

National Fish Habitat Board meeting

January 26, 2009, 11:00 AM EST

By conference call

The meeting commenced at 11:05 AM

Board members present:

Kelly Hepler, Chair
Mike Stone
Martin Konrad, with proxy for Rich Leopold
Gary Myers
Pat Montanio, with proxy for Jim Balsiger
Gary Frazer
Steve Moyer for Charles Gauvin
Chris Horton
Mike Andrews
Randy Fisher
Krystyna Wolniakowski
Bob Mahood
Bill Taylor
Stan Moberly
Gordon Robertson
Jason Stark
Pat Murray

Also participating:

Anne Zimmerman

Board staff present:

Susan-Marie Stedman
Janet Cushing
Tom Busiahn
Ron Regan
Ryan Roberts
Doug Beard

Other attendees:

Mary Beth Charles (ASA)
Katherine Hazelwood (TNC)
Mike Leonard (ASA)
Howard Hankin (NRCS)

Legislation update – Gordon Robertson first thanked Mary Beth Charles for her help over the last two years and announced that her fellowship at ASA is ending. Mike Leonard is the new ASA fellow.

The legislative sub-Committee has met with Senate hill staff to discuss changes to the bill to address the Board's suggestions from the October 2008 Board meeting. Gordon needs to have any additional suggestions by February 6. He also reported that House staff have contacted NOAA and requested Technical Drafting Assistance.

Gordon is hoping the legislation can be introduced the week of March 16 in conjunction with the North American Wildlife Conference, which is being held in Arlington VA this year. He expects a hearing in the Senate in the late spring, and the "Dear Colleague" letter will be revived. They will also coordinate with House staff.

Discussion: Gary Frazer stated that Congressman Kind has asked both NOAA and FWS for Technical Drafting Assistance on the House bill. FWS sent the previous House bill out to their Assistant Regional Directors for comments, and they are coordinating with NOAA on a coordinated response, but not an official administration position.

Kelly Hepler reported that Tom Mendenhall has spoken to him about strengthening the BLM's role in the legislation. Gordon replied that he will be meeting with Tom.

Gary Frazer suggested that the agencies reinitiate work on the Executive Order as soon as new leadership is in place. Ron Regan reported that AFWA mentioned the EO in meetings with the Obama transition team.

Communications Update – Ryan Roberts reported that the annual report is being finalized and he is also working on 1-pagers that could support the legislative effort, he will coordinate with Gordon on that.

FHP applications - Tom Busihan reported that three Candidate Fish Habitat Partnerships have applied for recognition from the Board at the March meeting: the Desert Fish Habitat Partnership, the Glacial Lakes FHP, and the Hawaii FHP.

Board Operating Budget – Chair Hepler stated that the bottom line on the budget is whether we are in the black or in the red, and he is pleased to report that we are in the black for 2009. The proposed budget for 2009 fully funds the science and data needs (with help from NOAA, who is funding 3 post-docs to work on the coastal assessment) as well as the Communications activities. Logistic and facilities for the 1-year-out conference, and other miscellaneous expenses. In addition, approximately \$480K will be rolled over to be used in 2010.

Kelly also stated that he and Vice-chair Doug Austen will talk to the Science and Data co-chairs and other staff on February 13 and will plan on covering the budget in more detail at the March Board meeting.

Discussion – Mike Stone asked about the response from the states in terms of funding. Ron Regan replied that about 12 states have contributed money, which is very good given the current fiscal climate.

Gary Myers made a motion to approve the 2009 operating budget, Stan Moberly seconded it. The motion passed unanimously.

NFHAP and the Economic Stimulus Package – Pat Montanio (NOAA) suggested that the Economic Stimulus Package is a great opportunity to market NFHAP by putting projects on the ground and communicating with the public about all the jobs and other benefits the projects provide. The House version has \$400M for NOAA to use in habitat restoration, it will probably need to be turned around in 30-90 days so NOAA will probably be turning to the large backlog of good projects we have from existing grant programs. There may also be an opportunity to put out a quick RFP, but NOAA won't know until the final bill language comes out. She agreed that sending the House bill out to the FHPs would give them an idea of where the opportunities might be, in NOAA and in other agencies.

