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**Partner:** The Nature Conservancy (Corinne Smith, Project Manager, corinne\_smith@tnc.org)

**Final Report for USFWS Agreement F11AC00673**

**Reporting Period:** 4/1/11 – 3/30/13

**Project Title:** Mat-Su Salmon Habitat Partnership Support and Coordination

**Project Background:**

The Matanuska-Susitna Basin Salmon Conservation Partnership formed to address increasing human use and development in the Mat-Su Basin and related impacts to salmon, their habitat, and other aquatic species. This agreement and amendment supported coordination of the Mat-Su Salmon Partnership, assessing progress and updating of the Partnership's strategic plan, and coordination of the 2011 and 2012 Mat-Su Salmon Science and Conservation Symposiums.

**Project Activities and Accomplishments for the grant period:**

***Partnership Coordination:***

Over the grant period Jessica Speed was hired by The Nature Conservancy to fill the role of Partnership Coordinator. Together, Jessica and Corinne Smith Mat-Su Program Director with TNC and steering committee member with the Partnership have fulfilled the basic support and coordination functions for the Partnership as well as additional projects and roles during this grant period. Basic coordination functions have included attending and representing the Partnership at National Fish Habitat Partnership (FHP), all Alaska FHP, Mat-Su conservation community and the first ever joint Alaska Fish Habitat Partnership and Landscape Conservation Cooperative meetings.

As Partnership Coordinator, Jessica has been responsible for leading coordination of Steering Committee and other standing Partnership committees such as the outreach and symposium planning groups. Corinne often assists with agenda development; Jessica helps coordinate meetings, guest attendees and completion of Partnership business relevant to these meetings. She also is now the key point of contact for the partnership handling updates and maintaining the partnership email list serve and website, as well as inquiries and requests for information.

Requests for information include coordinating Mat-Su Steering Committee responses to multiple National Fish Habitat initiatives including for the National Fish Habitat Action Plan revision, proposed changes to NFHAP funding allocation, evaluation measures to track fish habitat partnership performance, fish habitat protection activities in Alaska, and Mat-Su habitat assessments relevant to the 2015 national status of fish habitat evaluation and more.

Outreach efforts have most notably included the creation of a new website, partnership newsletters and National *Water's to Watch* designation. Jessica worked with Katrina Mueller (USFWS) to develop a new Partnership website found at [www.matsusalmon.org](http://www.matsusalmon.org). The new completed website has greater functionality than the old and is much friendlier to the general

public. It is a superior product than anticipated and we're very grateful for Katrina Mueller's technical assistance. Other outreach materials include the production of three Mat-Su Salmon Partnership two page e-newsletters about Partnership activities that were sent to the Partnership list serve and website. The most recent newsletter included links to long article versions hosted on the Partnership's new website for the first time. Jessica also coordinated and assisted in the successful NFHP National *Waters to Watch* 2013 application and successful designation for Big Lake. This coverage will increase exposure for the Partnership both nationally and locally and showcase habitat improvement efforts at Big Lake.

Other notable Partnership activities have included participating in a fish habitat partnership organizational development workshop, submitting proposals for funding Partnership coordination, and hosting a workshop to assist partners in preparing study requests for a hydroelectric project. In February of 2012, Jessica and Steering Committee member Frankie Barker attended and presented at a Fish Habitat Partnership Excellence program in Portland, Oregon. Joined by three other Alaska FHP's this event was sponsored by the National Fish Habitat Partnership and was designed to help local organizations achieve organizational resilience and success. All of the Alaska fish habitat partnerships discussed modes and mutual benefits for further collaboration. Corinne successfully submitted proposals and received funding from the Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund for partnership coordination and the symposium. Corinne also submitted a National Fish Habitat Partnership proposal which has been re-submitted to assist in funding the salmon symposium, some partnership coordination and further develop outreach materials to support the revised strategic action plan. The Mat-Su Salmon Partnership also hosted a workshop on how to prepare study requests for the federal licensing process for the Susitna-Watana Hydroelectric Project.

Over the grant period, the Partnership received great recognition. Firstly Corinne received national recognition for her contribution to aquatic resource conservation by being awarded the National Fish Habitat Partnership 2012 Scientific Achievement Award. This annual award honors outstanding achievement in the use of science to improve fish habitat conservation. The second acknowledgement of good work came following the National Fish Habitat Partnership's completion of a test-drive of a new partnership evaluation process. The Mat-Su Salmon Partnership scored in the top three of the 17 recognized partnerships in the country. The evaluation looked at strategic focus, use of NFHP funds to meet those strategic priorities, and reliance on good science, partner engagement, and collaboration to achieve goals.

