NATIONAL FISH HABITAT PARTNERSHIP

STATUS REPORT 2021-2025

Prepared for Senate Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee and House Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee

October 2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP) is a collaborative conservation initiative established under Chapter 101 of Title 16 of the U.S. Code, as authorized by the America's Conservation Enhancement (ACE) Act. Through science-based, locally driven partnerships, NFHP unites federal, state, Tribal, and local stakeholders to protect, restore, and enhance fish habitats across the United States.

In alignment with §8209 of the ACE Act, this five-year report details NFHP's progress from 2021 to 2025 in delivering measurable habitat conservation outcomes, improving ecological conditions, and expanding public access to fishing and recreation. It also showcases the collective achievements of the 20 regional Fish Habitat Partnerships that drive this work forward.

Investment and Reach

Over the reporting period, NFHP supported 434 projects across 46 states (see *attachment, "NFHP Project List 2021-2025"*), **investing $27 million in NFHP funds, matched by $93.6 million in non-federal contributions, and bolstered by an additional $50 million in leveraged resources.** These investments, leveraging three private dollars for every public dollar invested (3:1), reflect the strength of public-private collaboration and the shared commitment to aquatic resource stewardship.

Habitat Conservation Outcomes

On-the-ground efforts have resulted in more than **3,500 habitat enhancement actions**, including **fish passage barrier removals** and **culvert upgrades that reduce flood risk** and reconnect aquatic systems. **Structural improvements**—such as artificial reef installations in reservoirs—have enhanced **habitat complexity** and **recreational fishing** opportunities.

In total, over **7,700 miles of stream and river habitat** have been reconnected or restored, and more than **57,000 acres of aquatic and riparian habitat** have been protected or rehabilitated. These outcomes underscore NFHP's dedication to restoring fish habitat at scale using science-informed strategies.

Fishing and Public Access

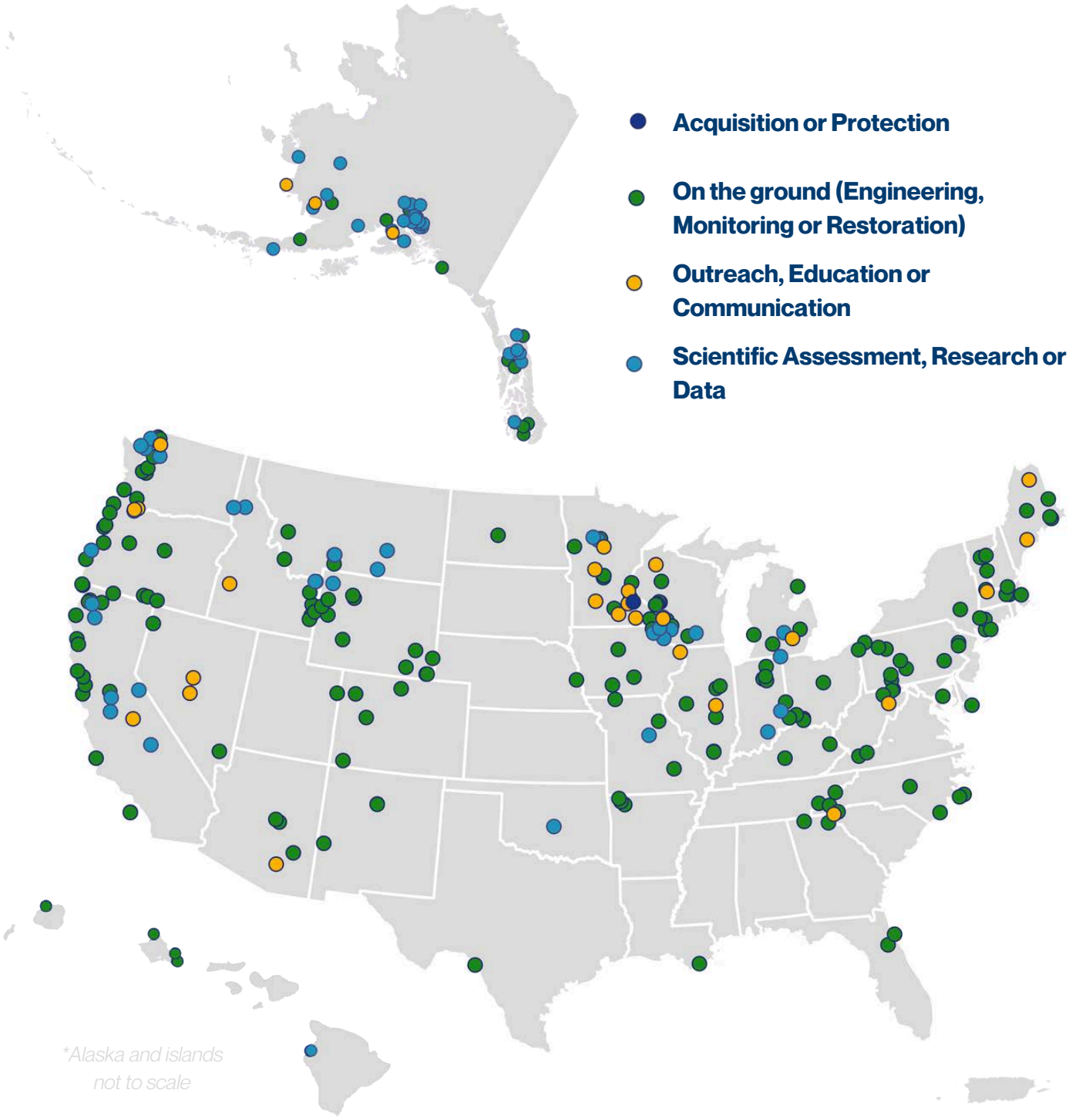
Habitat restoration efforts have **significantly advanced recreational and Tribal fishing opportunities** across the nation. **Half of all funded projects supported fishing access**, often aligning with state fisheries management plans and targeting key sport fish species. A total of 157 projects—representing **36% of all investments**—**maintained, improved, or established public access** through the construction of **fishing platforms, trails, and boat ramps**. These efforts restored habitat connectivity while fostering community engagement and access to aquatic resources for all.