Anne Zimmermann reported that the Forest Service may get \$650M for mine remediation, removal of barriers to fish passage, and watershed improvements. They will work through FHPs as much as possible, making sure that jobs are created. Howard Hankin reported that NRCS may be getting \$175M for floodplain easements, \$50M for dam rehabilitation and removal, and \$175M for watershed operations. Gary Frazer reported that FWS and USGS \$\$ right now seem to be directed toward infrastructure rather than habitat projects. Steve Moyer reported that the Fish and Wildlife Foundation sent a letter to Congress advocating for NFHAP \$\$.

A motion to adjourn was made by Matt Hogan, seconded by Gordon Robertson, and passed unanimously. The meeting concluded at 12:00.

National Fish Habitat Board meeting

October 7-8, 2008

The Nature Conservancy

4245 North Fairfax Drive – Suite 100

Arlington, VA 22203-1606

October 7

The meeting commenced at 1:07 PM

Board members present:

Kelly Hepler, Chair

Jim Balsiger

Jeff Koenings

Marion Conover, with proxy for Rich Leopold

Steve Moyer, with proxy for Charles Gauvin

Chris Horton

Mike Andrews

Stan Allen, with proxy for Randy Fisher

Jim Sedell, with proxy for Krystyna Wolniakowski

Bob Mahood

Gary Myers

Bill Taylor

Stan Moberly

Gordon Robertson

Gary Frazer

Matt Hogan

Also participating:

Anne Zimmerman

Board staff present:

Susan-Marie Stedman

Janet Cushing

Tom Busiahn

Ron Regan

Ryan Roberts

Doug Beard

Gary Whelan

See appendix for other attendees

Meeting agenda change: Science and Data update moved to before Legislation update.

Minutes from May 2008 meeting: Gary Frazer noted this correction: Ryck Lydecker (Chair, Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council) and Matt Hogan (Executive Director, AFWA) also attended meeting with Assistant Secretary Lyle Laverty regarding the Executive Order.

Motion to approve the minutes by Matt Hogan, seconded by Stan Moberly. Motion passed.

Executive Order Update: Gary Frazer reported that CEQ is still discussing the E.O. but that the status is unknown.

2009 Multi-state Conservation Grants: Ron Regan reported that AFWA received 112 letters of intent, 11 of which were from FHPs. The Committee asked 20 of the pre-proposals to submit a full proposal. Three FHPs (WNTI, EBJTV, SARP) were funded. The Fisheries and Water Resources Policy Committee decided to stick with the Fish Habitat Partnership theme for their 2010 Statement of Need.

State funding: Kelly Hepler reported that he and Ron Regan followed up with states and 12 have committed funding.

Science & Data Update: Framework document - Science & Data Committee co-chairs Gary Whelan and Doug Beard introduced the subject, and began a presentation on the “Framework for Assessing the Nation’s Fish Habitats”, followed by the other co-chair Doug Beard. They identified staffing resources needed to complete the national fish habitat assessment (2 FTEs + GIS specialist) and the national data system (1FTE + GIS specialist ~\$300,000 per year).

Motion to approve Framework made by Stan Moberly, seconded by Jeff Koenings.

Discussion: Fish Habitat Partnerships will contribute data that is not available on a national scale. The Science and Data Committee has been working with FHPs on this as well as helping them develop their own databases. A dedicated data person will be needed to cover this task adequately.

Motion passed unanimously. Chair will send personal thank-you to those who worked on the Framework.

Science&Data Update: National Assessment - Dr. Dana Infante gave a presentation on the national fish habitat assessment, explaining the analyses that have been done on rivers, and describing the next steps for analyzing lakes and reservoirs. A separate task will be to assemble and analyze databases for Alaska and Hawaii. The Michigan State team is also in discussion with NOAA on assessment of coastal regions. The Michigan State team is not capable of taking on the coastal assessment, but has ideas how to link inland and coastal results.

