9/17/08. Versar will incorporate those changes by 9/23/08.
- Based on the OAP review, the EC will determine whether or not the draft PEIS is ready for release to the public.

OAP Update on EIS and Comments

- The OAP identified several issues with the draft PEIS related to readability. The document should present the scientific evidence in a logical way, so that the reader can understand the consequences of the proposed action and its alternatives and is led to the best course of action.
- The importance of restoring oyster habitat has not been sufficiently addressed in the draft PEIS. When there are larger reefs, the sedimentation issue is minimized, which may also contribute to a healthier oyster population less susceptible to diseases like MSX and Dermo. Compounding this problem, as oyster habitat shrinks, it becomes increasingly more difficult to restore.
- A moratorium alone would not be effective in restoring the oyster population in the Bay; it would not address the issues of disease and sedimentation, which are more important to restoration than over fishing.
- The EIS will contain a wealth of information about Crassostrea ariakensis, but surprisingly little solid statistical conclusions about the species.
- The EIS is difficult to use from a management perspective. The elements required to make a logical decision on oyster restoration do not seem to be present, though this is to some extent unavoidable with the amount of uncertainty currently in the EIS. There is a need for reliable science that can be applied to the alternatives to confirm their effectiveness.

Discussion Highlights:

- The degree at which diploid *C. ariakensis* would thrive in the Bay is relatively uncertain.
- The OAP is of the opinion that *C. ariakensis* would not be a serious ecological competitor to the native oyster. But in fact, this is unknown, since no field experiments to this end have been performed.
- Members of the OAP pointed out that the precautionary principle would not preclude an introduction of non-native oysters. A “risk-averse” management strategy would preclude any alternative, and a “risk neutral” outcome former requires decision making on a certain amount of acceptable risk. If the risks associated with non-native introduction are considered acceptably low, it may be introduced.
- Members of the OAP emphasized that an introduced oyster would almost certainly leave the Bay, and could potentially spread over a large range on the East Coast and that this outcome is of concern to some states.
- Text will be added to the Section 2 to indicate that Alternatives 6 & 7 are no longer being considered and three categorical combinations under Alternative 8 will be included in the document. A section describing the effects of these combination alternatives, including any possible synergistic effects, will be added for legal sufficiency. The OAP noted that the technical revision should ensure that the logic behind the combination alternatives would be easily understood.