Power of Partnerships

Over the last five years, NFHP's network has included more than **720 partner organizations**, demonstrating the **power of partnerships** in advancing shared conservation goals. Together, these efforts embody NFHP's mission to protect, restore, and enhance fish habitats that enhance the quality of life for Americans.

HABITAT PROJECTS

From 2021-2025, the **National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP)** has supported **434 projects through its network of 20 regional Fish Habitat Partnerships (FHPs).**



FISH HABITAT INVESTMENTS

Through 20 regional FHPs, NFHP fosters the conservation of fish habitats and enhances the quality of life for Americans. A key aspect of NFHP is increasing efficiency of all levels of government by coordinating fish habitat conservation activities of federal, state, and local agencies, as well as Tribes, NGO's and the private sector. This has delivered a greater than **3:1 return on every dollar invested** and yields additional benefits such as **improved water quality, flood mitigation, better fishing experiences, and additional recreational opportunities.**

A $75,000 investment by the Pacific Marine & Estuarine Fish Habitat Partnership supports the **replacement of an undersized culvert with a bridge** on Flower Pot Creek on Tillamook Bay, Oregon. This effort leverages nearly $240,000 in non-federal contributions and an additional $880,000 in federal funding, yielding a **15:1 return on investment**. Ecologically, the project will **reconnect** 1.4 stream miles and 14.6 acres of tidally influenced wetland—**critical habitat for salmon**. The new bridge will also **prevent flooding** - enhancing **long-term resilience** for a key **emergency access route**.

STEWARDSHIP. SCIENCE. RESULTS.

CONSERVATION OUTCOMES

In total, 3,572 habitat enhancements were completed through the removal or upgrade of connectivity barriers and the installation of in-stream habitat features, such as woody debris. These reconnection efforts benefit both fish and people by improving access to critical aquatic habitats. Collectively, projects restored or conserved 7,744 miles of stream, river, riparian corridors, and lake and coastal shorelines. An additional 50,748 acres of wetlands, estuaries, and floodplains were restored, protected, or enhanced to support long-term ecological resilience.

