Coordinating the National Fish Habitat Partnership and Federal initiatives

Desired outcome: Board action to encourage improved linkages between the National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP) and Federal initiatives that affect fish habitat conservation.

Issue: Federal agencies and the Administration frequently launch initiatives that affect fish habitat conservation. Linkages with the National Fish Habitat Partnership help these initiatives to be more successful and enduring. However, linkages are often not made, with potentially confusing and duplicative results.

> Example: Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, a recent initiative of the Department of the Interior, are successfully addressing aquatic science needs where they are cooperating with Fish Habitat Partnerships established under the National Fish Habitat Action Plan.
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> Example: The National Blueways System was established by Secretarial order on May 24, 2012 "to recognize river systems conserved through diverse stakeholder partnerships that use a comprehensive watershed approach to resource stewardship". Despite its similar purposes, the Order does not refer to the National Fish Habitat Partnership or the March 2012 Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Secretaries of the Interior, Commerce, and Agriculture.

Opportunity: Improve effectiveness of Federal initiatives that affect fish habitat conservation by establishing linkages with the National Fish Habitat Partnership, building upon the March 2012 Memorandum of Understanding.

> Benefit: Coordinating science, partnerships, and conservation delivery with NFHP will provide for more efficient use of Federal resources to achieve goals of multiple related initiatives.
>
> Benefit: Enlisting NFHP's broad base of support will help Federal initiatives endure across multiple Administrations to achieve lasting results for the American people and realize significant cost savings.
>
> Benefit: Connecting Federal initiatives to NFHP will enhance awareness among partners, policymakers, and the public, increasing understanding and engagement, and enhancing implementation of NFHP.

Examples of recent Federal initiatives that affect fish habitat conservation

This may not be a complete list. Click on the initiative titles to see their web sites.

- America's Great Outdoors – Presidential Memorandum
- Healthy Watersheds Initiative – Environmental Protection Agency
- Urban Waters Initiative – Environmental Protection Agency

- National Blueways System – Department of the Interior
- National Water Trails System – Department of the Interior
- Landscape Conservation Cooperatives – Department of the Interior
- National Ocean Policy – National Ocean Council
- Habitat Blueprint – National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration
- National Water Census – U.S. Geological Survey
- Working Lands for Wildlife – USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Possible actions for Board consideration:

- Request that the Federal Caucus and Federal agencies include in their respective MOU reports a list of Departmental programs that could benefit from stronger collaboration with NFHP, identifying specific examples of NFHP initiatives or programs that could further reinforce these departmental programs.

- Send letters of support from the Board to the Departments about Departmental programs. The Board may wish to request that the Federal Caucus identify such programs for Board consideration.

- Identify a lead from the government affairs team (Robertson, Moyer, AFWA, other?) to facilitate connections between NFHP and Federal initiatives.

- Through AFWA, increase State input to Federal agencies on the importance of linking to NFHP.

The National Blueways System

Where Land and Water Stewardship and Recreation Meet

Connecticut River - Photo: USFWS

Healthy rivers and watersheds are among America's most loved national treasures. These resources are vital to local economies, to enjoyment of the natural world, and to the quality of the environment on which we all depend. Rivers connect communities, rural and urban, human and natural. Across the nation, towns, county and state governments, civic organizations, businesses, landowners, and volunteers are working together to protect and restore healthy rivers and lands capable of providing quality outdoor recreation and other benefits within a working landscape.

The National Blueways System is where water and land stewardship come together, creating synergy and a framework for partnerships. The National Blueways System uses a landscape-scale approach to river conservation and outdoor recreation that unites activities from the headwaters to the mouth and across the watershed.

Secretary Salazar signing the National Blueways Secretarial Order - Photo: USFWS

- The National Blueways System recognizes and rewards the work of stakeholder partnerships and provides federal support to increase collaboration among diverse partners.

- The National Blueways System, established on May 24, 2012 by Secretarial Order 3321, will provide a blueprint for communities to plan and manage for the health, resiliency, and connectivity of their rivers and watersheds. It supports communication, cooperation and collaboration among different stakeholders, who strive for an integrated approach to managing land and water resources.

- Healthy rivers and watersheds provide outdoor recreation, clean water, flood and drought protection, and other valuable economic, social and ecological services. The National Blueways System seeks to sustain and enhance these services providing long-term value for the American people.

A National Blueway is a nationally significant river and its watershed recognized for having a diverse stakeholder partnership committed to integrative and adaptive management in land and water management that sustains working lands, natural resources, and outdoor recreation.