



Steering Committee Meeting

Alaska Department of Fish & Game, Suite 4
1800 Glenn Highway, Palmer

Wednesday, February 27, 2019 1:30 – 4 pm

Call in # (907) 746-6347 ← ADFG conference room

*Note: Regularly scheduled January meeting was deferred to February due to federal government shut-down.

MEETING NOTES

Facilitator: Jess Johnson

Notetaker: Thomas Capiello

Committee Members Present:

In-person

Jessica Speed, Laura Eldred, Marc Lamoreaux, Christy Cincotta, Trent Liebich, Carrie Brophil, Ted Eischeid, Sarah Apsens (DEC guest)

Phone

Mike Daigneault, Erika Ammann

1. Welcome at-large and Native Alaskan Steering Committee member seat holders

- Adrian Baer, Alaska Center
- Christy Cincotta, Tyonek Tribal Soil and Water Conservation District
- Ted Eischeid, MatSu Borough, will replace Brianne Blackburn who moved away.

2. Partnership Business

- Approve November 28, 2018 Steering Committee Meeting Notes [*November Notes](#)

These notes primarily covered discussion on NFHAP proposal reviews. Tom C asked whether they would (or should) be made public since part of internal discussions on proposal evaluation. Notes approved with caveat to summarize which proposals reviewed for posting on website, but with more detailed evaluation discussion notes for internal files only.

- Partnership Strategic Action Plan Update (Member, Strategic Plan Committee)

Refer to Draft Strategic Focus document and Feedback on Strategic Focus from 2018 symposium document (email from Jessica Speed).

Still in progress, subcommittee met several times so far this year. Helpful feedback from symposium has been reviewed and incorporated. Continuity and linkage to 2013 Strategic plan

Matanuska-Susitna Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership
Thriving fish, healthy habitats, & vital communities in the Mat-Su Basin

needs to be provided, as well as some objectives from that plan are out of date and need to be crossed out or revised. Additional input will be requested from Science and Data sub-committee.

- Fish Habitat Partnerships & Advocacy (Mike Daigneault)
 - Discussion

Refer to guiding document Perspectives on FHPs and Political/Regulatory Advocacy and NFHAP Strategic Plan. (*included at end of these notes)

What is advocacy and what is acceptable regular and ongoing questions? Being a trusted source for science and information is vital role for FHPs. FHPs are unique as a coalition of organizations; really need support of ALL partners; member partners however, may have a strong role and be better suited to represent themselves as advocates for certain issues, rather than the FHP itself. (Unless total unanimity). FHPs are well suited to provide a forum for open discussion and dissemination of information, without or despite providing a ‘unified’ position.

Ted pointed out that there is typically no consensus among all scientists/practitioners but there should be a path for information to lead to BMPs that Policy makers can use. Can we promote certain BMPs without advocating? Mike agreed, and used setbacks as an example. Whereas we may not be able to advocate for setbacks per se, we can share a breadth of the current science on the value of intact riparian areas (what set-backs would be aiming to protect). There was also discussion that providing specific distance set-back recommendations (i.e., 50ft or 75ft.) might be crossing the line to advocacy. Literature review and process that summarizes what we know about buffer protections would be pertinent. Partnership is in a position to do just that, and develop a ‘knowledge base’. This would effectively leave that detailed determination to the policy makers themselves.

- Partnership Science and Data Committee – 2019 Workplan*[Committee Charter](#)
 - Discussion

Refer to Science and Data Committee Charter, document (email from Jessica).

Laura Eldred as committee chair requested a work plan or further explicit direction from Steering Committee. Summer time not good for meeting due to field work demands. Jessica noted that strategic plan completion is fore front, and will be needing S&D review. Other topics referred to as possible assignments were info summaries on ATV stream crossings, evaluation of threats as listed in 2013 Strategic plan (we have not examined these in-depth to determine quantitatively the extent of these threats, priorities more or less based best professional judgement). Hopefully after March 12 meeting Steering Committee will have something more concrete to pass on.

- Allocation Application for FWS Funds Update (Jessica)

Still no specific date when this report and the full criteria it will be based on will be available. Lots of budget scrutiny at the Dept level. To date, there is a 3-month delay in developing scoring criteria for the NFHAP funding allocations.

3. Other Committee Updates

- Capacity and Development (Jessica)

Met in January and will meet again in March. Updating annual work plan. Organizational resilience and prioritizing under uncertain funding environment (currently depends much on USFWS, TNC) are top issues.

- Symposium Planning (Jessica)

First meeting of year will be in March (13th). Tentative dates already set at Palmer Depot for November 13, 14. Limited choices for dates but conflicts with other events minimal this year. Ideas for Themes and Keynote speakers willingly accepted. Salmon – The Musical, briefly toyed with. Matt and Sue Salmon? Could be something....

- Science and Data (Laura or Jon)

Discussed technical review format. Everyone seems to be satisfied with current format; follow-up questions and answers from applicants helpful.

