**Steering Committee Meeting**

Alaska Department of Fish & Game, Suite 2

1800 Glenn Highway, Palmer

**Tuesday, May 13, 2014 12:30 – 4 pm**

**Notes**

Jessica Speed- The Nature Conservancy (Coordinator)

**Steering Committee Members Present:**

Jessica Winnestaffer - Chickaloon Village Traditional Council (Facilitator)

Roger Harding - Alaska Department of Fish and Game (Notetaker)

Corinne Smith- The Nature Conservancy

Frankie Barker- Mat-Su Borough

Arni Thompson - Alaska Salmon Alliance

Liz Robinson -Envision Mat-Su

Bill Rice- US Fish and Wildlife Service (Phone)

**Guests:**

Sam Ivey- Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Matt Kirchoff- Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Robert Ruffner, Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership

David Wigglesworth- US Fish and Wildlife Service

Libby Benolkin - US Fish and Wildlife Service

Meg Perdue - US Fish and Wildlife Service

Erika Ammann - NOAA

**Guest Presentations –**

**State Wildlife Action Planning revision process – Matt Kirchhoff, ADF&G**

Matt introduced himself and gave a brief description of working for ADF&G for 23 years as Wildlife Biologist in Juneau. Matt recently returned from retirement to work part-time for the department to coordinate revisions to the State Wildlife Action Plan. Roger has met with Matt and provided him some background information on NFHP and on Alaska FHPs.

In 2001, congress dedicated funds to prevent species from being listed on ESA and this includes non-hunted game and fish. This is an annual appropriation. In 2005 each state drafted their individual State Wildlife Action Plans which was required for any state that wanted to receive SWG money. Currently the state of Alaska gets about 3 million in SWG funding with 2/3rds of this funding going to Division of Wildlife and the remaining 1/3 going towards to aquatic species (primarily Sport Fish Division).

Congress requires an update of the states plans in order to be eligible to continue receiving SWG funds. Originally each state was given lots of leeway in developing plans but currently there is a set of Best Practices standards which is providing Matt with guidance in developing the updated plan. Matt asked Mat-Su steering committee members to try to imagine what species might be listed in the revised plan that would efficiently and effectively allocate financial resources to prevent any ESA listing. The updated plan will be the blue print for how SWG funds will be spent in Alaska for the next 10 years. Matt will be reaching out to NGOs, FHPs, government agencies, and other groups to gather input to reflect: 1) how wildlife in Alaska should be conserved; and 2) what are the threats to these species and their habitats? The goal is to develop a credible State Wildlife Action Plan.

Questions following presentation:

Q - who will sign off on the plan: Commissioner Campbell would sign.

Q- How has Sport Fish has used SWG funds in the past? The 1st years of the plan, everyone got a small piece of money. In 1st plan there were over 400 + species listed, so lots of non-game species qualified for funding; you could justify almost any project to get funds to study and monitor. A species has to be included in the SWAP in order to spend any SWG money on it. Matt wants to make sure that the revised SWAP is relevant to conservation groups, and includes legitimate areas of concerns, i.e., whatever threatens wildlife in AK, should be addressed in revised SWAP.

Jessica W. suggested that Matt include tribes in his outreach efforts and also suggested Alaska Forum for the Environment, which nearly 200 tribes are involved. Matt will contact Jessica for more information and contacts!

Corrine suggested reviewing FHP Strategic Plans from all of the AK FHPs for action items and SWAP should use to identify, research needs etc. (Editor Note: these have been provided to Matt).

* Elements or things that need to be done i.e., checklist and then out to blind review
  + Identify species at risk, in terms of ESA\ population trends etc
  + Identify important at risk habitats, i.e., sea level rise and loss of estuarine habitat
  + Identify important threats, i.e., climate change.
  + Identify needed conservation actions, i.e., regulatory changes, stream enhancement in logged streams,
  + Review-revision
  + Provide a monitoring program
  + Public participation

Jessica S. asked what the best way the FHPs can participate and Matt replied that he envisioned some type of workshop with 1-2 members from each FHP. David W. mentioned the possibility of an All Alaskan FHP meeting and could help coordinate with Matt for his workshop. Matt’s next step is to get ADF&G buy in on the procedures he and Tim will follow to develop revisions to the SWAP.

