

2014 Multistate Conservation Grant Program

Grant Proposal

Executive Summary

1. **Project Title:** Promoting Strategic Fish Habitat Conservation through Regionally-coordinated Science and Collaboration
2. **Full Legal Name of Organization:** National Fish Habitat Board. If awarded, the grant will be administered on behalf of the National Fish Habitat Board by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, 444 North Capitol Street NW, Washington DC, 20001
3. **Organization Information:**
 - a. Applicant Classification: Nongovernmental Organization
 - b. Nongovernmental Organization Classification (if applicable): 501(c)(6)
4. **Lead Applicant's Contact Information:**

Mr. Kelly Hepler, Assistant Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish and Game and Chair, National Fish Habitat Board
c/o Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
444 North Capitol Street NW, Suite 725
Washington, DC 20001
Email: Kelly.hepler@alaska.gov
Phone Number: 907-242-1907
5. **Name and Affiliation of Co-Investigator(s)/Partner(s) (if applicable):**
 - Matt Menashes, Director of Operations, Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies
 - Tom Busiahn, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
 - Gary Whelan, Michigan Department of Natural Resources
 - Christopher Meaney, NOAA Fisheries
6. **Project Length:** 1 year.
7. **Funding Requested:**
 - a. Total Amount: \$544,500
 - b. Year 1 Amount: \$544,500

NOTE: This request builds on a one-year project funded in 2012.
8. **Estimate of Partnership Funds to be Leveraged (if applicable):** \$89,750
9. **Funding Source.**
 - a. Funding Source: 100% Sport Fish Restoration Fund
 - b. Percent WR: 0
 - c. Percent SFR: 100

- 10. State Benefit Requirement:** The outcomes of this project will benefit all 50 states.
- 11. Primary National Conservation Need (NCN) Addressed:** NCN 2: Strengthening the National Fish Habitat Partnership
- 12. Summary Statement (200 words or less):**
Through regional collaboration, Fish Habitat Partnerships (FHPs) will compile biological and process-level information on fish habitats to meet FHP needs and supplement the national fish habitat assessment; establish new or improved strategic goals, objectives, and priorities for conserving fish species and habitats; expand the scope of partners; and develop best management practices for implementing habitat conservation actions across species ranges and boundaries of jurisdiction and land ownership.
- 13. Terms and Conditions.** *Use of MSCGP Grants - All applicants must ensure that their proposed project does not fund, in whole or in part, an activity that promotes or encourages opposition to the regulated hunting or trapping of wildlife or taking of sport fish.*

I agree with the above terms and conditions.

Project Narrative

Title

Promoting Strategic Fish Habitat Conservation through Regionally-coordinated Science and Collaboration

Objective(s)

Priority needs identified by Fish Habitat Partnerships vary across regions, and include improving hydrography data in Alaska, engaging landowners in the agricultural Midwest, and setting restoration and protection priorities for aquatic habitats across the U.S. This project would address several of those needs, building upon progress supported by Multistate Conservation Grants. It specifically continues a collaborative approach begun under a Multistate Conservation Grant awarded to the National Fish Habitat Board in 2013.

Through regional collaboration among FHPs, this project will:

- Collectively advance FHP habitat assessments through identification of mutual data needs, data acquisition and landscape-level analysis of aquatic species-habitat relationships.
- Use region-specific fish population, habitat, and human impact data to fill regional data gaps and to assist the national Science & Data Committee in improving the 2015 national status report.
- Develop and/or improve strategic plans of individual FHPs, identify geographic focus areas, and develop ties between FHP priorities and those of other landscape conservation efforts.
- Develop and demonstrate best management practices for habitat conservation, and methods to effectively engage local communities in fish habitat conservation projects.
- Enhance the effectiveness of FHPs in delivering fish habitat conservation by improving business practices and expanding the range of partners involved with the FHPs.

Problem Statement

The National Fish Habitat Board (Board) is responsible for overseeing and coordinating implementation of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan (Action Plan). The Board has identified the following operational roles for FHPs, the primary work units of the Action Plan. The roles of FHPs align closely with the needs identified in NCN #2:

- Coordinate and compile scientific assessment information on fish habitats within their partnership areas,
- Establish strategic goals and objectives that define desired outcomes for fish species and habitats within their partnership areas,
- Identify priority places and/or issues to focus conservation action, and prioritize fish habitat conservation projects to meet goals and objectives,
- Coordinate and compile information on outputs (conservation actions) and outcomes (changes in habitat condition) for reporting to the Board and stakeholders, and
- Collaborate with other FHPs where appropriate to carry out these responsibilities.