- Outreach (Jessica)

Committee has not met this year. Time commitments have been centered around Focus Document. Marcus Geist and Anjannette Steer working on online interactive map of past NFHP funded Partnership projects, that may be sortable by project type or strategic plan objective, with some metrics and metadata and links to data and reports. Kate Sherman, Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission collaborating with NFHAP on all project tracking system and database.

[Here's a link to an intro on that from presentation made in 2017:

http://www.fishhabitat.org/files/uploads/Proj_Tracking_System_Presentation_NFHP_Board_2017Oct.pdf]

General Partner Updates (all or any attendees)

- NOAA

Coastal Habitat Grant application deadline April 16th. Nationwide grants, non-federal entities eligible, awards range from 75K – 3 million, 3-year term.

- Tyonek TTCD

Formalizing Elodea task force partnership with Dan Coleman. Finishing up EA for herbicide control on Alexander/Sucker Lakes project. Possible funding opportunity from Farm Bill money via NRCS, for Elodea eradication. Cindy said that structuring the partnership in Regional context will be necessary next step for that. Division of Agriculture, i.e. Dan Coleman's position at risk due to possible state budget reduction.

- Mat-Su Borough

Funding uncertain, environmental planner position III vacated by Brianne could remain vacant, if so Ted would have to fulfill duties.

- Tribal

-An Eklutna Tribal Conservation District nearly established – congratulations!

-NVE received a Tribal Wildlife Grant from the US Fish and Wildlife Service titled: “Eklutna River Salmon Habitat Assessment and Collaboration to Recommend Restoration Flows”. The purpose of this proposal is to define Eklutna River habitat that would become available at various restored flow regimes, to best advocate for return of water as the preferred mitigation measure in upcoming mandated negotiations.

-Working with Palmer Hay flats coalition on wildlife crossing issues

- DEC

Three ACWA grants are underway: Green infrastructure on Cottonwood Creek includes outreach; Lake Management Plan for Lake Lucille (which has sediment contaminated with heavy metals); and Water Quality on lower Little Susitna during coho season. Sarah Apsens new employee with Non-Point section will be stationed in Soldotna. There are significant potential impacts to this department from possible state budget cuts.

- USFWS

Funding delayed but field planning underway. Streambank workshops with ADFG in the works.

- ADF&G

Streambank restoration workshops in coordination with USFWS will continue in Kenai (May 13-14), Fairbanks (June 4-5), and Mat-Su (May 22-23 – tentative?) .

- At-Large

Tom C. shared his personal view of still feeling shocked at the devastating defeat Ballot Measure 1 took at the last election. He was disappointed at what he described as a mis-information attack but more importantly the lack of knowledge on to what extent salmon are protected in this state. Tom provided an example of a new large subdivision going in along a salmon spawning stream that unless the stream itself is altered there is no State protection of habitat. Tom indicated that it is probably not stated well-enough – the need as a Partnership to address this information gap within the public that we don’t normally communicate to. Jessica mentioned outreach ideas to realtors etc. it certainly would help to focus on groups like this.

Tom also wanted to mention: perhaps the Borough also needs to step in with platt restrictions and land use designations, and setbacks that are not just livable structures but that protect riparian habitat from being cleared.

Upcoming Events:

- NFHP Board Meeting, March 20 & 21, 2019, Arlington, Virginia
- National Fish Habitat Partnership Coordinators Call, 10am-12pm, February 28,2019

- All Alaska Fish Habitat Partnerships Meeting, 9:00am -12pm, April 4, 2019, FWS Regional Office, Anchorage, AK
- Kenai Symposium, April 18,2019, Kenai, AK

Next meeting:

- Tuesday, March 12th 1:30-4pm

Facilitator: Thomas Cappiello

Notetaker: Marc Lamaroux

Perspectives on FHPs and Political/Regulatory Advocacy –

(for additional background, please reference the National Fish Habitat Action Plan, 2nd Edition, 2012)

The mission of the National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP) is to protect, restore, and enhance the nation’s fish and aquatic communities through partnerships that foster fish habitat conservation and improve the quality of life for the American people. The goals of the NFHP are to:

- Protect and maintain intact and healthy aquatic systems.
- Prevent further degradation of fish habitats that have been adversely affected.
- Reverse declines in the quality and quantity of aquatic habitats to improve the overall health of fish and other aquatic organisms.
- Increase the quality and quantity of fish habitats that support a broad natural diversity of fish and other aquatic species.

The National Fish Habitat Action Plan (NFHAP) is described as “...a science-based, voluntary, and non-regulatory effort providing a nationwide strategy to harness the energies, expertise, and existing programs of federal and state agencies, conservation organizations, foundations, and individuals.” The role of the NFHAP is further described as: “The Action Plan’s voluntary partnership approach complements Federal and state regulations that protect aquatic habitat. The Action Plan supplements, but does not replace the existing foundation of statutory authority and associated regulatory programs implemented by the Departments that presently serve to protect aquatic habitats from degradation.”