Discussion: Questions were asked about the scope and data sources for the coastal assessment. The coastal assessment would include 8-digit Hydrologic Units that contain a tidal water body and adjacent water bodies out to the nearshore shelf area. Quite a few databases are available for estuaries and nearshore waters, including data on marine protected areas.

The Science and Data Committee needs additional funds to meet the needs identified. A minimum of \$300K will keep the effort alive until real money is available. The Chair will work with staff and S&D Committee to seek resources. Staff will meet in November to update the Board's budget, including Science and Data needs for FY '09.

Legislation update – Gordon Robertson first thanked Christie Plummer (TNC), Steve Moyer (TU), Gary Kania (Congressional Sportsman's Foundation), Tom Sadler, Gary Taylor (AFWA), and Mary Beth Charles (ASA) for their help. When talking with staffers, the Legislative sub-committee told them the Board wanted the law to 1) authorize money for fish habitat conservation, 2) state the reasons for the authorization, and 3) provide the Board with opportunity to provide input. Two bills were introduced the past session (Senate -9/24, House-9/26). Hill staff asked for 4 changes:

- 1) Board composition; Hill staff wanted industry representatives on the Board because they're less likely to throw stones than if they are on the outside. Hill staff listed categories for Board membership, as well as categories not requiring membership. They felt the Board should not have a Federal lead, so they got rid of the Executive Leadership Team.
- 2) Co-leadership: Hill staff said co-lead doesn't work, there needs to be one responsible entity, so they made that DOI.
- 3) They felt that the programmatic staff should be housed in DOI because of the jurisdictional authorities of DOI.
- 4) Science lead: this got moved to the new Partnership office in DOI.

Gordon recommended that we keep requested changes to a minimum, but admitted there is a chance to make changes since both bills need to be re-introduced into the new Congress. He also reminded everyone that even if the legislation passes, that does not mean there will be appropriations, especially in this economic climate.

Discussion: The inclusion of "industry" groups breaks away from the Waterfowl Management Plan model, but the Congressional staffers wanted those groups who affect fish habitat to be at the table. Sen. Bond's office had previous experience with a similar bill that needed a diverse set of people.

A number of Board members expressed a desire to emphasize that a multi-agency effort is needed, specifically to assure that marine and coastal areas are covered and that the USGS has a role in the science. Stan Moberly was asked to provide the Legislative sub-committee with specific language to strengthen the multi-agency coordination in the bill.

There was also discussion about the need for a larger role for the states in the bill. State Directors will want to know that their investments will pay off in more than just projects, that States will get money for science.

A number of Board members expressed concern about the diminished role of NOAA in the introduced bills. It was pointed out that NOAA has the lead in coastal and marine habitat conservation and science, and by placing the emphasis on DOI the introduced bills seem to place lower priority on estuaries and marine environments. Jim Balsiger was asked to provide to the Legislative sub-committee specific language to strengthen NOAA's role in the bill.

Gordon Robertson was charged by the Board to address 5 recommendations by the Board:

- 1) USGS as science lead for inland and NOAA science center for ocean
- 2) Stronger language for Commerce
- 3) Raise question of DOI for freshwater and Commerce for saltwater jurisdiction
- 4) State role in fishery management and public trust resource
- 5) Way to include funding for states for national science
- 6) Combine some development interest groups on Board

Salmon Stronghold Legislation: David Anderson, consultant to Wild Salmon Center, explained the goals of the North American Salmon Stronghold legislation. Most current funding for salmon focuses on Threatened and Endangered species. Little money goes to dealing with existing healthy salmon habitat. The NASS legislation focuses on getting money for areas of fish conservation that don't normally get much \$\$\$. For Cantwell, this is her entry into the salmon fray.

Discussion: The Board's concern is that in the Wild Salmon Center press releases there's been no mention of NFHAP even though the Salmon Stronghold has applied for candidate partnership. The last thing we want to do is compete. It was decided to get a small group together to talk about the NFHAP legislation and the NASSP legislation and ways to promote both.

October 8, 2008

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Kelly Hepler at 8:50 a.m.