**Update on Kenai Fish Habitat Partnership(FHP) activities – Robert Ruffner, Kenai FHP**

Robert has worked with many of the Mat-Su steering committee members and also sits on the Northwest Boreal Forest LCC where he acts as a liaison for the Kenai and Mat-Su FHP’s. Some of those things should be talked about here, specifically LCC strategic plans. Robert gave a report on his recent activities in Juneau with the Senate Resources Committee

Robert gave a brief overview on some of the differences between the Kenai FHP and the Mat-Su. Basically the Kenai FHP did NOT want be a SALMON only partnership and wanted to include all 30 aquatic species on the Kenai Peninsula and not just the 4 species everyone hears about. While Mat-Su FHP wanted salmon in their name and to be their primary focus. How Kenai FHP became a recognized FHP was similar to several others and they were officially recognized after the 2nd tier, so probably in the 3rd tier or so. Given they became an official FHP in a later tier, they Initially didn’t get the financial support and capacity that Mat-Su FHP has had as one of the first four recognized FHP’s. Another difference was that in its Strategic Plan the Kenai FHP did not include a Conservation Action Planning process (CAP) but since the original Strategic Plan have gone back and completed 2 CAPs: 1 for Marine and near shore waters and 1 for freshwater. To complete these CAPs, they got about 10 people together and brought Greg Low (TNC) to Kenai who led the groups through the CAP process. Greg wanted groups to think out 20 years and beyond and tried to prioritize threats etc. For the Kenai CAP, the groups choose invasive species as a primary threat. Pike is a big issue on Kenai but it is different than in in Mat-Su: Kenai has a chance to eradicate them. Thus, Kenai FHP may need a big chunk of money to try and eradicate pike vs. requiring ongoing but smaller funding needs. Kenai does have elodea and are about to spend a million dollars on projects to try and eradicate it. The Kenai also has Reed canary grass but they can only hope to control it but not eradicate it. The big 3 invasive species are ranked on what could be most damaging, and they are hoping FWS can fund some projects. For pike, funding would come from ADF&G, another 1 million dollar project and the first in moving waters in Alaska; Kenai has money in the bank to get started on elodea.

It was discussed that for a number of years ADF&G has been trying to make a prioritization matrix, and Alexander Creek scored higher; this matrix includes what has been lost (i.e., million $ sport fishery etc.), whether encroaching on major system, and level of impact where don’t have a lot of other impacts. Also need to think about feasibility issues; ADFG went into Alexander Creek that has lots of stream miles with 1 lake to reclaim where salmon are spawning. They basically push pike back into the lake but each system is a little different. AKSSF has been primary funder of invasive species projects and good to remember that Kenai has plants and Mat-Su has the pike.

Robert reported that the 2nd highest priority for Kenai FHP is warming water and reduced water flow. Cook Inlet keeper has been working on this issue for some time

Roads and culverts: Kenai has been pretty good about getting the bad ones fixed and Robert reports that approximately 80 out of 100 have been completed, and now only the costly ones (>1 mill $) are remaining. Robert mentioned that the Kenai FHP encouraged the state money to be spent on Mat-Su fish passage projects as they are cheaper priorities. Kenai FHP now wants federal highway $ to do the bigger and more costly projects. Jessica W. mentioned that tribes also get fed highway $ so might be a good way for Kenai FHP to involve tribes. It was also pointed out that there is a MOU between State and DOT and Habitat and Robert could talk with Mike Daigneault for more information. The Kenai Borough did adopt a 50 foot buffer along anadromous river corridors etc.

Robert reported that in the Kenai Cap Marine Plan there may be some overlap with the Mat-Su especially with the 3 potential threats to FHP’s geography ranked in order.

* Large scale oil spill - What would change face of things in marine environment. Salt marshes more at risk. What should be known in advance of any spill?
* Oil Well blow outs
* Beach armoring

A brief discussion followed on areas of shared interest and concerns between Kenai and Mat-Su:

David W. mentioned that these potential marine threats would cross over to both SWAP terrestrial and aquatic species, and also with large development issues. Corrine stated that coho and sockeye were species of concern or management problem but also king salmon in areas where harvest has been severely restricted. Robert also mentioned that several species of interest were shared and overlapped the 2 FHPs and that Robert hopes the upcoming Kenai RFP will really hone in on priorities. David W. mentioned that Katrina’s work on the All Alaskan web pages may be another area for collaboration. Bill R. asked Robert how does NW boreal LCC view the 2 FHPs? Robert answered that this is why he is on steering committee so that he can work between the 2 FHPs and LCC and that generally things are working well with LCC. Jessica S. mentioned her recent outreach work with Pacific Marine and Estuarine Partnership(PMEP) and other coastal fish habitat FHPs which includes an upcoming newsletter highlighting some of the ways coastal FHP’s are working with LCC’s. David W. reported that last year a meeting was convened to identify areas for collaboration between LCC’s and FHP’s, and we might try again this year.