Objective 3 of the NFHAP identifies the need to "broaden the community of support for fish habitat conservation" and mentions "raising public awareness of the role healthy fish habitats play in the quality of life and economic well-being of local communities". Further, it makes the pledge to "educate Americans about how everyday activities affect fish and their habitat". Consistent with Objective 3, one of the Strategic Actions of the NFHP is to: “Mobilize and focus national and local support for achieving fish habitat conservation goals”. This action is further described as building grassroots support, increasing funding for fish habitat conservation, and focusing existing resources to increase effectiveness. A component of this strategic action is described this way: “Build strong grassroots support that places fish habitat conservation higher on the public agenda and enlists new contributions from the private sector.”

According to the NFHAP, “Fish Habitat Partnerships are self-identified, self-organized, and self-directed communities of interest formed around geographic areas, keystone species, or system types. They involve diverse groups of public and private partners that are focused on conservation of important fish habitat across jurisdictional boundaries and land ownership types.” The NFHAP further describes fish habitat partnerships in this way: “Fish Habitat Partnerships are the primary work units of the National Fish Habitat Partnership and take the lead in getting projects implemented “on- the-ground.” The role of Fish Habitat Partnerships includes: "Engage key audiences and the general public to build support for fish habitat conservation". Taken in context, the primary function of FHPs is to get on-the-ground projects completed; education and awareness of fish habitat conservation needs and communicating FHP progress toward meeting those needs is a component of that primary function.

The NFHP is rooted in sound science and data. The NFHAP describes it this way: “Sound science and data are the cornerstones of the National Fish Habitat Partnership's ability to bring scarce resources to bear where they can gain the highest returns. Science and data drive our decision-making.”

Within the NFHAP, conservation is defined as “Activities that protect, sustain, and, where appropriate, restore, and enhance populations of fish, wildlife, or plant life or a habitat required to sustain fish, wildlife, or plant life or its productivity.” This definition is quite broad, allowing for many activities to qualify as conservation.

Analysis of National Fish Habitat Action Plan Contents

The National Fish Habitat Action Plan does not specifically address the topic of political or regulatory advocacy. The Action Plan does clearly articulate that the fundamental purpose of NFHP is to protect fish communities through habitat conservation and that FHPs are the primary agent for implementing on-the-ground habitat conservation projects. The Action Plan also describes a communication strategy and a need for educating the public and building awareness of the significant fish conservation needs across the country. The foundation of these communication efforts is about building awareness to establish invested partners and long-term support for fish habitat conservation, FHPs, and NFHP.

A Few Alaska Examples to Consider

Local Ordinances Addressing Stream Setbacks – In the Mat-Su and Kenai Peninsula Boroughs, representatives of the respective FHPs were asked to testify to the local assembly. The testimony focused on the science and understanding of the benefits of intact riparian areas and floodplains in the context of fish habitat functionality, private property protection, and stability of local infrastructure. When asked for an opinion on the setback language, etc., the FHP representatives deferred these policy decisions to the Borough assembly, restating their understanding of the science and benefits of a functioning, connected river corridor.

The Board of Fish – The Mat-Su Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership (MSBSHP) coordinator testified to the Board of Fish. The testimony focused on the purpose of the partnership, the fish habitat needs in the Mat-Su, and the partnership's progress toward meeting those needs. The coordinator was not testifying on any specific proposal or regulatory change.

The Mat-Su Site Tour – Annually, the MSBSHP organizes a tour of on-going or accomplished projects of the partnership. The invitee list includes local, state, and federal policy makers. The purpose of the Site Tour is to introduce both current and

prospective partners to the partnership, educate them about the salmon habitat needs in the Mat-Su and how the partnership is working to address these needs, and to increase awareness and future investment toward salmon habitat conservation in the Mat-Su.

The Stand for Salmon Initiative – The goal of the initiative was to increase the State’s regulatory protections for fish habitat. The Initiative quickly became politicized and polarized, with various social and economic topics introduced to the conversation. What role, if any, should FHPs play in future debate surrounding the Initiative or any derivative thereof? Based on NFHAP and past practices, FHPs do not have a role in advocating for specific language or components of the Initiative or any other regulatory language. However, FHPs can play a significant role in education and awareness by bringing together diverse interests and objectively facilitating a conversation about fish habitat protection and conservation.

The Structure of Fish Habitat Partnerships

FHPs are self-directed coalitions of diverse partners that organize around geographic areas, keystone species, or ecosystem types, and work toward common goals to protect, restore, and enhance fish habitat. Given the diversity of partner organizations comprising each FHP, advocating on behalf of the partnership is a very high bar to reach and requires approval/support of all partner organizations. However, partner organizations always have the opportunity to advocate certain positions or policies, provided that they clearly communicate that they are speaking on behalf of themselves or their organization and not the FHP.