Strategies to increase corporate engagement with the National Fish Habitat Board

Desired outcome: Board action to appoint a working group with a charge to develop strategies leading to greater corporate engagement with the Board, either through representation on the Board or within the Board's overall structure.

Issue: As a public-private partnership, the Board recognizes the potential contributions that the private sector makes to conservation. Board membership has always included representation by the sport fishing industry. The proposed *National Fish Habitat Conservation Act* lists several industry sectors for potential inclusion as Board members: sport fishing, commercial fishing, livestock and poultry production, land development, row crop, petroleum, and mineral extraction.

The *National Fish Habitat Action Plan, 2nd edition*, sets an objective to "broaden the community of support for fish habitat conservation". On July 10, 2012, the Board's Executive Leadership Team (ELT) discussed adding additional seats to the Board to increase engagement by corporations, interest groups, and Federal agencies.

In the current era of rapid social and technological change, organizational roles are shifting rapidly. Government is increasingly constrained by budget shortfalls and political gridlock, while the business sector is becoming more influential in the policy arena. Businesses are adapting to shifting markets, and are sensitive to public attitudes communicated broadly and instantaneously via the internet. Many businesses recognize that long-term success depends on decreasing their environmental footprint and on encouraging a sustainable economy in the context of a sustainable environment.

In particular, the outdoor recreation industry, including but not limited to the sport fishing industry, depends on a healthy outdoor environment that includes clean water and abundant fish and wildlife. Other industry sectors will align with natural resource conservation in other, perhaps less obvious ways. The learning curve varies among companies and industries; while leading companies are exploring opportunities to promote sustainability, others are still dominated by short-term thinking and fixation on quarterly profits.

Engagement by appropriate industries in the National Fish Habitat Partnership could lead to significant mutual benefits and more effective fish habitat conservation. Potential benefits should be explored as part of strategy development for increased corporate engagement with the Board.

A Board strategy for a focused and aggressive public-private partnership would open the door for private sector partners to bring their assets to the table to more effectively address the complex conservation challenges of the 21st Century. This would demonstrate evolutionary thinking and would position the Board as a leader in corporate engagement for conservation.