



Steering Committee Meeting

Friday, December 1, 2023 9am-1pm

Alces conference Rm., Alaska Dept of Fish and Game Office – 1800 Glenn Highway, Palmer

In-person only

NOTES

Attendees: Laurie Stuart (Tyonek Tribal Conservation District), Michael Mazzacavallo (Alaska Department of Fish and Game), Ted Eischeid (National Fish Habitat Partnership Board), Theo Garcia (Knik Tribe), Margaret Stern (Susitna River Coalition), Matt Varner (Bureau of Land Management), Nelli Williams (Trout Unlimited), Jessica Speed (Mat-Su Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership Coordinator/Trout Unlimited).

Meeting objective: Opportunity to meet in person, soon after the Mat-Su Salmon Symposium to discuss what the Steering Committee heard at the Symposium and to identify any action steps. It's also an opportunity to reflect on the value of the Partnership and how we ensure it continues to thrive.

9:00-9:15 **Welcome & Meeting Overview**

Partners answered icebreaker question.

9:15-9:30 **Taking stock of where we are as a Partnership**

Framing statement: The Matanuska-Susitna Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership formed in 2005 to address increasing impacts on salmon habitat from human use and development in the Mat-Su Basin. Modeled after the National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP), this coalition of now 65 organizations uses a collaborative, cooperative, and non-regulatory approach that brings together diverse stakeholders. The most recent addendum to the Strategic Plan focused on activities and actions from 2019-23. How successful has the partnership been at addressing the six organizational priorities? How are we doing in relation to the 12 threats and strategies?

- **Q1:** Of the six organizational priorities, where did we accomplish the most, and where do you think we have the most work left to do?
- **Q2:** How should the priorities be updated to reflect where we are today?
- **Q3:** Based on an updated threats and strategies assessment, how do you think we are doing?
- **Q4:** How could we build on areas of success to address other threats?

9:30-10:30 **Q&A/Discussion**

More roundtable reflections included a question about what participants were most proud of the Partnership accomplishing in 2023. Partners shared highlights (engagement in MSB riparian setback ordinance and designated seat on Waterbody Setback Advisory Board, successfully hosted events, MSB Excellence award and more. Some also flagged a need for greater clarity in Steering Committee roles and responsibilities. Also, discussion about ‘how’ the Partnership operates, capacity and who is responsible for getting the work of the Partnership done. There seemed to be clear consensus on the importance of meeting in-person versus virtual.

Outcomes/actions:

- Develop half page job descriptions to be given to new committee members on Partnership committees.
- Review Partnership operations guidelines, workplan and roles. What are expectations of various roles and what can be done by coordinator, standing committee members etc..

Walked through progress toward organizational priorities from 2021-2023. (*See draft list below*).

10:30-10:45 BREAK

10:45-13:00 How do we ensure that the Partnership continues to thrive?

Framing statement:

The Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership (Mat-Su Salmon Partnership) was officially recognized as a National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP) in 2008, one of the first four FHPs in the country. The Partnership was formed to provide a broad-based coordinated response to increasing impacts on salmon habitat from human use and development in the Mat-Su Basin, one of the fastest growing regions in the country and still a place where wild salmon thrive. The Mat-Su Salmon Partnership’s vision is thriving fish, healthy habitats and vibrant communities in the Mat-Su Basin.

- **Q1: What are the top 1-3 services the Partnership provides?**
- **Q2: What does a thriving partnership look like to you? Who is involved, and how are they engaged?**
- **Q3: How do we ensure that the partnership remains relevant and high functioning?**
- **Q4: How can we ensure that the symposium continues to serve as an engaging forum focused on collaboration, emerging science, and conservation?**

Partners had a range of discussion primarily around Q2 and Q3 (what does a thriving partnership look like and how do we ensure the Partnership remains relevant and high functioning).

Conversation included:

- Adequate capacity – greater division of labor beyond coordinator.
- A Partnership that is nimble enough to address current and emerging issues e.g. engaging in MSB riparian setback ordinance, things like 6PPD-Q etc..
- Small but meaningful progress each year, will add up to something substantive over time.
- Provide leadership/continue the conversation around science data sharing that has been brought up by the Science to Conservation Outcomes initiative.
- As part of the America’s Conservation Enhancement Act of October 2020, that now guides the National Fish Habitat Partnership program, each Fish Habitat Partnership in the country,

needs to re-apply to Congress by 2025 for official recognition as a Fish Habitat Partnership. Official status will be required to be eligible to receive NFHP funding (for Partnership operations/coordination and to fund local area projects).