BREAK

**Partnership Business**

NFHP FWS Funding Application (David Wigglesworth)

Decision memo regarding funding is awaiting final approval. David reviewed that there are 18 FHPs that are eligible to receive funding. Through pressure by FHPs there was a portion of funding that could be used for administration or go towards funding projects. Base line funding was approved for all 18 eligible FHPs ($75,000); 9 FHPs received a performance level 1 score and qualified for an additional $60, 974; 6 FHPs scored a performance level 2 and received an additional $182,920, while 1 FHP scored a performance level 3 and will receive $304,869. Two FHPs received only operational funding ($75,000).

David W. reported that Mat-Su funding application was well received and people thought it had lots of positive comments, but we do not know what our funding level will be at this time. So in terms of project funding guidance David suggested that the FHP could look at various scenarios and funding schemes. In terms of timing, once approved, USF&WS will need several weeks to pull together all of its procurement procedures but would try and have contracts up and ready by June 13th. So for groups that are going to get money, project managers will need to work with FWS staff on developing contracts and David reminded steering committee that there will be new forms this year.

It was brought up that there are other projects being conducted in Mat-Su that are being supported by other funds? It would be nice to get some formal endorsement or acknowledgements of projects funded by other dollars but are still included in Mat-Su Strategic Plan; this would show total impact of FHP and strategic plan outside of NFHP funds. FWS coordinators will be getting together to talk about funding problem areas and to refine definitions of “project completion, assessment and leveraging”.

Editor’s Note: on May 15th, 2014 the Mat-Su Salmon Partnership received official notification that it received a level 2 funding and will be awarded $257,920 ($75,000 base + $182,920) in funding.

Updated RFP process (Roger & Jessica)

* Project funding list for FY2014

Discussion centered around which projects would be funded based on what performance level and subsequent funding is received, including conversation about

whether to use 75k to fully fund some projects given what performance level score Mat-Su receives.

The group decided on a tier approach for coordination or baseline funding: if Mat-Su receives a score for performance level 1 then 60k would go towards coordination and 15k contributing to fund projects; if Mat-Su receives a performance level 2 than 70k would be used to fund coordination and 5k for projects and if performance level 3, all 75 k would be used for coordination. Corrine feels that TNC is pretty set for Jessica’s salary this year but would be good to get a little more travel and symposium support. Please review Corinne Smith’s email on May 5th, 2014 regarding that Mt-Su annual budget and major decisions.

Next topic: Jessica update for scoring sheet from subcommittee

Bill has sent out new RFP process at previous Steering Committee (SC) meeting. Wanted to make sure transparent and that we all had a chance to review all projects.

1. FWS staff will screen projects to make sure they qualify…yes/no…fund/non fund. And provide reasons.
2. FWS would do any follow-ups with applicants if short falls or more info needed etc.
3. Applications will go to science and data committee for “science eye” review and they will make additional recommendations.
4. Convene Science and Data Committee with SC and go through proposals and S & D provide expertise.
5. Then SC will score applications, and forward individual scores to Bill who will combine scores for final review at November Partnership Steering Committee meeting.

The November SC meeting will need to be rescheduled as it falls on a holiday. Jessica will send out a doodle poll with most likely dates November 12th and 13th. RFP should be out on street around July 20th from FWS and will be on list server and on web site plus emails. Question/discussion about who should receive and how to send out….FWS, TNC or Mat-Su Salmon. Include what expectations and role and some dates (not all details) should be included in RFP email.

David W. suggested that RFP might want to look at summary pages that would help with cutting/pasting into funding application.

