



**Steering Committee Meeting
In-person
Wednesday, January 24, 2024**

NOTES

9:30am Welcome, Meeting Overview and Opening Round Table Question

Theo Garcia – Knik Tribe
Pete Probasco – Mat-Su Borough Fish and Wildlife Commission
Matt Varner – BLM
Emily Mailman – NOAA
Margaret Stern – Susitna River Coalition
Trent Liebich – USFWS
Jessica Speed – Partnership Coordinator (TU)
Aaron Prussian – TU
Nelli Williams – TU (Fiscal Sponsor)
Michelle Beadle – TU (helping with notes)
Michael Mazzacavallo – ADFG
Laurie Stewart – Tyonek Tribal Conservation District

What we are excited about: Strategic planning and riparian setbacks; joint goals thinking big (building on Dec. Discussion), more fish passage; invasive species; site tours & symposium (relationships and partnerships); federal funding – put it to good use with strong partnerships; reinvigorate/fresh look at Partnership work and how we can grow; scientific expertise on salmon. Pete: Wants partnership more involved in the science and addressing potential negative impacts.

Background

- Background: Formed in 2005 to address increasing demands on salmon habitat in Mat-Su basin, part of 20 fish habitat partnerships nationally. Draws together local groups with common ground.
- Vision: Thriving salmon, healthy habitats, and vibrant communities.
- Conservation strategies: overreaching science strategies, alteration of riparian areas, climate change, culverts that block fish passage, filling of wetlands, impervious surfaces and stormwater pollution, aquatic invasive species, large-scale resource development, loss or alteration of water flow or volume, loss of estuaries and nearshore habitats, motorized off-road recreation, wastewater management. Find strategies in [2019 Addendum](#) to the strategic plan.
- Funded 119 projects since 2006, 4.5 million direct funding, over 15.5 million in other project contributions. Funding projects include science, restoration, conservation, coordination/education related.

- Pete asked about follow-up to investments? USFWS does some monitoring. Results are hard to measure on a biological level and can be expensive to evaluate, can measure success based on goals of strategic plans.
- Matt feels we need to get better at storytelling and sharing results of projects.
- How partners are brought together: symposium, site tours – highlight the work of our partners, educating, building positive relationships, community planting day
 - Other services we should think about? Where should we continue to focus?
 - Last year TU got the NOAA Rec Fish grant. First for Mat-Su region.
- America’s Conservation Enhancement act of 2020 codifies NFHP, expanded board to 26, authorized funding to partner organizations, added congressional reporting requirements, and other provisions. Up for reauthorization in 2025.

What are 2024 priorities?

- 2019 addendum updates ran through December 2023. This will need updating. Updates are designed to happen every 3-5 years.
 - New fish habitat application, measuring of successes, re-organizing how data/information is tracked, public awareness/story telling
 - Make sure new addendum has strategic actions that have smart objectives: repeatable, trackable, easy to evaluate. Anyone should be able to obtain the data and compute it rather than relying on others. How was data achieved, how is it computed, and where is the baseline? Needed for progress reports.
 - Have we outgrown the partnership with all current requirements? How does it serve the partners? – Laurie
 - Do we need to start from scratch/restructure rather than addendum? Have fewer, bigger objectives rather than numerous that can’t be met over 3 years. – Michael
 - Strategic plan: more work, less paperwork. Easier to share data upon request is important and will make it easier for partners. Focus on next 5 years to make big impacts. Be thoughtful about what is not working right now and be open to other needs not being met. Might need to reach outside of steering committee, perhaps the science and data committee. – Matt
- Highlight work done to date, our plate is big, draw out a refocus, and request feedback on our progress report
- Laurie – don’t have strong social science in our plan. Possibly get grant money to hire someone to give an assessment?
- Did the strategic plan not drop down to a low enough level to give good direction? Is there a need for additional staff funded through grants for document review, data management, etc?
- Should we utilize the science and data committee more? A staff member perhaps associated with data management. The goal would be increased capacity.
 - Would adding to the capacity/staff to this group change the role of TU? Would grants come through them? Would they support staff?
- How can we reshape strategic actions to make bigger impacts on the ground? Staffing, training, more support of partners? - Matt
- Actionable items:
 - What do other FHP’s do for data management and strategic plan updates? What is their process? Check with high functioning groups.

- Strategic Action Plan update
 - A practical and effective process to update the strategic plan
 - Identify current challenges and why we are asking for assistance
 - Get broader feedback from partners on the process
 - Outcome needs to be an updated SAP that builds on last. Acknowledges our progress to date and outlines our capacity.
 - Get feedback after outlining our priorities, our capacities, and then ask what is missing and their priorities.
 - Step the addendums down to actionable documents that are useful.
 - Good executive summary and hammer key points, then refer to founding document or addendum for further info.
 - Identify specific topics where science has evolved in update ex. Pike.
 - Help with implementation, maybe data management.
 - Build an effective process for the entire cycle.
 - Provide leadership, pursue funding, drive ideas, outreach.
 - Partners can provide funding to increase capacity. Should we seek out specific partnerships to fill gaps?
 - Develop vision and plan for next 5 years, then approach funder? – Nelli
- TU is currently supporting the coordination role by supplementing beyond the \$85k from NFHP. Should have a broader combination of foundation, individual, corporate, government for funding to be successful.
 - Identify entities we can pursue for staff funding. Is there internal competition with TU?
 - Identify what the value add would be for a staff member to find funding.
 - It's challenging to find funding for increasing capacity.
- Develop a subgroup to further explore funding opportunities.