The National Fish Habitat Partnership Board will submit these applications to Congress and has created an application template and requested any partners interested in applying must submit a draft for their review by December 31st. They will provide feedback in March.

Final applications are due to the NFHP Board in June, 2024.

Outcomes/actions:

- Submit draft fish habitat partnership application to the NFHP Board (Jessica with support from Matt and Michael)
- Agreement another longer and in-person meeting is warranted to cover items highlighted in the meeting. Host next Steering Committee meeting as an all day. In-person meeting.

13:00 Adjourn

ORGANIZATIONAL PRIORITIES (2021-2023)

1) Encourage the development and dissemination of relevant science-based information.

- The Science and Data Committee will focus on providing technical expertise within and outside the partnership, including identifying and filling data gaps, inform and establish best practices, and interpreting research on Basin habitat impacts.
 - *Science and Data Committee provides technical review support for the Partnership's annual review of proposals for National Fish Habitat Partnership funding. This is a very important service and greatly strengthens the RFP process.*
 - *Science to conservation outcomes initiative – November of 2021 - current/ongoing. What happens when the partnership fills in a data gap? How do we ensure science is truly used to inform decision making and development. This initiative explored potential tools and pathways to conserve cold water refugia identified on the Deshka River and Big Lake Basin. It is a pilot effort to apply this same methodology to other important science outputs.*
 - *Improved SHP's focus and communications related to engagement of scientists and partnership in public processes and decision making*
 - *Highlighted science data flow barriers in the decision-making system (awareness of, accessibility and quality)*
 - *Partners are interested and engaged*
 - *Presentation to MSB FWC, part of 2021, 2022, 2023 Symposiums*
 - *Is ongoing, with tangible objectives identified in a workplan*

- Identify and implement strategy to improve dissemination of relevant science-based information.
 - *Science dissemination strategy is reflected in outreach activities and communications. Conscious focus was on community leaders, practitioners and community members. See accomplishments in outreach section.*
 - *The science to conservation outcomes initiative is doing the important work to research and more accurately inform an effective science dissemination strategy. Eg. Piloting science to conservation outcomes: cold water refugia and in 2023 Symposium: data transfer. Science to conservation outcomes workgroup would like to host a meeting of intended panelists and others in winter 2024.*
 - *Other science dissemination mechanisms included:*
 - *Monthly email bulletins with periodic updates to Partnership list-serve*
 - *Social media, website updates, blog posts*
 - *Public comment, events like Symposium, summer site tour*
- *Note: Received an Award of Excellence from the Mat-Su Borough for “continued efforts in bringing partners together to discuss and advance efforts to protect fish and fish habitat”. Received, following the 2023 summer site tour.*
- *Worked on a unified branding package with AKFHP’s, including upgraded joint website.*

2) Support the development of an Elodea and other emerging aquatic invasive species management framework that includes prevention, early detection, rapid response, eradication, and monitoring.

- Under the umbrella of existing agency plans, support coordination of resources to specifically address elodea and other emerging aquatic invasive species eradication in the Mat-Su Basin.
 - *Participate in Mat-Su Elodea Task Force Meetings. The group hosted a July 2023 Bio Blitz to educate about and survey Big Lake for Elodea.*
 - *November 2022 – attended SAP session at Alaska Statewide Invasive Species Partnership annual workshop (virtually).*
 - *November 2022 – SC pledges to support overlapping goals in the MSSHP SAP and AKISP strategic plans.*
 - *Communication with AKISP – invitation to share some overlapping goals in strategic plans during partner meeting.*
 - *Supporting regions of state to have adequate capacity and oversight to address IS (e.g. establishment of a cooperative weed management area (CWMA) or Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMA’s).*
 - *Funded AIS projects through National Fish Habitat Partnership – 2022. (AWC and Elodea Surveys in West Susitna/TTCDC (2022/2023) and Hewett Lk Sockeye Assessment following pike removal/ADFG)(2022).*

- Encourage use of the Elodea management framework as a template to respond to other emerging invasive species issues.
 - *Don't see this yet, but perhaps could, if establishment of a more broad-based Mat-Su overarching org (like a CISMA or CWMA). **Note**, TTCD is currently serving this role for Elodea in the Mat-Su – which originally started in 2018 as the Alexander Creek Watershed Task Force – then recently changed to a broader “Mat-Su” Elodea Task Force (2021 or 2022).*

3) Continue to provide and allocate strategic grant funds in support of prioritized salmon habitat projects.

