



Eastern Brook Trout
JOINT VENTURE
A Fish Habitat Partnership

EBTJV Steering Committee Meeting Summary
December 19, 2023

Participants:

Lori Maloney, EBTJV Coordinator
Jacob Rash, EBTJV Chairman; NC WRC
Lee Simard, EBTJV Vice Chairman; VFWD
Todd Ewing, Guest; Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership Coordinator
Ross Shramko NJFW
David Thorne, WV DNR
Steve Perry, EBTJV/NFHP
Sarah Baker, GA DNR
Jason Coombs, USFWS
Nat Gillespie, USDA FS
Jason Detar, PA FBC
Jaime Masterson, USFWS
Jason Cessna, MD DNR
Brad Fink - Virginia DWR
Adam Kautza MassWildlife
Than Hitt - Researcher, USGS
Steve Vedra – Volunteer, Fundraising
Fred Henson, NY Dept. Environmental Conservation
Jud Kratzer - AFS Liaison to EBTJV; VFWD
Matt Lawrence - Maryland DNR
Christina Ryder, Guest; USFWS
John Magee-NH Fish and Game

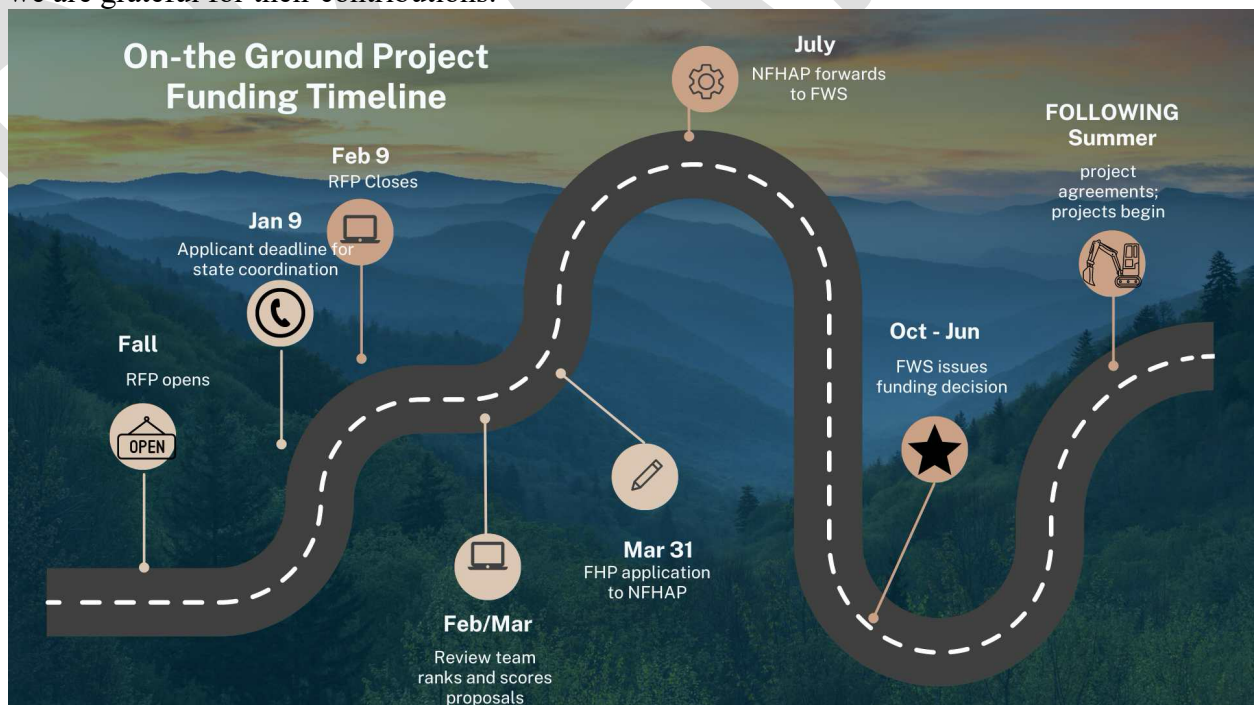
This Zoom meeting was called to order by Chair Jacob Rash at ~1:00 p.m. on December 19, 2023. The first order of business was for the Chair to establish a quorum (≥ 10 SC members), which was achieved as 15 Steering Committee (SC) members participated in the meeting.

