

Steering Committee Meeting
Tuesday, January 13, 2026 1:30 – 4 pm
Conference room 220 in Beatrice McDonald Hall
University of Alaska Anchorage, 2400 W Campus Dr, Anchorage
If joining via Teams: [Join the meeting now](#)
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MEETING NOTES

Facilitator: Erin Larson

Notetaker: Mike Campfield

Partnership Business

- Approve September 2025 Steering Committee meeting notes (5 min) **[Draft September notes](#) – approved without objection or modification.*
- Jessica will post on Partnership website: www.matsusalmon.org, resources, SC meeting notes
- Partnership Strategic Plan Update: Status Update, Draft Plan Input & Next Steps (45 min)
(Meg Friedenauer, Agnew::Beck) **[Draft Plan](#)*
 - *Discussion of the new draft plan and the process used to develop it.*
 - *Second draft was sent to steering committee members during meeting. Changes from initial version include: Updated format with tightened and condensed sections, some graphics and executive summary. Key elements like priorities unchanged.*
 - *Meg read through the priorities in the new draft and solicited input from the group.*
 - *Annual progress tracking methodology memo and reporting template are deliverables still under development and pending completion.*
 - *Group considering creating a working group or at least a shared document for the Strategic Action Plan. Edits to be completed by first week of February.*
- *Actions:*
 - *Agnew::Beck will share survey results from partners and input from symposium.*
 - *Jessica will solicit to fill remaining gaps in accomplishments spreadsheet, by end of January. Meg will finish related memo within first two weeks of February.*
 - *SC/all: provide feedback on draft SAP in editable document. Deadline: February 6th.*
 - *Jessica/Erin – create editable document/Teams channel*
- Timeline: FY27 Request for Proposals for Mat-Su NFHP funded projects (20 min) **[Timeline](#)*
 - *Jessica led discussion about making the grant timeline shorter, 12 months instead of 18 months – among other changes brought about by the ACE Act Reauthorization. The law that guides the NFHP program.*

- *Committee approved updated timeline for the FY27 request for proposals for NFHP funding. New timeline is June 1st to September 14th, 2026 call for proposals.*
- *Action: Jessica will update website and communicate with partners re: new changes and timeline.*
- 2025 Highlights and Priorities in 2026
 - 2025 highlights (5 min)
 - *2025 was challenging at the federal level with uncertainties in the grant programs and workforce. Mostly the partnership met its priorities. Jessica went over the list of accomplishments associated with the priorities. *Find short list below notes.*
 - 2026 draft priorities (25min) *2026 draft priorities
 - *Approved 2026 salmon symposium. Discussed how to better communicate presentations and science.*
 - *Approved community planting day in 2026. Plants for salmon will be at a new location this year, possibly Caswell Lakes Road and will need to do some fundraising. Discussed more events in 2026 for committees and the partnership as a whole, including social activities.*
 - *Action: Jessica will follow up with planning and fundraising for both events with respective committees and collaborators, and will keep the Steering Committee posted.*
- Housekeeping: Steering Committee meeting schedule for 2026 (15 min) [2026 draft meeting calendar.](#)
 - *All please review draft facilitators and notetakers listed. If you see your name and timing does not work for you, please find an alternate.*
 - *We also discussed meeting locations, with potential meeting in Talkeetna in March or May. Cody will check with Knik Tribe about hosting at Knik Tribes office in Wasilla one of those months.*

Updates (20 min)

- National Updates
 - Project Funding
 - *FY25 Project Status: Finalization is underway. If projects weren't in the system by Dec. 31st, they are likely excluded from this cycle. *All Mat-Su's 2025 and one delayed 2024 agreements were completed and submitted as required. We should be set in that regard.*
 - *FY26 Project Delays: We are still awaiting approval from the Secretary of the Interior on the NFHP recommended for funding project list. Supposed to be December, 2025. Hopefully, will get some good news soon.*
 - *Note: FY26 funding is likely to be lower due to national assessment needing additional funding (130k across 20 FHP's (≈\$6,500 each). *See more relevant notes below.*
 - *FY27 Strategy: The new NFHP hard deadline is Nov. 15th, anything before that is up to individual FHP's. Everything else will proceed as it has, just a different timeline.*
 -
 - Federal oversight

- *Review Bottleneck: A single person is now reviewing all DOI agency awards over \$50k. Expedited approvals are no longer an option; the committee must plan for significantly longer wait times for all awards and when the opportunity to put together grant agreements with USFWS opens, Partners are advised to not delay as DOI review will be first come first serve.*
- *ACE Act Rigor: The era of "rubber-stamping" is over. Projects must strictly adhere to ACE Act text.*
- *Framing Outreach: Outreach can no longer be a standalone project. It must be integrated as a tangible component of an "on-the-ground" conservation project or funded through operations. Nothing we've been doing that we can't continue to do, just a matter of where funded from and framing. E.g. outreach w/operations funding.*
- Performance & Accountability
 - *Project KPIs: Key Performance Indicators are now required for projects under the ACE Act. KPI's exist for 'projects' but not for operations.*
 - *Implementation Timeline: Expect a rollout for operations metrics by FY28, following a 1.5-year development process to build a rubric that evaluates if these performance goals are being met.*
- Operations Funding Cap – potential increase
 - *Funding Cap Increase: A proposal to increase the optional project cap from \$125k to \$200k will be decided at the Jan 28/29 Board Meeting. (*Note the funding cap increased did pass at the January, 2026 Board meeting).*
 - *Strategic Intent: If passed (effective FY27), this allows FHPs more latitude for "partnership-driven" work, such as hiring coordinators specifically to leverage and bring in more non-NFHP money.*
 - *Administrative Flexibility: The Steering Committee retains the power to decide how to allocate funds (Science vs. Restoration vs. Comms) and is not required to use a formal RFP process if internal allocation is preferred.*
- Partner updates
 - *Susitna River Coalition is planning an event for the Palmer depot about dams*
 - *MSB is continuing to work on several fish passage projects for construction this summer.*
 - *Trout Unlimited is planning an educational outreach event about pike and a fishing derby in the Susitna River drainage, possibly Big Lake.*

Committee Updates (5 min) *Committee written updates below.