- Establish a process for identifying annual Partnership conservation priorities to guide organizational activities and ensure that projects funded through the National Fish Habitat Partnership program align with local Partnership priorities.
 - *Did not identify a new standardized process for conservation priorities specifically, but did begin development of updated RFP update projects in general. steering Committee began conversations to update annual RFP earlier in 2023 – including updating priorities. This will likely be applied to subsequent years.*
 - *Did identify a time when the Steering Committee could get together in person to talk strategy, following annual Symposium.*
- *Annual RFP*
 - *Calendar year 2023/fiscal year '25 - Made some good updates (streamlined – more user friendly for partners, hopefully addressing concerns about reduced applications and yet also still addressing concern about staying competitive with ACE Act implementation.*
 - *FY21 (top tier)\$258,33, funded 6 projects*
 - *FY22 (top tier)~350,000, 6 projects funded*
 - *FY23 (Mid-tier)\$234.566, 4 projects funded.*
 - *FY24 projects submitted in March 2023 received top tier ranking, so likely to receive closer to 300k in 2024.*
- Track implementation of ACE Act and proactively engage to ensure the Partnership remains competitive.
 - *Continued engagement with National Coordinator meetings, Mat-Su/NFHP Board representatives, feedback on NFHP requests, working with local partners on needs, providing list-serve and Symposium updates on the transition etc..*
 - *Participating in National Fish Habitat Partnership Coordinators workshop.*
- Streamline and automate RFP Process

- *In 2021 process was entirely online and highly laborious – both from an applicant and coordinator perspective, processing proposals to share with SDC and SC. So we changed it back to a partial application online vs entirely online because of this. In 2023 (FY25) to streamline process and reduce redundancy and burden on applicant, have moved entirely from online application. Will assess the following year when completed.*
- *Efforts in recent years have also gone into updating our RFP so proposals will meet the guidelines of the ACE Act and our partnership will be competitive going forward – including in reapplying for FHP status through congress.*

4) Provide effective and inclusive outreach and education focused on healthy salmon habitats.

- **Grow and utilize the ability of the Partnership to be an effective convener on salmon habitat issues.**
 - *Science to conservation outcomes: cold water refugia initiative (three large group meetings, six small group/individual and engagement at three Symposiums) with a range of organizations and people.*
 - *Summer site tour for community leaders on the Deshka River to highlight climate change science and deep human connection.*
 - *Education and coordination to support greater conservation impact and Mat-Su partner success in accessing Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding. (and hosted to Mat-Su regional partner fish passage meetings (December 2022 and April 2023).*
 - *Hosted (BIL/IRA) education sessions at 2022 and 2023 Mat-Su Salmon Symposiums*
 - *Hosted two Mat-Su regional partners fish passage meetings (December 2022 and April 2023).*
 - *There are a number of examples of this in 2022. Our annual events serve this purpose, but in 2022, the Science to conservation outcomes initiative – particularly with the combined focus on the Deshka River for the annual site tour and as a 2022 Water to Watch amplified the messaging more.*
- **Improve community knowledge, awareness, and understanding that leads to informed decision making and works towards salmon-friendly land use and development.**
 - *Summer site tour for community leaders (4x, annually hosted, except did not host in 2020)*
 - *Plants for Salmon: Community Riparian Planting Day (2x, Hosted in 2022 and 2023)*
 - *Continuing to share science summaries (importance of wetlands, riparian areas and potential impacts from aquatic invasive species).*
 - *Greater focus highlighting public comment periods to list-serve and encouraging science sharing.*

- *Deshka River was nominated and recognized as a 2022 National Fish Habitat Partnership Water to Watch. Other W2W: (2021 (Eklutna R.), 2022(Deshka R.), 2023 (Big Lk retrospective).*
- Target outreach to community members and leaders to improve inclusion and engagement and demonstrate Partnership successes and accomplishments.