Collaborative efforts are critical to ensuring that human and financial resources are used wisely and efficiently to effectively achieve conservation success. The 18 Board-recognized FHPs are

committed to working collaboratively to fulfill their responsibilities, as evidenced by their demonstrated willingness to work collectively to increase their capacity to implement the Action Plan (2012 MSCG) and the regional collaboration that is occurring with functions such as resources assessments (2013 MSCG). However, to continue these collaborative activities the FHPs are in need of additional financial support to fully implement the objectives described in this grant proposal. Collaboration among FHPs strengthens the National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP) by focusing on processes that bring partners together to advance strategic priorities regionally as well as nationally. This approach to fish habitat conservation is a fundamental principle of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan.

Experience

The National Fish Habitat Partnership is a state-led effort to address the nation's fish and aquatic habitat conservation needs. The National Fish Habitat Board, organized in 2006, is responsible for developing policies and guidance for recognizing Fish Habitat Partnerships, and for establishing national measures of success and evaluation criteria for FHPs. Since 2007, the Board has recognized 18 FHPs based on its policies and guidance, and in 2012 completed the first performance evaluation of FHPs. Kelly Hepler has chaired the Board since May 2008, supported by an interagency staff from state and federal agencies and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

Fish Habitat Partnerships, the primary work units of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan, are supported by a variety of funding sources and in-kind contributions. The FHPs are dynamic, inclusive coalitions of public and private institutions, each with an established governance structure, a strategic plan identifying conservation priorities, and capabilities for scientific assessment. The Board's FHP recognition process ensures that the individual FHPs all have in place the diverse partners, governance structure, and planning capabilities needed to identify strategic priorities and to select projects that address their priorities.

FHPs themselves do not collect scientific information or conduct fish habitat conservation projects. State agencies or other partners involved with FHPs provide the personnel and other resources to do these jobs. FHPs add value to fish habitat conservation by assembling and analyzing information at a landscape scale, recruiting new partners, and providing strategic frameworks that focus resources on the highest priority conservation needs. In the near term, FHPs may place a burden on state agencies and other partners, which are already resource-limited. In the longer term, FHPs will help state agencies and other partners to be more efficient in achieving desired conservation outcomes by strengthening the collaborative approach to implementing conservation actions and providing essential decision-support tools.

While all of the FHPs have made significant accomplishments in their short histories, they operate under the Action Plan's tenet that conservation actions must be sustained and accountable. This project builds upon the capacity and experience of FHPs to achieve long-term conservation outcomes.

Approach

The National Fish Habitat Partnership brings a focused and coordinated approach to protecting, restoring, and enhancing the nation's aquatic habitats. This proposal strengthens that approach by supporting more robust collaboration among FHPs and other large-scale conservation organizations to achieve the NFHP's national and regional scientific and conservation goals.

In general, this project will support activities of the Fish Habitat Partnerships that will help to achieve the five objectives in the 2nd Edition of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan:

1. *Achieve measurable habitat conservation results* through strategic actions of Fish Habitat Partnerships that improve ecological condition, restore natural processes, or prevent the decline of intact and healthy systems leading to better fish habitat conditions and increased fishing opportunities.
2. *Establish a consensus set of national conservation strategies* as a framework to guide future actions and investment by the Fish Habitat Partnerships by 2013.
3. *Broaden the community of support for fish habitat conservation* by increasing fishing opportunities, fostering the participation of local communities – especially young people – in conservation activities, and raising public awareness of the role healthy fish habitats play in the quality of life and economic well-being of local communities.
4. *Fill gaps in the National Fish Habitat Assessment* and its associated database to empower strategic conservation action supported by broadly available scientific information, and integrate socio-economic data in the analysis to improve people's lives in a manner consistent with fish habitat conservation goals.
5. *Communicate the conservation outcomes* produced collectively by Fish Habitat Partnerships, *as well as new opportunities and voluntary approaches for conserving fish habitat*, to the public and conservation partners.