The agenda was reviewed: election of vice-chair will not be done at today's meeting because one of the nominees is not present and some Board members need to leave early. It will be handled after the meeting via e-mail. With regard to Board goals, the Chair will work with staff to develop ideas, and share with the Board after the meeting.

FWS funds allocation - Gary Frazer referred the Board to a 2-page handout on proposed FY 09 funding allocation. At the Feb 08 Board meeting, FWS and the Board agreed on a

process for communication on FWS budgeting, reflecting special relationship between FWS and Board. The process calls for FWS to consult with Board at a fall meeting on allocation priorities.

In 08, FWS had 5.135 million, an increase of about 3 million from 07. About 63% of funds went to support 72 projects. Other funds helped approved and candidate FHPs with their expenses for meetings, etc. Nearly 150K supported national fish habitat assessment.

In 08, FWS committed to one year of funding for demonstration projects through Candidate FHPs. Used a team that included reps of the Board to identify projects for funding.

In 09, FWS is operating on a Continuing Resolution through March 6, 2009. About the same level of funding is anticipated as 08, depending on rescissions or other actions that would affect the funding level.

FWS proposed allocation for 09 has 3 differences from 08. FHP development & operations is increased from 400K to 900K to provide seed money for FHPs to get organized and operate. Board approved SW Alaska Salmon Habitat Partnership; FWS proposes to target 100K in project funds to that FHP, based on amount FHPs received in earlier years, and the character of that FHP. Demonstration projects would not be funded.

FWS Director reserves the authority to allocate funds, but would appreciate feedback from the Board.

Discussion: There was discussion about the science and data needs for 2010 and beyond, and whether the Board could request more money (\$5 million) from FWS to support that need. Gordon Robertson reminded the Board that the first question appropriators ask is “how much money is going to on-the-ground projects?” We should maintain at least 2/3 of the money to projects.

A motion was made by Matt Hogan that the Board send a letter to DOI Secretary or FWS Director to request an increase by \$5M for 2010 budget. It was seconded by Jeff Koenings. The motion passed unanimously, with Federal members of the Board abstaining from the vote.

Gary Frazer pointed out that FWS has provided significant funding (\$185K) for science & data efforts this fiscal year. He is happy to discuss additional funds with Chair Hepler, but NFHAP is a partnership effort, and FWS cannot fund everything.

Communications update – Ryan Roberts provided an update on Communications efforts, including the unveiling of the NFHAP Communications strategy, along with the naming of the members of the communications committee. Also presented was developments related to the partner coalition page on the NFHAP website, that included development of

a partner tool kit, accomplishment document and project profiles from the “Waters To Watch” initiative. Branding of the NFHAP bi-weekly newsletter as NFHAP-Penings was also presented. The Communications update also was the first solicitation of nominations for the second annual NFHAP awards, set for 2009.

Discussion: Mike Andrews pointed out that our greatest priority right now is passage of the legislation. Communication planning should occur for the legislation on reintroduction. Chair Hepler suggested a meeting between the legislative and communications teams. Besides this being a communication tool for partners this is also a tool for partnerships and Board.

Letter from WAFWA - Jeff Koenings explained that the WAFWA thought it was important for Western states to be involved in FHPs in their area.

Discussion: Chair Hepler stated that the Board is trying to be consistent with guidance that says regional associations of state agencies should be involved in FHPs. There has been a request for a formal response to the WAFWA letter. Jeff Koenings stated that any endorsement or encouragement that we’re heading in the right direction would be helpful.

Strategic Planning Framework - Margaret Connelly (US Forest Service, serving a 60-day detail at AFWA) worked on strategic planning guidance for FHPs. The Candidate FHPs requested more guidance on what the Board expects on strategic plans. The Framework is intended to meet that need. It is not a detailed guide on how to develop a strategic plan, but instead provides recommended elements of an FHP strategic plan. Margaret worked with Board staff to define the need and the scope of the project. The draft Framework was reviewed by Board staff, Partnerships Committee, and FHP representatives, and discussed on an FHP conference call.

Discussion: Mike Andrews appreciates the Framework, but was surprised not to see more on budget needs. There is some language on budgeting in the strategic guidance, but that topic may be more appropriate in operational plans rather than strategic.

