

SAV-vy Collaboration:

Using Regional Academic Experts to Streamline Mitigation Planning for Essential Fish Habitat

— Deidra Valianti + Dave Brizzolara

INTRODUCTION

The Ocean Wind 1 Offshore Wind Farm had two proposed export cables within mapped areas of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) habitat, a key ecosystem component providing essential fish habitat and food for many important estuarine and marine species.

Federal and state mandates required the mitigation of direct and indirect impacts to the SAV habitat, so the developer had to implement an effective means of mitigation planning that would result in a high likelihood of success.

A technical advisory committee (TAC) provided a template for success for future offshore wind mitigation efforts.

TAC GOALS

Engage regional SAV experts in open discussions to inform a successful mitigation plan for unavoidable impacts to SAV within Barnegat Bay.

Overcome roadblocks in mitigation conversations with agencies.

Use TAC input and meeting discussions to create an agency acceptable SAV Restoration and Mitigation Plan, specifically the Site Selection and Planting/ Seeding Methodology sections.

TAC MEETING TOPICS

1. Project Introduction/Kick-Off
2. SAV Site Selection
3. SAV Restoration Methods
4. SAV Monitoring Protocols
5. SAV Maintenance and Adaptive Management
6. Review of SAV Site Selection and Methodology Draft Plan Review

TAC MEMBERS

Dr. Robert Orth
Virginia Institute of Marine Science

Dr. Jud Kenworthy
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Dr. Paul Bologna
Montclair State University

Chris Pickerall
Cornell Cooperative Extension

Dr. Cassie Gurbisz
St. Mary's College of Maryland

Dr. Jessie Jarvis
University of North Carolina- Wilmington

BACKGROUND + METHODOLOGY

HDR's search for finding vendors/ contractors for large-scale SAV mitigation was unsuccessful, as well as looking for purchasing eelgrass seeds or plants from nurseries in NJ. This led to the realization that large-scale restoration and mitigation of eelgrass in Barnegat Bay would need to have a creative solution. HDR found that some of the mid-Atlantic region's leading SAV experts were interested in providing guidance and having open discussions which led to the creation of the Technical Advisory Committee.

TAC OUTCOME

Productive conversations and successful collaboration between TAC members and the project team led to the creation of a guide for the implementation of a large-scale SAV mitigation in Barnegat Bay. Site Selection and Methodology Plans were written and reviewed by the TAC. While the Project was canceled in November 2023, this process proved to be a means of successful collaboration and mitigation planning, serving as a template for future work.



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