A discussion about specific details about the scoring sheet were raised and concerns expressed. Jessica will send out a note about time frame for reviewing the RFP and what is needed. Discussion included the following:

1. Corrine: looked at previous 3rd one down in resource benefits, and next one down… a little confusing and overlap?
2. Bill R. Under Performance Measures: thought where RFP going and talking with coord. going more for on the ground projects….NFHP is moving more in this direction…more than assessment .
3. Some discussion about higher score FOR ON THE GROUND and restoration projects.
4. Do outreach as part of project proposal? Last year was scored higher the more letters of support or partners you had. Partners were penalized if doing projects themselves. Do we need landowner permission and what is importance of land owner letters?
5. Liz: one idea might be to take 5 and 15 and make it 20 total points and have it as 1 component. Want measurable outcomes.
6. Corrine asked the question of shifting in scoring from last year. Feels like permitting and partner participation is lacking.
7. Bill asked the question about what moved the dial last year; including key personnel in application did not add anything. We fund lots of people who don’t have a lot of experience and some that do.
8. Jessica S. don’t want to lose touch with on the ground projects but somehow use it as education…does project address root problem?

Resource benefits and Performance Measures are the big items that need further review. SC will need to review and provide input on next iteration the working group provides so we can approve the process and score sheet at the July meeting to have the RFP out in July.

NEXT topic:

Eric Rothwell has left the state but NMFS will be filling his position. Eric was a wonderful addition to the Partnership Steering Committee and will be missed. In the meantime, Erika Ammann will be attending future Mat-Su meetings; Erika is very qualified with lots of experience and is currently serving as the chairperson for the Southwest Alaska SHP. Contact: Erika Ammann - NOAA Federal <erika.ammann@noaa.gov>

NEXT Topic: **Alaska FHPs**

* New NFWF business model for Alaska & pending RFP

All Alaskan FHP meeting held April 14th. Krystyna W. of NFWF disclosed at the meeting that NFWF will be distributing a FRP in May. NFWF is continuing development of their business plans for each of their 3 targeted geographic areas in Alaska: Arctic, Yukon - Kuskokwim, and Cook Inlet. Jessica gave Krystyna a copy of the Mat-Su Strategic Plan. NFWF is also interested in funding stream flows, AWC, NHD work, projects that benefit belugas and produce clear outcomes. Could also be a possible coop project with Kenai and Mat-Su FHPs if can figure out what and how to do etc. Corrine mentioned that there is overlap with shipping lanes and shoreline protection etc. Also Arctic Ocean Observing System has data portals that could be a way to put Mat-Su and Kenai data in a centralized Cook Inlet data repository.

David mentioned that AOOS is looking at climate changes occurring in multiple FHPs and possible expanding ongoing NHD work which is certainly relevant. Jessica S. another cooperative idea might be pike: although not in same geographic area could be possibility of research on some common ground. Both Mat-Su and Kenai are playgrounds from Anchorage residents which could be vector for spreading invasive?Arnie mentioned that the North Pacific Research Board’s new director is Denby Lloyd which might be an avenue for collaboration along with the Alaska Ocean Observing System.

**National NFHP** (David)

* NFHP Bill

Next Topic

David: Senate Bill has been introduced that would authorize the National Fish Habitat Partnership but would certainly alter the way things are done now. There would be a new board and the way federal agencies interact with FHPs would also likely change. This bill currently would only authorize 7.2 mill which is what NFHP currently receiving. The difference would be how these funds would be distributed as the bill includes several “set asides: for example tribes might get 5%. The Bill also sets aside science money for various federal agencies and implementation of nonprofit board.

David talked with someone today and current efforts are to try and package NFHP legislation with a sportsman bill or a larger bill. Apparently they might have might mix of sponsors to package several bills together.

There might be a co-bill in the house etc or one introduced soon. Of current allocation 7.2 million, 3.3 now goes to NFHP and money is doled out to FWS field office to support FHPs. Not sure what this means and how interactions with field offices would be impacted but if no new money what would happen? FWS is an important component of the NFHP delivery model. Discussion was generally focused on question about the bill and how it would be implemented and how it would affect existing relationships.

Adjourn

UNFINISHED Agenda Items:

* National Science Assessment

**Committee Updates**

* Symposium Planning (Jessica)
* Outreach (Jessica)
* Science and Data

**Upcoming Events:**

* Joint-conference American Fisheries Society (AFS) and American Water Resources Association (AWRA) – October 20-24, 2014 in Juneau
* NFHP Fish Habitat Partnerships teleconference Thursday, May 22nd, 2014.

**Next meeting: July 8th, 2014**

Facilitator: Need a volunteer Notetaker: Liz Robinson