The distribution of funds among regions is shown in the budget table. Based on our experience in 2012, the distribution of funds among FHPs within each region will be flexible to meet specific and evolving needs of the collaborating FHPs; the distribution of funds across regions is not expected to change from that shown in the budget table. Regional sub-agreements will be structured around the five objectives of the Action Plan, and will identify specific tasks that will further the objectives. Subawards will be made between the National Fish Habitat Board and the regional partners, with fiscal agents administering funds on behalf of FHPs. These fiscal agents are long-term managing partners for the FHPs and provide services to the FHPs under partnership agreements, therefore no competition is required for these services.

Expected Results or Benefits

The project will achieve results compatible with desired outcomes identified in NCN #2. All of the expected results build upon prior work of the FHPs, much of which was supported by MSCG funds. Expected results and benefits include:

- Enhanced regional aquatic habitat condition assessments and landscape-scale conservation design for coastal habitats on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts (including Hawaii), coldwater habitats in the Appalachians and interior west, and the southeastern United States through collaborative efforts of FHPs.
- In three eastern FHPs, implementation of sustainable FHP business plans based on an organizational review and capacity assessment conducted in 2013, to enhance the effectiveness and capacity of the FHPs to achieve their missions and goals.
- Across the U.S., facilitation of prioritized, on-the-ground, partner-led fish habitat conservation projects that achieve measurable results towards Action Plan goals and strategies.
- Integrated use of habitat assessments to identify geographic focus areas and improve strategic prioritization of conservation actions and reporting of outcomes by FHPs across the eastern and western United States.
- Expansion of landowner engagement in four Midwestern states by establishing landowner committees, utilizing training provided to land conservation employees in 2013. Landowner committees help to prioritize projects, record monitoring data, and showcase measurable habitat/sport fish outcomes on farms and in communities.
- For four Midwest Fish Habitat Partnerships, improved utilization of fish habitat condition assessments completed in 2012 to identify spatially explicit focal areas in which to prioritize limited conservation resources, building upon the example of the Ohio River Basin FHP.
- Building upon progress made on the Kenai Peninsula (Alaska) in 2013, application of advanced remote sensing information (LiDAR) to map stream networks in the Mat-Su Basin to standards of the National Hydrography Dataset (NHD). This effort will be enhanced by a recently funded Alaska LCC project to establish a statewide framework to incorporate and steward updated local and regional level hydrography data into an improved NHD for Alaska.
- Through the Campaign for Western Native Trout (initiated in 2012), building and strengthening grassroots networks of support by communicating conservation needs and results using new and traditional media and events.
- Production of a spatial framework that delineates key nursery habitats on the Pacific coast, overlaying existing datasets describing potential threats to habitats and the fish inhabiting them, and integrating these analyses to set priorities for restoration and protection. This work builds upon results of a scoping “summit” held in 2013.

Certification Regarding Fishing/Hunting

“By submitting this proposal, the organization’s primary contact and/or authorized representative identified in this grant application certifies that the National Fish Habitat Board (1) will not use the grant funds to fund, in whole or in part, any activity of the organization that promotes or encourages opposition to the regulated hunting or trapping of wildlife or the regulated taking of fish; and (2) that the grant funds will not be used, in whole or in part, for an activity, project, or program that promotes or encourages opposition to the regulated hunting and trapping of wildlife or the regulated taking of fish.”

Certification Regarding Partnership Funds (if applicable)

“By submitting this proposal, the organization’s primary contact and/or authorized representative identified in this grant application certifies that the National Fish Habitat Board: 1) understands that partnership fund contributions are assessed in the Association’s review and selection of its priority list of MSCGP projects, but are not considered by the USFWS to be an official non-federal match/cost-share; 2) will provide the partnership funds identified in order to complete the proposed project; 3) understands that if the promised partnership funds are not provided, and there is not a sufficient explanation, potential consequences could include a poor “quality assurance” evaluation by the National Grants Committee for the organization’s future MSCGP applications; the imposition of “special award conditions” on this proposed grant and/or future grants (pursuant to 43 CFR 12); and if the failure to provide partnership funds affects the scope/objective or deliverables or other terms and conditions of the grant, then the USFWS could take necessary enforcement and termination actions (pursuant to 43 CFR 12).”

