Comparability of Biological Assessment Methods –
Prince George’s County and the Maryland Biological Stream Survey

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Abstract
To make any statement of comparability between biological monitoring and assessment protocols, attention must be given to characterizing random and systematic error that can arise not only from sample to sample within a method, but between methods even when monitoring the same locations. If internal method error sources and the resulting variability are not documented and accounted for, the fact that similar assessments were attained may be no more than a random phenomenon. Thus, we hold that sufficient information for analysis of method comparability must include documentation of 1) the performance characteristics of a method (what a method is capable of), and 2) the fact that an existing dataset represents those characteristics (how a method actually performed). To examine method and data comparability between Prince George’s County Department of Environmental Resources (DER) and the Maryland Biological Stream Survey (MBSS), 15 sites were sampled by both agencies during the same index period (Spring 2001). Benthic macroinvertebrate samples were collected by both agencies using similar field methods, and assessments performed using the same multimetric index; however, there were differences in reach length, specific subsampling procedures, taxonomists, and data entry QC.

While methods performed equally well (intra-method) and arrived at similar final assessments (inter-method), there were several differences that could be attributed to field methods (variability of sample unit allocation), laboratory procedures (subsampling and taxonomy), and database management (metric calculation). In this paper, we discuss similarities and differences in the methods, and evaluate the acceptability of combining these datasets.