The following notes summarize the business conducted during the meeting held on **December 19, 2023**:

- **The group went through a full round of introductions.**

- **Todd Ewing gave a presentation about the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP).** The presentation and conversation provided valuable insights into SARP's mission, programs, funding mechanisms, and outreach strategies, emphasizing the importance of collaborative efforts in conserving and restoring aquatic resources across the southeastern United States.
 - Todd Ewing, program coordinator for Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP), discussed SARP's mission and activities.
 - SARP, a joint committee under the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, aims to conserve aquatic resources across 15 states.
 - SARP focuses on restoration, aquatic connectivity, research, and planning programs.
 - Restoration Program:
 - Facilitates and funds aquatic restoration projects, primarily stream or river-based with some estuary projects.
 - Over 130 restoration projects completed since inception, totaling over \$8 million in direct contributions.
 - Project types include stream restoration, barrier removal, dam removal, bank restoration, covert removal, water savings projects, and invasive species removal.
 - Aquatic Connectivity Program:
 - Comprises four components: inventory, prioritization, aquatic connectivity teams, and barrier assessment training.
 - Started in the Southeast and expanded nationally with grants from the Fish and Wildlife Service.
 - Aquatic connectivity teams established in most states and territories within the Southeast footprint.
 - Conducts barrier assessment training to assess culverts and road- stream crossings for fish passage barriers.
 - Research and Planning:
 - Smaller program focusing on improving barrier assessment tools and identifying fish passage barriers using Lidar technology.
 - Projects include improving the assessment tool to incorporate smaller fishes and determining the distribution of conservation-needs fish species in the Virgin Islands.
 - Collaboration with Clemson University for ongoing projects.
 - During Q&A, questions covered capacity, funding sources, project review; outreach/social media, and past and potential future collaboration among fish habitat partnerships.

- Funding sources include state dues, operational funds from the National Fish Habitat Partnership, trusts, and NFWF. They do not currently solicit individual giving but might be interested in that.
 - Project selection involves review by a steering committee representing state agencies, NOAA, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
 - SARP conducts outreach through social media
 - Todd is interested in future collaborations with other fish habitat partnerships.
 - EBTJV and SARP had a multi-year collaboration with ACFP on “Whitewater to Bluewater” ending in 2019.
 - Challenges include limited capacity and the need for increased staff and resources.
- **The Steering Committee Vote to approve the [September 2023 SC meeting summary](#) .**
 - **The Steering Committee heard an update from Coordinator Lori Maloney on the FY25 RFP cycle process.** The RFP opened in November, and the deadline for initial consultation with the state points of contact is January 9, 2024. This is to help ensure that the state agency biologists have adequate time to give input on the projects and provide letters of support if appropriate. Fred Henson noted that the consultation deadline is helpful.
 - **The final deadline is February 9, 2024.** EBTJV’s application package will be approved at the March steering committee meeting for submission to NFHP by March 31, 2024. Lori reviewed the overall timeline and touched on the infographic (below).
 - The review team is always accepting more volunteers.
 - The state and federal agencies who give input to this process are critically integral and we are grateful for their contributions.



- **Lori Maloney gave an update on the Congressional Designation Process and Application**
 - Under the America's Conservation Enhancement Act of 2020 all 20 fish habitat partnerships are required to apply officially to Congress by 2025 for designation as a national fish habitat partnership. EBTJV went through a process in 2007 of officially applying to become a member of NFHP under the National Fish Habitat Action plan. This application to Congress has a lot of similar elements. Priority, geography, species, habitats, strategies. What does your strategic plan look like, how did you develop it? Who are your partners? What does your governance look like? What's your fiscal structure?
 - This process is a multi-step process: December 31 is the deadline for our draft application, for review by a NFHP committee. NFHP will return the draft with comments in the Spring, at which point EBTJV will revise and solicit any final input from our Steering Committee. The final version will be due in June, 2024.
 - Lori had provided a draft by email link to a Google Doc in early December. Steve Perry noted that he had reviewed the draft and found it in good shape; he had a few suggestions for items to include. Lori encouraged anyone else to review the document and provide feedback.