Budget

Budget by Region

Expenses	Region	Fish Habitat Partnerships	2014		Total MSCGP Costs Only
			MSCPG	P.F.	
National Coordination		National Fish Habitat Board	\$24,500		\$24,500
Eastern U.S.		Atlantic Coastal FHP, Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture, Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership	\$175,000		\$175,000
Midwest U.S.		Fishers & Farmers Partnership, Driftless Area Restoration Effort, Midwest Glacial Lakes Partnership, Great Lakes Basin FHP	\$55,000	\$50,000	\$55,000
Western U.S.		Western Native Trout Initiative, Desert FHP, Great Plains FHP	\$75,000		\$75,000
Pacific Coast		Pacific Marine & Estuarine Partnership, California Fish Passage Forum	\$125,000	\$32,000	\$125,000
Alaska		Kenai Peninsula FHP, Mat-Su Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership ¹	\$50,000	\$7,750	\$50,000
Hawaii		Hawaii Fish Habitat Partnership	\$15,000		\$15,000
Total direct costs			\$519,500	\$89,750	\$519,500
Indirect costs			\$25,000		\$25,000
Total Expenses			\$544,500	\$89,750	\$544,500

Total MSCGP for Year 2 of the 3-year project is \$544,500; Total partnership funds for Year 1 of the 3-year project are \$89,750.

Budget by Federal Cost Categories

Expenses	2014		Total MSCGP Costs Only
	MSCGP	P.F.*	
Personnel	\$18,500		\$18,500
Fringe (__%)	\$6,000		\$6,000
Travel			
Supplies			
Equipment			
Contractual	\$495,000	\$89,750	\$495,000
Other			
Total Direct Costs	\$519,500	\$89,750	\$519,500
Indirect Costs (10%)	\$25,000		\$25,000
Total Expenses	\$544,500	\$89,750	\$544,500

¹ The Landscape Conservation Cooperatives in Alaska recently were awarded \$300,000 to advance and steward digital hydrography data in Alaska as a multi-LCC project funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of the Science Advisor, Landscape Conservation Cooperatives' National Network Office.

Qualifications of Key Personnel

National Fish Habitat Partnership

Kelly Hepler, Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Kelly Hepler currently serves as the chairman of the National Fish Habitat Board and is the Assistant Commissioner for the Alaska Department of Fish & Game. Prior to joining the Board, Mr. Hepler had been appointed to a number of national committees by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) and the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Through his participation on these committees, Mr. Hepler has assisted in the development of a strategic plan for the USFWS fisheries program; participated in a review of the federal aid program; and examined national fisheries and water resource policy issues. Mr. Hepler began working at the Alaska Department of Fish & Game in 1979 as a fisheries biologist and has held increasingly complex positions throughout his career. He is a seasoned budget manager and has strong team and administrative skills that enable him to be a sound policy advisor. He holds a B.S. in Fish and Wildlife Management from Montana State University.

Matthew E. Menashes, AFWA

Matthew E. Menashes is the Association's Director of Operations and will serve as the Principal Investigator on this award. Mr. Menashes has over 13 years' experience as an association executive and an additional eight years in federal service. Mr. Menashes is responsible for the Association's day-to-day operations as well as fisheries, water resources, and ocean policy issues. He supervises the finance, communications, education and training, and operations functions of the Association. He also serves as a member of the core staff team for the National Fish Habitat Partnership.

Tom Busiahn, NFHP Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Tom Busiahn has 36 years of experience in fisheries conservation and policy, working for federal, tribal, and state agencies, and has extensive experience in leading interagency planning efforts for habitat and species restoration, invasive species control, and managing harvest in mixed fisheries. He has an M.S. in Fisheries Science from South Dakota State University and a B.S. in Fish & Wildlife Management from the University of North Dakota.

Gary Whelan, Michigan Department of Natural Resources

Gary Whelan has 25 years of experience with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, where he supervises the Fish Production System for the state including fish health, the Tribal Coordination Unit, the Aquatic Species and Regulatory Affairs Unit, and the Habitat Management Unit. Mr. Whelan is co-chair of the National Fish Habitat Board's Science and Data Committee responsible for the National Fish Habitat Assessment. He received his B.S. in Fisheries Management from the University of Wyoming and his M.S. in Fisheries Management from University of Missouri.

