Title: Legislative Update

Desired outcome(s): Board awareness of the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act status and 2015 legislative approach

Background:

Versions of the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act (NFHCA), which will codify and strengthen the National Fish Habitat Partnership, have been introduced in the previous three sessions of Congress. The most recent version, S. 2080, was introduced in the Senate in the 113th Congress on March 5, 2014, but failed to gain traction before the end of the year. NFHCA was introduced by co-sponsors Senators Ben Cardin (D-MD) and Mike Crapo (R-ID). Previous versions of NFHCA have enjoyed broad bipartisan support in Congress, including bipartisan approval by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee in two different Congresses. S. 2080 included modifications to language in earlier versions of NFHCA that were made in consultation with several Senators and their staffs from both sides of the aisle.

2015 Legislative Approach:

The NFHCA coalition has added new partner organizations and now includes representatives from The Nature Conservancy, Trout Unlimited, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the American Sportfishing Association, the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, the Coastal Conservation Association and the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation. The primary focus of the coalition has been to introduce a similar bill as last year's version and advocate for its inclusion in the Sportsmen's Act, which is a package of various legislative provisions supported by the recreational fishing and hunting community. One hurdle the coalition is working to overcome is perceived concerns over private property rights and other relatively minor tweaks to clarify the scope of the program. While the Sportsmen's Act was introduced in the Senate on Feb. 5 without inclusion of NFHCA, the primary sponsors, Senators Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Martin Heinrich (D-NM) have made commitments to work with the coalition and Senators Cardin and Crapo to address the lingering concerns with the bill and have it included in the Sportsmen's Act during the forthcoming legislative process.