- **Steve Perry gave an update on NFHP**
 - At the NFHP meeting in Charleston, SC in early December, the FHPs met and the board also had an in-person meeting.
 - The board contracted a consultant to help with the nonprofit arm, Beyond the Pond. Two key recommendations resulting from this assessment are advancement of an action plan for BTP that illustrates key strategies, milestones, timelines, evaluation process; and that BTP should focus their mission on fundraising and securing financial resources to augment NFHP – in particular the nonfederal match for operations and for projects.
 - NFHP initiated a “board buddy” system to increase communication between board members and individual FHPs. EBTJV was one of the highest interest fish habitat partnerships among the Board members.
 - The board approved a motion to increase the cap on the amount of operation funding that FHPs can request, from \$85,000 to \$125,000.
 - Title 2 of the ACE Act requires that FHPs seek formal Congressional designation by 2025. A board team will review the initial applications submitted by the FHPs. This review will result in the feedback to strengthen their application. Steve volunteered to be a member of of this review team.
 - Steve’s initial three-year term as a member of the NFHP board is to expire at the end of February of 2024. Steve was pleased to announce he was reappointed to another 3 year term.

- **Lori Maloney gave an update on planning from the November 1-2 meeting at NCTC**

- EBTJV is making important progress towards our update to the range-wide catchment level salmonid assessment
 - March 1 2023 deadline for updates to catchments and final QAQC
 - The group hopes to publish the results, possibly as 2 papers
 - Yoichiro Kanno's team will help
 - Jason D. seeking list of 'core questions' from updater data team
 - Updater communication team: Lee S, Jake R, Dianne T, Lori M, Jason C, Nat G, T Sadler
 - Updater data team: Jason D, Jason C, Yoichiro K, Matt L, Colby D, Ross S, Jarrod P.
 - These groups interact with each other and with the fundraising team that Steve Vedra is leading.
- **Proposal to increase capacity for brook trout conservation projects in the Delaware River Watershed – scoping and discussion, with Christina Ryder, USFWS**

Christina Ryder, Delaware Program Manager in Science Applications, from the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) spoke about the Delaware River Basin Restoration Program and its components. The Grant program is run through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), awarding around \$15 million in conservation funding in 2023. The program focuses on interstate collaboration, especially with State administrators from Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, and Delaware, to prioritize conservation efforts within the watershed.

Efforts have been successful in initiatives like expanding boating access and aquatic organism passage programs. Currently, there's an interest in increasing the focus on brook trout conservation, with discussions on how to allocate funds effectively across state lines within the Delaware River watershed.

The conversation addressed administrative limitations, the need for a dedicated project manager, and potential models for implementing the program, including partnering with conservation organizations like Trout Unlimited or The Nature Conservancy.

There was agreement on the need for capacity building and the potential for a joint team approach to project prioritization and management. The proposal currently involves using Wildlife Management Institute (WMI) as a fiscal sponsor and establishing a dedicated biologist or project coordinator to facilitate on-the-ground implementation.

Jason Detar (PAFBC), Fred Henson (NYDEC) and Ross Shramko (NJ DEP) each weighed in on the strong need for project managers; there simply is not the capacity at the state level to do the work that is needed. This is in context of challenges of shifting priorities within state agencies. If we want these dollars spent well, we need capacity, and in general we need to maintain long-term engagement and support for conservation efforts.

Christina and Lori solicited feedback and participation from the group in reviewing the proposal and providing letters of support, emphasizing the goal of creating a replicable model for conservation efforts in other watersheds. The ask from EBTJV would be time spent by the Coordinator and agency staff on a workgroup to help set priorities for the program. Overall, there was enthusiasm for the initiative and a commitment to collaborative efforts moving forward.

- **Lee Simard gave an update about EBTJV communications workgroup.**
 - The communications workgroup had a meeting and the notes are available online. It has started to develop EBTJV “pitch” language, using simple And – But - Therefore framework.
 - The group is also working on language to promote the Catchment Updater.
 - Next steps: Work on refining this messaging toolbox; Build this into a more specific communications plan/framework
 - Than Hitt noted a citizen science effort of USGS and TU, to use AI to identify individual fish – primarily brook trout, through angler effort. It would help stewardship ethic for the for the river. It will have national social media presence through TU, and is something that EBTJV could engage in.

The EBTJV Steering Committee meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.