SCIENCE AND DATA

Beyond on-the-ground restoration, NFHP investments have generated 2,636 scientific products—including datasets, assessments, and monitoring tools—that inform strategic conservation planning. These resources enable partners to make data-driven decisions that guide future habitat protection and enhancement.

In 2026, the NFHP Science & Data Committee will release an updated National Assessment of Fish Habitats in the United States. This comprehensive analysis will evaluate habitat conditions at a national scale, focusing on key fish habitat impact indices such as land use, water quality, and habitat fragmentation (*see Appendix - Fish Habitat Assessment*).

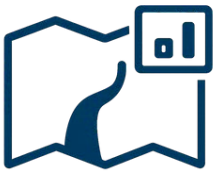
OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

Outreach and education initiatives have reached over 180,000 individuals, ranging from local workshops with farmers to large-scale community events, fostering awareness and stewardship across all audiences.

3,572
HABITAT ENHANCEMENTS

7,744
ACRES CONSERVED

50,748
ACRES CONSERVED



2,636
SCIENTIFIC PRODUCTS

180,000
PEOPLE ENGAGED

HABITATS BENEFITED

Each FHP within NFHP applies a regional lens to identify **focal habitats**—those most critical to fish species of concern in their geographic area. These habitats reflect **local ecological priorities** and are often integrated into **State Wildlife Action Plans**. Across the country, these regionally defined habitats are aggregated to provide a national view of habitat types benefiting from NFHP-supported projects. These efforts span on-the-ground restoration, scientific assessments, and education and outreach initiatives, all aimed at protecting, restoring, and enhancing aquatic ecosystems.

By leveraging local expertise and aligning with national conservation goals, NFHP ensures that habitat investments are both strategically targeted and broadly impactful.

HABITATS	% OF PROJECTS
Rivers or Streams	53%
Riparian or Watershed	15%
Lakes or Ponds	13%
Coastal or Marine	12%
Wetlands	9%
Reservoir	7%
Estuaries	7%
Springs	2%

FISHING OPPORTUNITIES

Half (50%) of all projects demonstrated benefits for recreational and Tribal fishing. Many of these projects are integrated into state fisheries management plans, aligning with state-wide initiatives. Habitat improvements targeted key sport fish species and restored connectivity of habitats, providing enhanced fishing access for both the general public and Tribal communities.

The Bristol Bay Fly Fishing & Guide Academy, funded through the Southwest Alaska Salmon Habitat Partnership uses the **practice and philosophy of fly fishing** as a means to **introduce the youth of Bristol Bay to the biology of salmon**, the ecology of rivers and lakes, and the value of stewardship and conservation. **Fly fishing is also a skill** that can lead to **employment opportunities** tied to the healthy watersheds that **support Bristol Bay's vibrant tourism industry.**

PUBLIC ACCESS

From 2021-2025, 157 habitat projects—representing **36% of all funded efforts**— **maintained, improved or established public access nationwide**. These investments included the construction of **fishing platforms, access trails, and boat ramps,** enhancing recreational opportunities and community engagement**.**

This project at Dam Site WP-1 in Nebraska, funded through Reservoir Fisheries Habitat Partnership, supports **water quality** in a newly constructed reservoir through **best management practices** that **reduce sediment** and **nutrient inputs**.

Within the reservoir, 2,000 feet of shoreline will be stabilized with riprap, and **eight breakwater structures—modified to improve angler access—will be installed**. These efforts not only protect aquatic habitat but also enhance recreational opportunities for the public.

RESERVOIR FISHERIES HABITAT PARTNERSHIP

POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

Over the last 5 years, NFHP's network has included more than **720 partner organizations**, demonstrating the power of partnerships in advancing shared conservation goals.

