Agenda Item: Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council (SFBPC): Brief and Update on Council Process to Conduct a Needs Assessment & Develop a Strategic Vision for Fishery and Aquatic Resource Conservation within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Background: In October 2011 the assistance of the SFBPC was requested by the FWS to renew the Fisheries Program vision as a foundation for updated strategic plan. Recognizing that SFBPC's ability to engage partners, stakeholders and experts was integral to FWS's ability to successfully address the nation's aquatic resource challenges, the SFBPC was asked to convene a diverse group of stakeholders to assist in this strategic planning effort.

The on-going project is being undertaken in 3 phases. In Phase 1, a revised strategic vision and needs assessment for FWS activities in support of fish and aquatic resources, including the Fisheries Program and other key elements within the agency, is being developed (April - October 2012).

In Phase 2, the SFBPC and its steering committee will work to ensure buy-in and ownership of strategic vision and needs assessment by stakeholders and partners (July - November 2012).

The 3rd and final phase is the development of final Strategic Vision and Needs Assessment for the approval of SFBPC, and subsequent presentation to the FWS Director (December 2012 – March 2013).

Relevant Update:

Recently, after consultation with FWS leadership, the SFBPC has decided to broaden the effort to not only look at the fishery and aquatic resource conservation efforts of the Fisheries & Habitat Conservation Program, but also these activities across the rest of the FWS.

This update will review the revised products created by the Strategic Vision steering committee and will highlight the revised process for the remainder of the effort.

Action Item (if necessary): No action necessary, but Board feedback will be solicited.

Michael Nussman, Chairman
Fisheries Issues Committee
Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council

Whitney Tilt
DJ Case and Associates

Re: Policy statement of the National Fish Habitat Board with respect to the roles and functions of the Fisheries Program of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Gentlemen:

The National Fish Habitat Board (Board) is responsible for promoting, overseeing, and coordinating implementation of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan (Action Plan). Through the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the states led the development of the Action Plan in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), NOAA Fisheries Service and other key partners.

In 2002, the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council (Council) recommended that the FWS and its Fisheries Program should serve as a catalyst to lead development of a national aquatic habitat plan. Subsequently FWS agreed to "explore the benefits … and the appropriate Service role" in development and implementation of such a plan. During the scoping and development phases of the Action Plan (2004-06), FWS worked in close coordination with states and other partners. Since receiving its first appropriation for implementing the Action Plan in Fiscal Year 2006, FWS has provided financial support for national and regional coordination, scientific advancements, and on-the-ground conservation projects, often in close coordination with partners.

Given this history, the Board is indebted to the Council and FWS for their critical roles in creating and implementing the Action Plan, and is pleased to assist the Council and FWS in defining the roles and functions of the FWS Fisheries Program to meet the future challenges of aquatic resource conservation.

Much has changed in the ten years since the Council last issued recommendations on the roles and functions of the Fisheries Program. Since then, the Action Plan has spawned a national partnership of thousands of organizations and individuals working toward common fish habitat conservation goals, facilitated by 18 approved Fish Habitat Partnerships, and overseen by the Board. The Board's Science and Data Committee led the first-ever national assessment of the condition of fish habitats in 2010, with planned updates every 5 years. To its credit, FWS provided considerable funding to support these accomplishments.

The Board supports FWS' embrace of a landscape focus, and development of scientific capabilities to ensure success of this new approach as long as it does not come at the expense of

other long-term FWS fisheries programs and commitments. In fact, these concepts are at the heart of the Action Plan and the National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP). FWS should take full advantage of the NFHP's strategic landscape conservation approach, its ground-breaking scientific products and capabilities, and its broad scope of partners poised to deliver strategic conservation of aquatic habitats throughout the United States. These assets can be leveraged along with those of FWS' network of Landscape Conservation Cooperatives and migratory bird Joint Ventures to link aquatic and terrestrial landscape processes and conservation priorities.

As FWS and its Fisheries Program seek to inculcate the concepts of landscape-level conservation into the strategic habitat conservation of aquatic ecosystems, they need look no farther than the National Fish Habitat Partnership, which makes those concepts reality. We request that NFHP and the Action Plan be woven throughout any future strategic plans for the FWS Fisheries Program, and indeed through the strategic plans of other FWS programs that affect aquatic habitat. For these reasons, we recommend that NFHP be a foundational cornerstone of the FWS Fisheries Program, helping to integrate components within the Fisheries Program, and to form common cause with states and other partners.

To enable the integration of NFHP into the FWS Fisheries Program, we request that the Council ensure active participation of the NFHP Board in the development of the details and implementation strategy that will occur in future planning phases of the FWS Strategic Plan. This participation is critical to guarantee the close integration of the NFHP objectives into the FWS plan of work. In particular, it is our opinion that the following two points are key this integration:

- The NFHP Board should be clearly identified as a key collaborator with the FWS Fisheries Program actively assisting in identifying overlapping priorities and conservation objectives between these programs with a clear outcome of developing joint strategies that reduce redundancy and increase the effectiveness of both programs.
- Similarly, the NFHP Board should be directly requested to identify opportunities for and impediments to collaboration with the FWS Fisheries Program with a clear outcome of developing joint strategies to improve collaborative efforts between these programs.

Finally, the Board desires to have a strong and capable partner in the FWS Fisheries Program. We recognize that FWS has many important statutory responsibilities, including endangered species, migratory birds, wildlife refuges, and trust responsibilities that must be met into the future. The need for a federal leadership role in fisheries conservation is just as strong as it was in 1871, when Congress created the precursor to today's FWS Fisheries Program and NOAA Fisheries Service. While states have primary responsibility for managing fisheries within their borders under their respective public trust responsibilities and Native American governments have important responsibilities for fisheries conservation on treaty lands, federal leadership is crucial to our collective future success. We urge the Council advocate for a strong and capable Fisheries Program, within the scope of FWS roles and responsibilities, across all the FWS Regions, with identifiable and accountable national leadership in the FWS headquarters.

DRAFT

Thank you for seeking input from the Board at our July 10-11 meeting in Portland, Maine. We look forward to follow-up discussion at the Board's next meeting on October 16-17 in Missouri.

Sincerely,

Kelly Hepler, Chairman
National Fish Habitat Board

DRAFT