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MEMORANDUM

To: National Fish Habitat Board

From: Staff

Date: February 21, 2014

Subject: Recommendations for Board action on the Southeast Alaska (candidate) Fish Habitat Partnership application

On March 3, 2010, the National Fish Habitat Board (Board) approved a process for recognizing Fish Habitat Partnerships (FHPs) in 2010 and beyond, following the initial 3-year schedule of FHP applications that spanned 2007-2009. The process requires prospective FHPs to meet the criteria in the *Policies and Guidance for Fish Habitat Partnerships*, last amended by the Board on October 8, 2008.

The Southeast Alaska Fish Habitat Partnership (SEAKFHP) submitted an application for recognition by the Board on January 10, 2014, in accordance with the Board's process for recognizing FHPs.

The staff provides the following recommendation for the Board's March 10, 2014 meeting:

> ***The Board should approve the application and recognize the SEAKFHP as a Fish Habitat Partnership. The SEAKFHP has demonstrated, through its application, that it meets the criteria in the Policies and Guidance for Fish Habitat Partnerships.***

The Board's response to the SEAKFHP application should provide the following guidance:

1) ***The Board commends SEAKFHP for establishing a goal of protecting fish habitat in freshwater systems, estuaries and nearshore-marine areas and for indicating that as the partnership matures; focus may expand to other fish and invertebrate species or key stressors that are noted in the strategic plan. It is noted that the focus of the partnership to date has been anadromous fish. SEAKFHP , with the assistance of other marine focused partners, should consider expanding work into estuaries in accordance with their strategic plan.***

2) ***The SEAKFHP should coordinate with other FHPs that have similar, overlapping, or complementary interests. These include the already existing FHPs in Alaska and the coastal FHPs. These FHPs are expected to reciprocate the relationship.***

3) ***The Board should strongly encourage the Partnership to continue to coordinate with the Science & Data Committee to ensure that their habitat assessments are compatible with the National Fish Habitat Assessment, and their data systems are compatible with the National Data System.***

Following are excerpts from the SEAKFHP application and draft strategic plan.

Mission and Conservation Goals

The Partnership's mission is to support cooperative fish habitat conservation, restoration, and management across the region with consideration of economic, social, and cultural interests of local communities in its efforts. The partnership has three initial priority conservation goals:

- Protect fish habitat in freshwater systems, estuaries and nearshore-marine areas in Southeast,
- Maintain water quality and quantity in those areas, and
- Restore and enhance fragmented and degraded fish habitats in impacted areas.

Steering Committee

The SEAKFHP steering committee includes two State of Alaska government agency representatives, three federal agency representatives, three non-governmental organizations, one tribal representative, one local government representative, and one at-large member. These entities comprise a community of interest dedicated to the protection, enhancement, and restoration of key habitats within SEAKFHP boundaries. The steering committee has adopted operating rules and by-laws, including a clear decision-making protocol.

Geographic Scope

The geographic scope of the SEAKFHP encompasses the lands, freshwaters, estuaries, marine ecosystems, and communities of Southeast Alaska. The partnership follows the Alaska Department of Fish and Game management area of Southeast Alaska and is defined as extending from Dixon Entrance at the South, to Cape Suckling in the North, eastward to the U.S. border, and includes all associated lands, freshwater and marine waters in between; a distance of about 525 miles consisting mostly of a narrow 120 mile strip of land and mountains on the mainland and over a thousand islands – collectively known as the Alexander Archipelago.

Strategic Priorities

Current expertise and focus of SEAKFHP partners is on populations of resident and anadromous salmonid species in freshwater, estuarine, and nearshore/marine habitats. As the partnership matures, focus may expand to other fish and invertebrate species or key stressors that are noted in our strategic plan. With the guidance of this expertise and focus four strategic priorities, referenced as core functions in our plan, have been identified:

- grow diversity and capacity of the SEAKFHP linking natural resource science and management with regional interests, local and traditional values, and community needs;
- build organizational strength & perseverance of the SEAKFHP for long-term sustainability and functionality;
- provide services to partners that foster regional cooperation and understanding and result in improved on-the-grounds conservation efforts across Southeast; and
- facilitate regionally relevant fish habitat conservation strategies (protect fish habitat and maintain water quality and quantity across Southeast, and

Science and Data Resources

SEAKFHP partners have numerous capabilities and resources available to inform baseline conditions of fish habitat in Southeast Alaska. Examples of science and data resources available to the partnership include, among others:

- The baseline National Hydrologic Datasets (NHD) collected and managed by the collaborative Southeast Alaska Hydrography Database (SEAK Hydro) project,
- USFS's Watershed Condition Framework and numerous watershed assessments on the Tongass National Forest,
- ADF&G's Anadromous Waters Catalog,
- Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation's (ADEC) Impaired Water Bodies Listing, and
- NOAA's Nearshore Fish Atlas of Alaska and previous agency-led assessment work conducted for Southeast Alaska included in the National Fish Habitat Assessment completed in 2010.