### ***Mat-Su Salmon Science and Conservation Symposium:***

Over the duration of this award, the 4th and 5th annual salmon science and conservation symposiums have been a great success with planning for the 6th well under way. In 2011, David Montgomery from the University of Washington and author of *King of Fish* was the keynote speaker who helped to attract a record-number of attendees and spoke about the longstanding histories of salmon decline in the western world. Through several interactive sessions the very engaged attendees were provided opportunities to discuss Mat-Su Salmon Partnership priorities, and various issues related to salmon habitat in the Mat-Su with Dr. Montgomery.

The keynote speaker for 2012 was Dr. Robert Lackey, Professor of Fisheries and Political Science at Oregon State University. Dr. Lackey co-edited the anthology *Salmon 2100* which includes diverse authors exploring the question "What is it going to take to have wild salmon populations in 2100?" Dr. Lackey kicked off the symposium and generated lively discussion with his presentation "Straight Talk about the Future of Salmon", followed by a second discussion sharing lessons learned from the Pacific Northwest.

At each symposium over 20 people presented their work covering a variety of topics including salmon studies, hydrology and water quality, conservation planning, restoration, planning and economic valuation, hydrology and wetlands, fish passage, climate change and invasive species, salmon distribution and habitat use. In 2012 there were more registrants than ever. The Mat-Su Salmon Science and Conservation Symposium provides a forum to share successes and lessons learned on conserving salmon in the Mat-Su Basin, and promotes an exchange of ideas on how to improve results. Every year this event matures and its popularity grows with increasing registrants and great feedback.

Both years, Corinne and Jessica led symposium planning with the assistance of a Partnership committee, and handled all logistics for flyer creation, registrations, speaker travel, catering, sound system rental, and facility arrangements. 2012 presentations are posted online on the new Partnership website <http://www.matsusalmon.org/what-we-do/science-symposium/>, with 2011 and older presentation abstracts found in the symposium booklet posted online and are available by request.

The Mat-Su Salmon Science & Conservation Symposium has become not only a vehicle to share information but also provides a means to track progress and gauge where the Partnership has reached or is reaching its goals as outlined in the Strategic Action Plan (SAP). Corinne Smith compiled an inventory of partner projects in 2010 and 2011 based on presentations at those two symposiums and other sources. Following input from partners these inventories formed the basis for annual progress reports.

### ***Strategic Action Plan:***

In 2008, the Partnership developed a Strategic Action Plan for salmon conservation in the Mat-Su Basin. The Partnership planned to update the plan every three to five years depending upon changes in development, achievement toward Partnership goals, threats to salmon habitat and other factors in the Mat-Su. Based on findings from sessions and discussions at the 2011 symposium, a follow-up survey sent to the entire partnership, and individual conversations with various partners, the Steering Committee decided to update the strategic plan. New development projects, the introduction of invasive aquatic species, and expanded human use of the Mat-Su as well warrant revisiting the plan to ensure that the partnership is focused on the most significant threats to salmon habitat in the Mat-Su Basin. Coordinated by Corinne, the Partnership Steering Committee laid out a process to update the plan based on progress by partners on existing plan objectives and the emergence of new threats to salmon habitat. The Steering Committee completed a scoping process and document to determine new potential threats to be addressed.

The 2012 symposium was a very successful first step in updating the plan with open space discussion groups discussing these new potential threats and the existing plan objectives. The committee then enlisted partners to lead the development of objectives and strategies for new potential threats and to review existing objectives in the plan. Nine working groups have been created based on the intersection of focal issues and threats filled by steering committee and partners. Corinne Smith has coordinated the strategic plan update process by creating draft update documents, facilitating partner meetings about the plan revision and providing CAP methodology training through two workshops that also gave context for consistent planning methodology. At the time of writing this report most working groups are still in the process of revising or creating new sections of the plan. These revised sections are due early June with a draft plan due for Steering Committee review in July. The partnership will review a draft plan in August, and the Steering Committee will approve a final updated plan in September.

Although the symposium provided a great start to drafting new strategies and reviewing the plan, the strategic plan revision is behind schedule by several months. Reasons for the delay are primarily due to the scoping process taking longer than anticipated and a planned January 2013 workshop being held in two sessions in late February and early March. The plan will be available in time for informing funding priorities for the annual NFHP funding cycle.