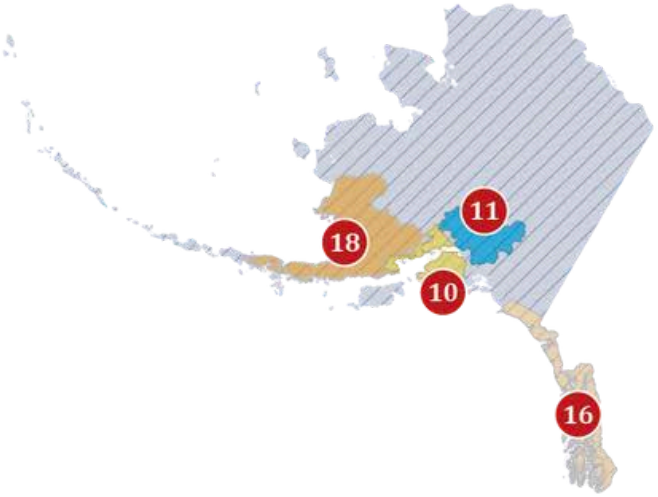
"It is the people that are part of the watershed that bring the answers to the table."

Fishers & Farmers PARTNERSHIP FOR THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER BASIN

A quote from Sherry Fischer, Missouri Department of Conservation, from the video describing workshops organized by Fishers and Farmers Partnership. **QR code for video**.