- Science and Data
- Symposium Planning
- Outreach

Upcoming Events and Relevant Dates:

- MSB FWC meeting, January 8th, 4-6pm, 2026, Palmer
- NFHP Board meeting, January 28 & 29, 2026, 12 – 4pm AKST
- MSB Assembly Meeting, Riparian Setbacks, March 17th, 2026
- American Fisheries Society Alaska Chapter, March 23-27, 2026, Fairbanks

Next meeting: Tuesday, March 10th, 2026.

Facilitator: Melis Coady **Notetaker:** Trent Liebich

Committee Updates *(find list of committee members [here](#))*

- Science and Data
 - Did not meet.
 - Seats available on committee.
- Symposium Planning
 - Hosted very successful 2025 Symposium (November 20th & 21st, Palmer)! Over 100 people attended each day and featured over 30 oral and poster presentations, showcasing the diverse expertise of regional partners. Keynote speaker Rick Thoman, Climate Specialist with the International Arctic Research Center, whose talk Mat-Su's Changing Environment: Connecting the Past, Present and Future set the stage for the theme Reflecting on the Past, Looking to the Future and, following presentations and planning discussions. A dedicated session on data transfer explored strategies for integrating current salmon science into community decision-making processes and nearly a half day interactive session was dedicated to kicking off an update to the Partnership's Strategic Action Plan. Palmer Highschool art students participated again this year – expanding the collaboration to chemistry and biology classes. Find proceedings on [Symposium webpage](#).
 - Planning committee met and debriefed event in December.
- Outreach
 - Did not meet.
 - Partnership hosted its summer site tour for community leaders September 11th, 2025, Palmer to Sutton (38 ppl). Over five stops and with nine presenters, the tour highlighted examples of tribal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) funded projects and broader Chickaloon Village Traditional Council salmon stewardship efforts.
 - KBNERR completed the [proceedings booklet](#) from the April, 2025 joint Kenai/Mat-Su Fish Habitat Partnership meeting. Thank you again to ACCS and KBNERR for organizing and making this event possible!!!
- Adhoc working groups and/or initiatives
 - Science to conservation outcomes pilot.
Presentation at 2025 Symposium on moving local science into community decision making. Sue Mauger attended MSB FWC meeting (Nov 13th, 2025) to be available for any technical input for commission members in support of their Resolution and ongoing discussions of classifying Deshka River cold water refugia shorelines as watershed lands. A FWC Assembly rep has expressed interest in bringing the resolution to the Assembly for consideration.

Some 2025 Highlights & Challenges

Amid a significantly shifting operating landscape with impacts to federal staffing and funding, changes with the Ace Act Reauthorization and government shutdown in the fall, the Partnership and our partners experienced some forward progress and successes!

Science dissemination (Priority 1)

- Sharing science: Mat-Su Salmon Science and Conservation Symposium
- Policy: designated Partnership seat (held by Matt LaCroix/EPA) on MSB Waterbody Setback Advisory Board who completed their final recommendation report to MSB, Continued tracking and science sharing: Deshka River Land classification, continued data transfer momentum (salmon habitat [database list](#)), creation of public facing [NFHP project dashboard](#) (lists all FHP – including Mat-Su projects).

Grant allocation (Priority 2)

- NFHP funding: funded 5 projects (CIK, TTCD, TU, MSB, CIAA) in FY25 (\$308,112), high scoring in FY26, increased optional funding ceiling for coordination (to \$125,000), improvements in process NFHP funding process (match requirements, compressed timeline), great high quality funded projects doing important salmon habitat work
- NOAA rec fish funding – aquatic invasive species education and outreach on Kenai/Mat-Su (TU)

Outreach (Priority 3)

- Regional engagement: Joint Cook Inlet Kenai/Mat-Su FHP meeting. [Proceedings.](#)
- Annual hosted events: Summer site tour (Showcased IJA funding success in Mat-Su: CVTC case study), Plants for Salmon (3rd and final year on Montana Crk/Upper Susitna, great collaboration with SRC, MSB, KT, USFWS, ADFG, TU)

Organizational capacity (Priority 4)

- Strategic Plan Update – forward progress!

Some areas of challenge in 2025

Outreach (P3)

- Less consistent communications – e.g. Partnership list serve and social media.

Organizational capacity (P4)

- Fundraising. Some funding proposals submitted (Catalyst, Mat-Su Health Foundation) were not successful, some remain unknown (FWS National, ConocoPhillips), other foundations or

entities planned to apply to were either frozen federal funding or changing focus due to uncertainty amid significant uncertainty.

- Less focus on engaging all standing committees – in particular outreach.

The Strategic Plan update is a great place and opportunity to build on successes and address some of the identified challenges.