Actions:

 - Create a subcommittee, starting with an excel spreadsheet of funding ideas.
 - Utilize current steering committee member's knowledge of different angles, for example tribal opportunities, federal side. Reminder that NFHP funding deadline is February 9th
- Do we need a data analyst? Should the data lead be a science person?
- Current application was made easier for people to apply. It is flagged in RFP that progress reports need to be shared with SHP but this is still inconsistent.
- Need to identify and reduce inefficiencies expended just to stay in compliance.
 - Some problems are less about inefficiencies and just ways of doing business have changed.
 - Funds move through cooperative agreement. As partnership moves money into a project, substantial involvement must remain in place for accountability. – Trent
 - Are there other structures or better ways of "doing business" to make this more efficient?
 - Can TU get the agreement and then sub-award? This would shift capacity to TU, but then would lose funding in the long run by increased overhead (admin, indirect costs). Would have to fund this in a way that would close the gap and make it worthwhile (for example outreach coordinator)

- Action:
 - Suggest discussing with all Alaska partnerships to maintain consistency
 - Consider inviting Jason Olive/USFWS from national to gain better understanding and learn about opportunities at a higher level
- Is there a better way to sharing data in the mean-time?
 - All reports come in through Grant Solutions now.
 - Newer processes with ACE Act need to be looked at to make sure we are following.
 - USFWS has stepped back on some of the direct involvement.
- Should the MSSHP apply for the larger approved funding (125K for partnership operations)?
 - Additional funds wouldn't go into place until 2025/2026 if we go for the full \$125k
 - Can apply for additional funds, then roll back request

How and Who?

- Do we need more updates from the Organizational Structure and Operating Framework?
 - Preparing an annual report of partnership activities by steering committee?
 - Sent to NFHP, but not one done for a wider audience though it could be used for that. Plenty to use for other functions such as symposium, maybe steering committee.
 - Should it have been done by committee and not just Jessica?
 - How can we divide and conquer? Where can we be more efficient? Can this help capacity issues?
 - Science and data committee member comments: What's working/not working?
 - This is a more mature partnership than other partnerships with a more diverse group of those involved.
 - Could become less organic with proposed changes with capacity if too top down. Less buy in with committees for example
 - Science to conservation initiative was created to help inform those making decisions. Could be imbedded as a broader goal of the committee. Could help with measuring success of less tangible problems such as riparian zones.
 - By sharing partner's success, could multiply the effect.
 - We don't have baseline habitat data to compare to.
 - guiding principles or structures may be helpful to mainstream methodologies and make data compatible.
 - Need to address data gaps to speak to management decisions.
 - Data gap and data accessibility problems. AK Mapper. Committee could give more guidance.
 - Would this help with data interpretation?
 - Can we get a better understanding of key management questions through broad outreach? Would help identify if data exists and isn't accessible or data doesn't exist. Would be a benefit to partners.
 - What is the capacity of the science and data committee?
 - Different levels of energy. Most activity seems to occur around RFPs.

- Past ideas were to identify index watersheds and maybe do intensive work in four but didn't work due to the size of this region and great challenge of putting it together.
- Different orgs have different standards and make assessments or suggestions on data collection challenging.
 - Jessica acts as liaison between committees is the base of communication.
 - Should we keep working on the Science to Conservation Outcomes initiative?
 - Action: Sue will share an update at the March Steering Committee Meeting.

Nuts and Bolts:

- Review process of RFPs after Feb. 9. Required to submit recommendations by March 31st.
 - Second Tuesday of March (12th) next meeting. Is a separate meeting needed the start of the month (March 1,4,5,6) for up to 2.5 hours to review RFPs. Will have a summary from science and data committee, have time to ask questions.
 - Action: Jessica will send out doodle poll and proposals
- Many public comment periods coming up. Too many for one person to deal with. Also need to decide what stance we want to take and/or if they are a fit for the partnership.
 - Comments have historically been about sharing science due to different interests and ability to comment within the partnership.
 - Will send out email/one drive link to collect feedback from group.
- Some of the at large steering committee seats are up for renewal.
 - Do we want to change the cycle time to not but up against RFP time.
 - No one is objecting to the shift. Will announce and allow those not attending 2 weeks to comment. After which time changes will be considered approved.
- Calendar for the next couple months: (the rest to be discussed at future meeting)
 - Host steering committee seat application review: changed to new cycle
 - Steering committee meeting: this is a non-standard meeting format, but standards will continue – likely beginning in March.
 - Some operational items identified in the December 1 and January 24th meetings will need to be addressed at the March meeting. (e.g. job descriptions for standing committees and work plans development and approval etc..).
 - Strategic Plan Update: Laurie is following up on potential facilitator and funding idea. Will update at March meeting.
 - Begin Partnership Progress Report: tracking basic, high-level progress. Current process could be improved. Will conduct outreach for more information. Due date not posted yet. Does anyone have ability to help on steering committee? Michael? Need a better system for tracking. Can be another shared document.
 - Outreach for NFHP RFP: Make sure partners are aware. Too late for hosted Q and A. Although that seems like it would be potentially useful to partners in future.
 - NFHP Requests:
 - Start planning for spring/summer events: Does anyone have interest in site tour? Recommendations? Community planting day now has its own committee.
 - Some committee members have heavy schedule in summer and cannot help.

- How can we shift some calendar responsibilities away from Jessica?
 - How can we create more engagement? Share this document in one drive?
 - Might improve when roles are better defined.