New relationships and/or collaborations

- *with the Palmer Arts Council and Palmer Highschool as part of the 2022 Salmon Symposium. Both parties are interested in working together again next year.*
- *Site tour (2022: established relationships with four new commercial fishing guide services).*
- *Riparian planting day*
 - *2022: New/re-established relationship with Big Lake Community Council and local businesses, 2023: Talkeetna Community Council/community members.*
- *Engagement in MSB riparian setback standards update process. Provide oral and written public comment during 2023, hosted MSB planning director at a SC meeting to facilitate technical input on the current ordinance, creation of a designated seat on MSB Waterbody Setback Advisory Board.*
- Develop and implement an annual event directed to a community audience.
 - *Plants for Salmon: Community Riparian Planting Day (hosted 2022/Big Lake and 2023/Montana Crk). Is now an annual event.*
- The Partnership will work collaboratively with ACE Act funded agencies, Alaska Fish Habitat Partnerships, northern Cook Inlet local governments and partners to address larger scale issues with regional impact.
 - *BIL/IRA education and outreach efforts (2022/23)*
 - *BIL education session at 2 Symposiums*
 - *Hosted Mat-Su regional partners fish passage meetings – ongoing, in collaboration with Chickaloon VTC, ADFG, FWS*
 - *Participated in statewide BIL and Beyond meetings (two)*
 - *Worked with AKFHP's to update joint website and create unified AKFHP brand (will finish in new year)*
 - *Again, science to conservation outcomes efforts – bringing up issues with much broader scale, scope and relevance.*

5) Continue to strengthen the Salmon Partnership's internal organizational capacity.

- Continue to develop and implement a sustainable staffing plan – explore strategies for increasing staff capacity, including additional paid staff, consultant capacity and/or contractors with a vision to longer term stability.
 - *Explored some strategies eg TU part time staff with BLM funds)(1yr+), applied for a number of grants to increase capacity – including BLM proposal this summer, had a NOAA intern supporting outreach event planning and partner field work.*
 - *TU pledged multiple years of coordinator support to supplement NFHP funding (does not completely fund coordinator position) and give the Partnership time to come up with additional funding.*
 - *Started a sustainable staffing plan and implemented elements, but needs updating and attention. (TU, TTCD and BLM)*
- Deepen existing engagements with partner organizations to increase their involvement and contributions to Partnership business.

Deepened engagement:

- *BLM on Steering Committee and significant funding to support Partnership outreach coordinator and other partnership organizational goals.*
 - *NOAA – capacity support/intern*
 - *Chickaloon Village Traditional Council – hosting regional fish passage meetings. Support for Deshka River site tour video.*
 - *Knik Tribe – on planning team, and major in-kind supporter of riparian planting day (with many of 100+ plants supplied by Knik from their lands), etc..*
 - *New initiatives partner engagement – plants for salmon, science to cons outcomes, regional fish passage effort.*
 - *MSB FWC on Steering Committee*
 - *NOAA Rec Fish Funding continued coastal FHP directed funding.*
- Continue to diversify the partnership’s revenue stream – decrease reliance on federal dollars.

I thought the in-kind support was very successful this year (yes, there are many areas of in-kind support not reflected below – including steering committee member time!) and the cash support, had some successes, but has room for greater time investment and growth.

- *In-kind support (some immediate notes)*
 - *Added some new community support and new partner in-kind support (Feather and Flour, keynote, Knik, Chickaloon)*
 - *Knik committed to help meet operations match*
 - *Riparian planting day – in 2023, much broader partnering with SRC, FWC, ADFG, Knik and more..*

- **All of the new events we hosted involved new and/or deepened investment by partners. (eg ADFG and Knik/plants for salmon, USFWS, Chickaloon, ADFG – fish passage, BIL education, TU, NOAA, USFWS, AK Municipal League etc...*

Room for growth in terms of cash support, but the following were some efforts and successes:

- *NOAA provided an intern who assisted with Partnership events (2023 summer site tour and Symposium)*
- *TU provided staff for Symposium onsite event support (2023 Symposium)*
- *In summer 2023, applied form \$10,000/yr for five years, to BLM. Were not successful, will try again at next opportunity. Hopefully late 2023 or early 2024.*
- *Had BLM funded outreach coordinator on (part time) for well over a year.*
- *Did well with Symposium. Lower costs and good cash support (and in-kind) (2022 and 2023).*
- *Trout Unlimited Alaska is able to and committed to helping fund coordinator salary approx. \$15,000-\$25,000/year over next two years. Note: There may not be that ability following the two-year commitment an additional coordination salary dollars should be pursued from NFHP and other sources.*