Letter of Intent for 2013 Multistate Conservation Grant Program

Project Title:	Promoting Strategic Fish Habitat Conservation through Regionally-coordinated Science and Collaboration
Applicant:	Kelly Hepler, Assistant Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish and Game; Chair, National Fish Habitat Board Phone: 907-242-1907, email: Kelly.hepler@alaska.gov If awarded, the grant will be administered on behalf of the National Fish Habitat Board by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, 444 North Capitol Street NW, Washington DC, 20001
Primary Investigator:	Matt Menashes, Director of Operations, Association of Fish &Wildlife Agencies Phone: 202-642-3602, email: mattm@fishwildlife.org
Co-Investigators:	Tom Busiahn, U.S. Fish &Wildlife Service Karen Abrams, Office of Habitat Conservation, NOAA Fisheries

Primary 2012 NCN addressed by the project:

Subject 1: Strengthening the National Fish Habitat Partnership.

Project Length:

3 years in duration

Project beneficiaries:

The outcomes of this project will benefit all 50 states

Estimated MSCGP funding request:

$1,200,100 ($400,000 per year for three years)

Funding Source:

Sport Fish Restoration fund

Through regional collaboration, Fish Habitat Partnerships will compile biological and process-level information on fish habitats to meet FHP needs and supplement the national fish habitat assessment; establish new or improved strategic goals, objectives, and priorities for conserving fish species and habitats; expand the scope of partners; and develop best management practices for implementing habitat conservation actions across species ranges and boundaries of jurisdiction and land ownership.

Narrative

How will this project meet the needs of the NCN?

The National Fish Habitat Board has the responsibility to oversee and coordinate implementation of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan. As the primary work units of the Action Plan, Fish Habitat Partnerships are responsible for:

- Coordinating and compiling scientific assessment information on fish habitats within their partnership areas,
- Establishing strategic goals and objectives that define desired outcomes for fish species and habitats within their partnership areas,
- Identifying priority places and/or issues to focus conservation action, and prioritize fish habitat conservation projects to meet goals and objectives,
- Coordinating and compiling information on outputs (conservation actions) and outcomes (changes in habitat condition) for reporting to the Board and stakeholders, and
- Collaborating with other FHPs where appropriate to carry out these responsibilities.

The responsibilities of FHPs align closely with the needs documented in NCN #1. This project will provide resources to support broad regional collaboration among FHPs to carry out these responsibilities in an efficient manner.

What states and/or USFWS regions or Regional Associations are targeted?

Currently, each State is engaged with one or more FHPs; therefore benefits will extend to fish habitats in all 50 states.

What are the goals of this project? (Goals should be written as outcome oriented.)

Through regional collaboration among FHPs,

- Collectively advance each FHP's habitat assessments through identification of mutual data needs, data acquisition and landscape-level analysis for the benefit of fish, mussels, and other aquatic animals.
- Provide region-specific fish population, habitat, and human impact data to fill major data gaps and assist the national Science & Data Committee in improving the 2015 national status report.
- Develop and demonstrate Best Management Practices for habitat conservation, and methods to effectively engage local communities in fish habitat conservation projects.
- Develop and/or improve strategic plans of individual FHPs, and develop landscape-scale linkages among FHP priorities and those of other landscape conservation efforts.

What activities or actions will this project undertake to achieve the stated goals?

The National Fish Habitat Board, through its fiscal agent, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, will distribute funds to Fish Habitat Partnerships to support operations and regional collaboration needs that have been identified by FHPs. Some FHPs are expected to submit stand-alone Letters of Intent addressing these needs in more detail. It is the intent of this proposal for the Board to consult with FHPs throughout the planning and implementation process to meet the highest priority needs on a national scale.