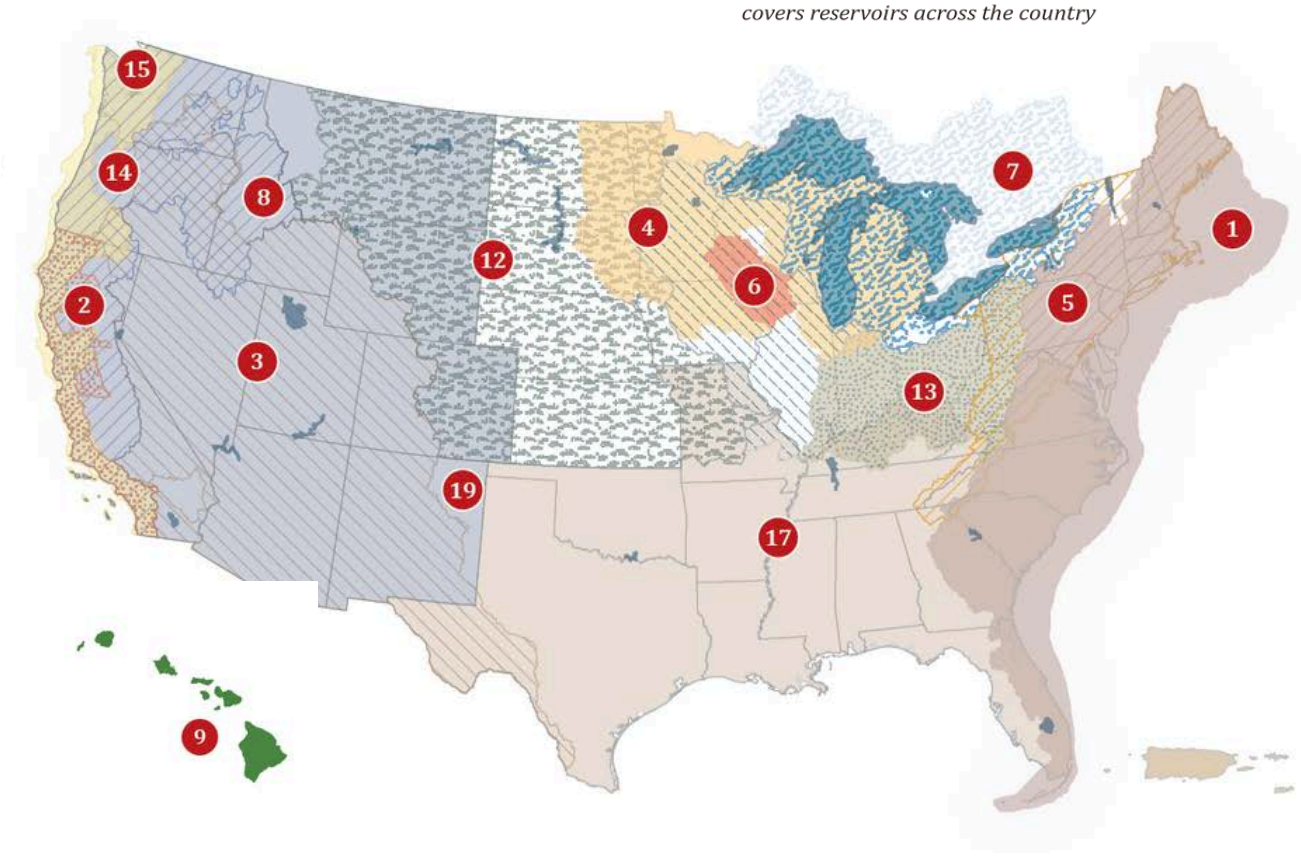
Appendix

FHP Boundary Map



1. Atlantic Coast FHP
2. California Fish Passage Forum
3. Desert FHP
4. Driftless Area Restoration Network
5. Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture
6. Fishers and Farmers Partnership
7. Great Lakes Basin FHP
8. Great Plains FHP
9. Hawaii FHP
10. Kenai Peninsula FHP
11. Matanuska-Susitna Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership
12. Midwest Glacial Lakes Partnership
13. Ohio River Basin FHP
14. Pacific Lamprey FHP
15. Pacific Marine and Estuarine FHP
16. Southeast Alaska FHP
17. Southeast Aquatic Resources FHP
18. Southwest Alaska Salmon Habitat Partnership
19. Western Native Trout Initiative
20. Reservoir FHP*

**the Reservoir FHP is a system based partnership that covers reservoirs across the country*



NFHP's network of 20 regional FHPs works across all U.S. states and in the territories of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Appendix

Project Approval Justification

Pursuant to the requirements of the America's Conservation Enhancement (ACE) Act §8209(i), the NFHP has implemented a structured, transparent process for evaluating and approving fish habitat conservation projects. This process ensures alignment with national conservation priorities and statutory criteria under §8205(b) and is designed to support congressional oversight and interagency coordination.

Each year, FHPs submit proposed projects for NFHP funding. These projects are reviewed by technical committees within each FHP and evaluated against:

REGIONAL CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

Each FHP has their own set of regional habitat priorities that are in line with National Conservation Priorities.

LOCAL AND STATE LEVEL PLANS

Such as State Wildlife Action Plans or other regional or watershed based plans. Participation of partners in committess can ensure that loval and relevant needs are being addressed.

NATIONAL CRITERIA

Project selection criteria established in the ACE Act under section §8205(b) and identified by the NFHP Board.

Following this review, each FHP submits an annual accomplishments report, project status updates, and a ranked list of recommended projects to the NFHP Board. The Board conducts a secondary evaluation to ensure consistency with ACE Act requirements and national priorities, providing scores and feedback to each FHP. The final slate of prioritized projects is submitted annually to the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) for approval.

Appendix

Project Approval Process Development

Timeline of glide path towards ACE Act compliance

FY 2021

- ACE Act enacted October 30, 2020.
- Projects submitted directly from FHPs to USFWS; no formal NFHP Board review process was in place.

FY 2022

- NFHP Board established a formal review framework.
- FHPs submitted accomplishment reports and ranked project lists demonstrating alignment with ACE Act criteria.
- Initiated development of a centralized project tracking system.

FY 2023

- Launched NFHP's project tracking data system.
- Enabled streamlined submission, review, and DOI approval of ranked projects.
- System supports rapid data queries for congressional reporting and partner engagement.