A motion was made by Marion Conover to approve the strategic planning guidance. It was seconded by Matt Hogan and passed unanimously.

Presentation by the Great Lakes Basin Candidate FHP – Mark Brouder gave a presentation on the Great Lakes Basin Candidate FHP. He stated that one of the challenges was finding a niche within the existing Great Lakes programs. With respect to tribal representation, letters went out individually to all Great Lakes tribes, a number said they were comfortable with GLIFWC representation. The FHP also includes Ducks Unlimited and a Canadian Province.

Discussion: Gary Whelan stated that he went to speak to the FHP at a steering committee meeting, and saw no impediments to them linking up to the national assessment.

Steve Moyer asked about previous work in the great lakes area. Mark Brouder replied that there is existing infrastructure, but what is missing is the intermediate layer to prioritize needed work. They are envisioning a Great Lakes partnership, but realize there are different needs in different lakes, and smaller groups will prioritize lake-priorities; these will be rolled-up to the partnership level.

Presentation by the Fishers and Farmers Candidate FHP – Roger Wolf gave a presentation on the Fishers and Farmers Candidate FHP. The Iowa Soybean Association is working in 17 watersheds. Until now, farmers have not had a mechanism to work on fishing issues and bring resources to local watersheds.

Discussion: Mike Andrews observed that when TNC went to work on the Upper Mississippi River, their largest contributor was cattle ranchers. Agricultural partnerships are already doing a great deal. Anne Zimmerman asked how this approach could be exported to other partnerships? Roger Wolf replied that the Iowa Soybean Association is a little unique, and their approach is a reflection of the culture of that Board. Other agricultural group participation is not there right now, and different issues come up in priority. We need to show that this partnership works for them to come on board. Steve Moyer observed that this will be an opportunity to see and learn about the coordination between FHPs, in this case the Fishers and Farmers FHP and the Driftless Areas Restoration Effort.

Revisions to the FHP Guidance – Tom Busiahn gave a presentation on the proposed changes to the FHP Guidance requested by the Board at the May 2008 meeting. He asked for the Board's agreement to direct staff to modify the application form for FHP recognition to reflect the revised guidance, and initiate the next round of FHP applications.

A motion was made by Gordon Robertson to accept the revised Policies and Guidance. It was seconded by Gary Frazer. The motion passed unanimously.

One –year out workshop – Tom Busiahn stated that the Action Plan calls for milestones by 2010. Board chair and staff have talked about a need for a status check to see if we are on track. There's no venue to do this, except Board meetings, but we don't have all the people involved with NFHAP to do this. Inspiration for a this 1-year out meeting was the 1-year-out meetings held when the State Wildlife Action Plans were being developed. Organizing such a conference would require both \$\$ and staff time. The question for the Board is whether it is worth the needed resources to hold this workshop? Tab 13 in the briefing book lists outcomes, recommended participants and format, a rough estimate of costs, and comments received on the proposal.

Discussion: Kelly Hepler reported that he has gotten comments from Gary Frazer (FWS) about timing concerns, and calling this a workshop. Gary Myers and Steve Moyer expressed support for the conference in light of the science and data needs identified earlier. The Board concurred with the Chair's suggestion that the staff look at the budget and get back to the Board on the feasibility of doing a 1-year-out conference.

Election of Vice-chair: Chair Hepler reviewed the nominees for Vice-chair - Krystyna Wolniakowski, Matt Hogan, Jeff Koenings, Bill Taylor, and Mike Andrews – and stated that he would like a chance to talk to the nominees to make sure they understand his expectations that the Vice-chair will be part of team working with staff. Once he has done that, election of Vice-chair will be conducted by e-mail.

Future meetings – Susan-Marie Stedman review the proposed dates for upcoming Board meetings in 2009: March 4-5, a half day the week of June 22 in conjunction with the 1-year-out conference if it is held, and October 3-4. TNC facility is available for the October dates but not the March dates. Staff will work on finding a location.

A motion to adjourn was made by Matt Hogan, seconded by Jeff Koenings, and passed unanimously.