Christopher Meaney, NOAA Fisheries

Chris is a Marine Habitat Resource Specialist with the Office of Habitat Conservation at NOAA Fisheries. Chris has experience in recreational and commercial fishery policy development and ocean and coastal resource governance. He has a B.S. in Environmental Conservation from the University of New Hampshire and a M.E.M from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, and is a National Conservation Leadership Institute alumnus.

Eastern United States

Scott Robinson, Coordinator, Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership

Scott has served as SARP Coordinator since September 2005. Prior to that he was a Fisheries Biologist for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources for eleven years. He is currently managing the administration of several grants, including a Multi-State Conservation Grant, for SARP. He received a B.S. degree and M.S. in Fisheries and Wildlife Biology from Clemson University. He is a Certified Fisheries Professional and past President of the Georgia Chapter American Fisheries Society.

Emily Greene, Coordinator, Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership

Emily coordinates all ACFHP activities, providing daily support to the development and operations of ACFHP by facilitating committee and working group activities, managing contracted projects, identifying funding opportunities, and developing outreach activities. Emily has a B.S. in Biology and Environmental Science from the College of William and Mary and an M.E.M from the Nicholas School of Environment at Duke University.

Stephen Perry, Coordinator, Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture

Steve Perry coordinates the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture, responsible for coordinating the partnership's standing committees; serving as liaison with the National Fish Habitat Partnership, other Fish Habitat Partnerships, appropriate Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, and regional conservation initiatives; promoting the EBTJV to resource professionals and conservation interests nationwide; and, functioning as the partnership's Business Manager. He formerly served as Chief, Inland Fisheries Division, New Hampshire Fish and Game Department.

Midwest United States

Heidi Keuler, Fish Biologist, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Heidi is the coordinator of the Fishers & Farmers Partnership for the Upper Mississippi River Basin. Heidi has experience with the multistate Upper Mississippi River Conservation Committee (UMRCC) and outreach.

Jeff Hastings, Trout Unlimited, Project Manager (Coordinator) for Driftless Area Restoration Effort. He has prior experience in working with landowners as a county conservation department employee in Wisconsin.

Western United States (inland)

Robin Knox, Coordinator, Western Native Trout Initiative

Robin Knox has been the Coordinator of the WNTI for seven years. He was the assistant Chief of Fisheries for the Colorado Division of Wildlife for 20 years, and the Instream-habitat Coordinator for the Indiana Department of Natural Resources for 4 years. He has a BS in Zoology from the University of Illinois and a MA in Fisheries Biology from the University of Missouri.

Pacific Coast

Lisa DeBruyckere, PMEP Coordinator, California Fish Passage Forum Coordinator

M.Sc. University of Maine at Orono. Experience administering the operations of two West-Coast partnership groups, the PMEP and the West Coast Governors Alliance on Ocean Health, and one state-based partnership, the Oregon Invasive Species Council.

Alaska

Roger Harding (Alaska Department of Fish & Game)

B.S. Humboldt State University; M.S. Fisheries University of Alaska Fairbanks. Mr. Harding has worked for ADF&G since 1983, including 12 years as Trout Research Supervisor. He serves on steering committees of the Western Native Trout Initiative, Mat-Su Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership, Southwest Alaska Salmon Habitat Partnership, and the candidate Southeast Alaska FHP.

Robert Ruffner (Kenai Watershed Forum; Coordinator, Kenai Peninsula FHP)

Robert has been the Executive Director of the Kenai Watershed Forum (KWF) since 1997 and has played a critical role in environmental education, research, and restoration in the region. He oversees 10 employees engaged in fish passage research, culvert and stream restoration, water quality monitoring, and non-profit development. He was awarded the River Hero award in 2008 from River Network. He has a B.S. in Geology and a M.S. in Geology with a minor in Civil Engineering from the University of Minnesota.

Hawaii

Gordon Smith (US Fish and Wildlife Service)

M.Sc., University of Hawaii, B.S. Oregon State University. Fish and Wildlife Biologist with over 15 years of experience in resource conservation and water quality protection in aquatic systems including insular streams, tropical estuaries and coral reef habitats. Currently coordinator for the Hawaii Fish Habitat Partnership.