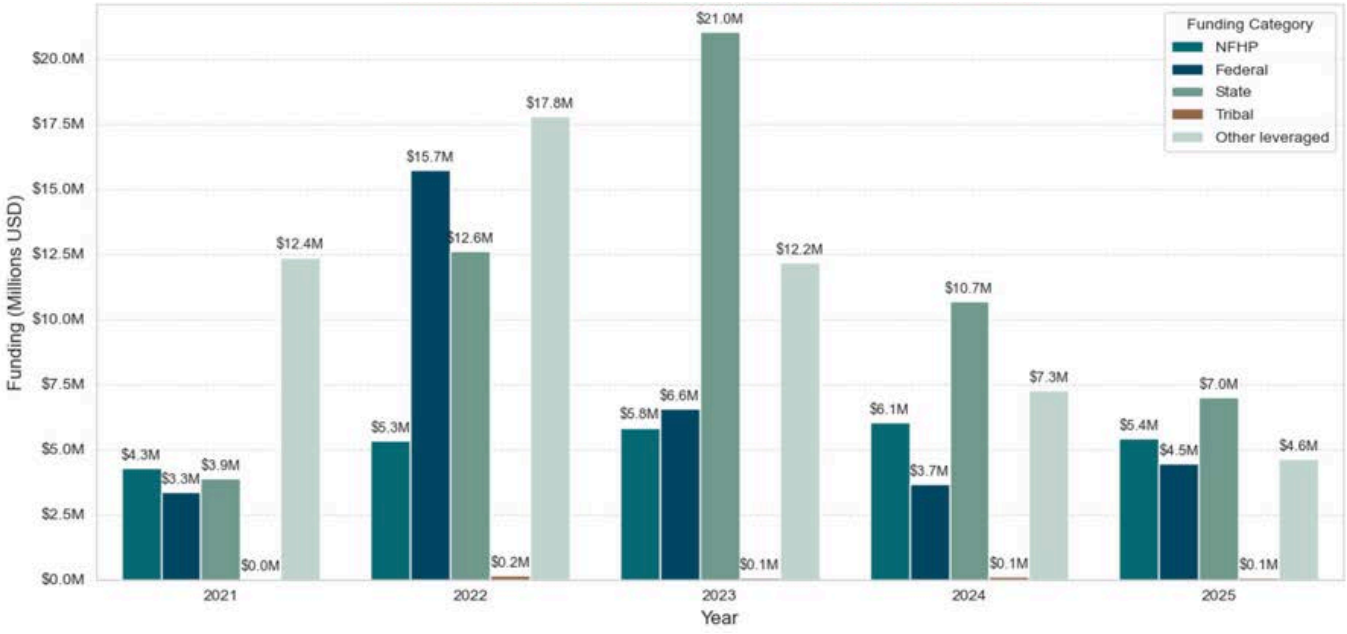
FY 2024–2025

- Continued use of the tracking system for project review and reporting.
- Historical project records updated in collaboration with FHP coordinators to reflect activities dating back to NFHP's inception in 2006.

Appendix

Accounting of Expenditures

YEAR	NFHP	STATE	TRIBAL	FEDERAL	OTHER LEVERAGED
2021	$4,299,996	$3,881,135	$14,440	$3,346,073	$12,378,671
2022	$5,318,059	$12,621,830	$176,865	$15,728,629	$17,792,990
2023	$5,838,296	$21,023,063	$67,389	$6,570,546	$12,168,364
2024	$6,050,872	$10,691,083	$111,697	$3,668,642	$7,260,362
2025	$5,423,964	$6,993,942	$86,835	$4,471,837	$4,638,539
Total	$26,931,186	$55,211,053	$457,226	$33,785,728	$54,238,927



Appendix

Fish Habitat Assessment

To provide the foundational science underlying this effort and to assist in conservation planning, the National Fish Habitat Partnership Board has generated two national fish habitat assessments in 2010 and 2015. Both assessments including methods, results and data are on the National Fish Habitat Partnership's website and are available to the public. One of the key elements of the ACE Act is a requirement to continue assessing the nation's fish habitat and to fill gaps in the previous assessments by the end of 2025. Similar to past assessments, we will use an analytical approach, further described below, that examines influences of landscape stressors such as aquatic connectivity and urban development on both individual fish species and entire fish communities to inform users of the level of degradation to aquatic habitats along with those stressors affecting habitat condition across the nation including the key factors driving degradation scores.

This assessment is updating the currently out-of-date assessment and complete the Ace Act requirement by: 1) updating data layers used in the past assessments to their most recent versions; 2) addressing known gaps in hydrology, forest harvest, grazing intensity, and socioeconomics; 3) addressing gaps in large scale data for lakes, reservoirs, impoundments, and inshore marine habitat using available data; and 4) generating a new assessment product with a similar spatial scale and look to the 2015 assessment using the same analytical approach.