In broad terms, western FHPs will 1) develop a spatial framework for estuarine and nearshore marine habitats and compile information on threats relevant to fish and shellfish communities; 2)

compile habitat and species assessments for salmonids and desert fishes to fill gaps (e.g. hydrological information) in the national assessment; and 3) collaborate among FHPs to develop or improve methods to identify priority places and projects. Eastern FHPs will 1) compile habitat and species assessments to fill gaps in the national habitat assessment; 2) employ landscape-level analysis methods to prioritize places and projects; and 3) expand the scope of conservation partners through outreach. Midwestern and Reservoir FHPs will 1) organize landowner committees to provide local leadership of fish habitat conservation projects and train agency employees in how to engage landowners and local communities; 2) conduct outreach to expand membership in the *Friends of Reservoirs Foundation*, enhancing public awareness of healthy reservoir habitats and engagement in conservation projects; 3) compile additional fish and physical data such as lake bathymetry to fill national assessment gaps; and 4) develop guidance (Best Management Practices) to address impairments in reservoir habitats, including sedimentation, eutrophication, water regime, habitat structure, water quality, habitat connectivity, and aquatic macrophytes.

Provide a specific timeline of the project activities.

2012 Q3-4 – Board staff convenes meetings with FHP coordinators (Eastern, Western, Midwestern) to identify specific tasks and subcontractors.
2013 Q1 – Statements of work initiated for subcontracts.
Q2 – National workshop for FHP representatives (supported by existing MSCG project) will include regional breakouts on FHP needs. Statements of work for subcontractors finalized.
Q3 – Subcontracts let. Work by FHPs begins.
Q4 – Planning for 2014 through meetings / teleconferences of Board and FHPs.
2014 Q1 – Second year subcontracts let.
Q2-3 – Implementation by FHPs.
Q4 – Planning for 2015 through meetings / teleconferences of Board and FHPs.
2015 Q1 – Third year subcontracts let.
Q2 – FHPs meet with national Science & Data Committee to integrate regional data with national assessment.
Q2-3 – Implementation by FHPs.
Q4 – Wrap-up of subcontracts. National fish habitat assessment report completed.

Project Budget	**Cost**	
	Direct	Indirect
Salaries and Benefits	$45,000	$4,500
Project related Expenses	$1,046,000	$104,600
Equipment purchases	$0	$0
MSCGP request (Sport Fish Restoration source)	**$1,200,100**	
Partnership Funds (Waiver of 14% IDC by AFWA)	**$152,740**	
Total Cost of Project	**$1,352,840**	

Measurable Outcomes

Landscape and process-level approaches to fish and wildlife conservation addresses root causes of species declines, and promotes adaptation to broad-scale stressors such as climate change, urbanization, and water availability. This project will enhance the landscape conservation capability of Fish Habitat Partnerships (and their individual partners such as states) by developing scientific information, analytical models, conservation tools, and expanded partnerships. The results will include quality recreational fishing, improved status of species of greatest conservation need, and expanded engagement by partners, especially landowners.

Extended Benefit

The second national assessment of fish habitat, scheduled for 2015, will be significantly enhanced by the addition of finer-scale regional data compiled by the FHPs. Completion of this challenging task will also make the national assessment more accessible and relevant to FHPs and useful for its long-term purposes of prioritization and measurement of results.

Summary

The National Fish Habitat Partnership brings a focused and coordinated approach to protecting, restoring, and enhancing the nation's aquatic habitats. This proposal strengthens that approach by linking the oversight responsibility of the Board and the operational responsibility of the FHPs to achieve national and regional scientific and conservation goals.

Qualifications

Kelly Hepler, Chairman, National Fish Habitat Board

Kelly Hepler began working at the Alaska Department of Fish and Game in 1979 as a fisheries biologist and has held increasingly complex positions throughout his career. Kelly served as director of the Division of Sport Fish and most recently as a special assistant for the previous commissioner. He represents the department in numerous national forums and is presently chair of the National Fish Habitat Board. Kelly holds a B.S. in Fish and Wildlife Management from Montana State University.

Matt Menashes, Director of Operations, Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies

Matthew E. Menashes is the Association's Director of Operations, and as such will serve as the Principal Investigator on this award. Mr. Menashes has over 10 years of experience as an association executive. In his position, Mr. Menashes oversees the Association's grants and contracts, finances and accounting, and leadership and organizational development functions.

Staff level leadership and management support of the work of the Board group will be provided by AFWA, USFWS, NOAA, state agencies and other partners such as NGO's.

National Fish Habitat Board Members April 2012
http://www.fishhabitat.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=94&Itemid=63

Staff Support:
Tom Busiahn, USFWS; Karen Abrams, NOAA; Ryan Roberts, AFWA