The following summary provides an overview of the assessment methods, product delivery schedule, and preliminary results. The initial assessment for the lower 48 states will be completed by end of 2025 with the entire assessment to be completed by the end of 2026.

DATA COLLECTION

Stream fish assemblages. Data were acquired from 84 providers to create a dataset that includes 783 species and 51,382 stream reaches from electrofishing surveys that occurred between 2000-2024. This represents a more recent window of data than were used in the 2015 assessment, which included samples from 1990 to 2013.

Appendix

Fish Habitat Assessment (cont.)

Natural landscape factors. Data were assembled on six natural landscape factors: stream reach elevation, stream reach slope, total drainage area, mean annual precipitation, mean annual air temperature, and an estimate of stream flow contribution from ground water. There are key variables for proper data stratification as fish assemblages are known to vary with these factors.

Anthropogenic factors. Data were assembled on 34 anthropogenic disturbances including urban land cover, agricultural land cover, stream-road crossings, instream barriers, nitrogen fertilizer used, road salt spread, and wastewater treatment plant locations. Some of these data were updated since the 2015 assessment, with examples including urban and agricultural land cover, stream road crossings, instream barriers, and other data sets are new datasets (e.g., road salt use, fertilizer use, hydrologic alteration).

SPATIAL FRAMEWORK INTEGRATION

Framework for spatial analysis was derived from National Hydrography Dataset Plus Version 2. Stream fish assemblage collection locations were linked to stream reaches. Natural landscape factors and anthropogenic disturbances were summarized over four spatial extents and attributed to each stream reach. These included local catchments and buffers of each stream reaches as well as network catchments and buffers.

CONTROLLING FOR NATURAL VARIATION IN FISH ASSEMBLAGES

Fish data was stratified by nine US EPA ecoregions which are known to have similar environmental characteristics. Within each ecoregion, sites were stratified by size classes into creeks (<100 km2 watershed) and rivers (>100 km2 watershed). Within each ecoregion and size stratum, we used models to control for natural variation in fish assemblages using the six natural landscape variables.

Appendix

Fish Habitat Assessment (cont.)

IDENTIFY DISTURBANCES LIMITING FISH ASSEMBLAGES

Disturbances in this assessment were considered limiting to fish assemblages when they were associated with an abrupt and significant decrease in numbers of a given species in a specific ecoregion and size stratum. Limiting thresholds were calculated for every fish species and disturbances determined within every ecoregion and size stratum.

ASSESSING THE CONDITION OF STREAM REACHES

Every stream reach was assessed based on detected limiting disturbance using data on species sensitivity overall and reach specific disturbance values. Assessment classes ranged from very low risk to very high risk of habitat degradation. Results were determined for every stream reach based on groups of related limiting disturbances. As part of the preliminary assessment approach, limiting disturbances were grouped into three sub-indices: land use, fragmentation, and water quality. The sub-index assessment score was determined by the lowest calculated condition class of the individual limiting disturbances within in the sub-index. A single cumulative assessment score was determined for each stream reach providing a holistic summary of stream habitat condition. The cumulative assessment score was assigned based on the lowest assessment score of the three sub-index classes which assumes the lowest value is the limiting disturbance on fish communities.

ASSESSING THE CONDITION OF STREAM REACHES

A preliminary set of results assessing the relative condition of stream fish habitats separately from land use, fragmentation, and water quality disturbances across the conterminous United States has been completed (Figures 2-4). These subindex results have also been compiled together to generate a cumulative condition assessment that considers all disturbances in combination (Figure 1). Using these preliminary results, applications are being developed by combining assessment results with other spatial information to provide context for understanding locations that may be most for conservation (defined as protection, rehabilitation or improvement).

Appendix

Fish Habitat Assessment (cont.)

PRODUCT DELIVERY SCHEDULE

December 2025. Initial fish habitat condition assessment of the lower 48 states with updated data layers for fish and a wide range of anthropogenic stressors. This assessment will include preliminary analyses of new hydrology, grazing intensity, and forest harvest and fire history effects on fish species and communities.

December 2026. Final fish habitat condition assessment of the Lower 48 states, Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico will be delivered. Complete analysis of hydrology, grazing intensity, and forest harvest and fire history effects on fish species and communities for the lower 48 states and other areas, where feasible, will be delivered. New information on socioeconomics will be developed and available to provide an additional data layer for future analysis. Additional data layers for lakes, reservoirs, impoundments, and estuary/inshore marine habitats will be developed as data becomes available.

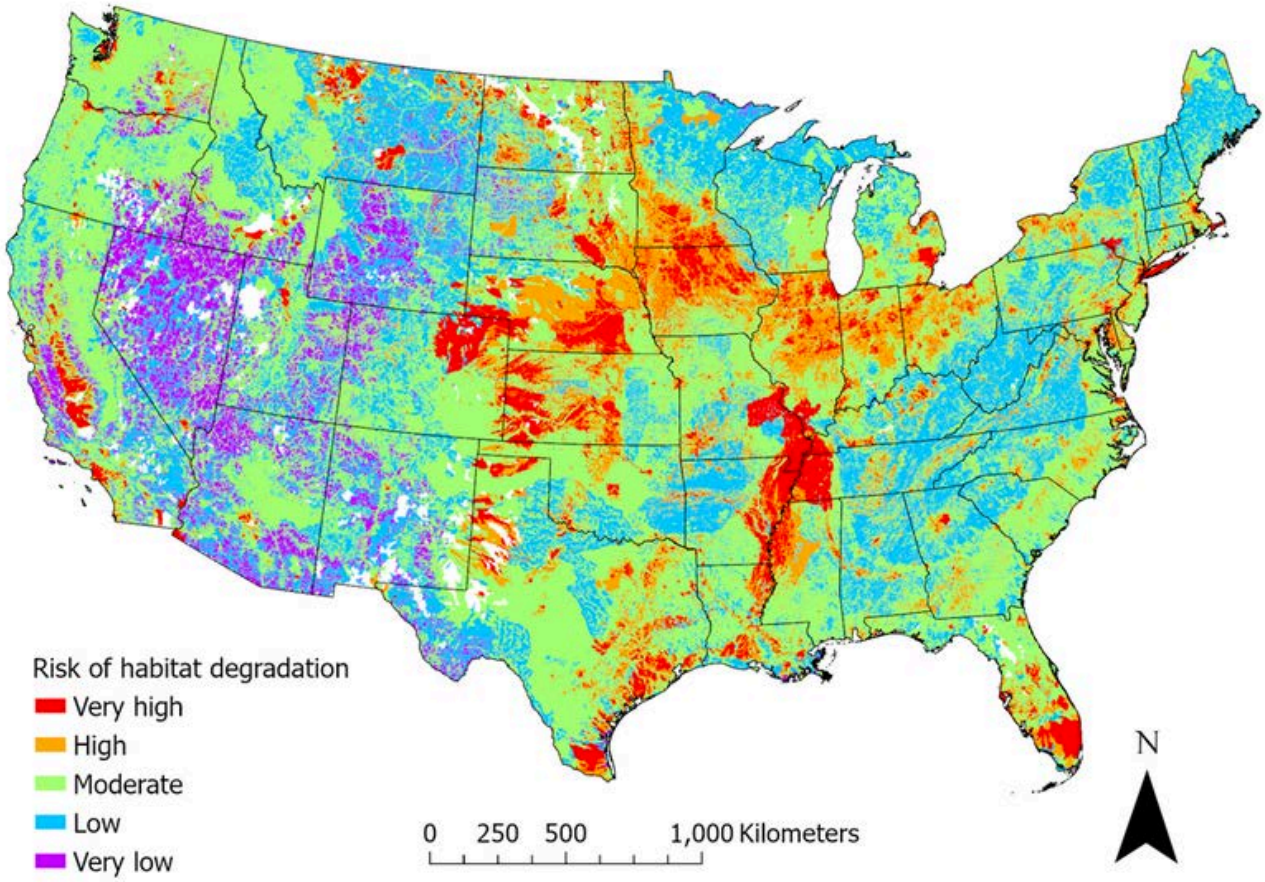


Figure 1: Cumulative risk of habitat degradation across all disturbances.

Appendix

Fish Habitat Assessment (cont.)

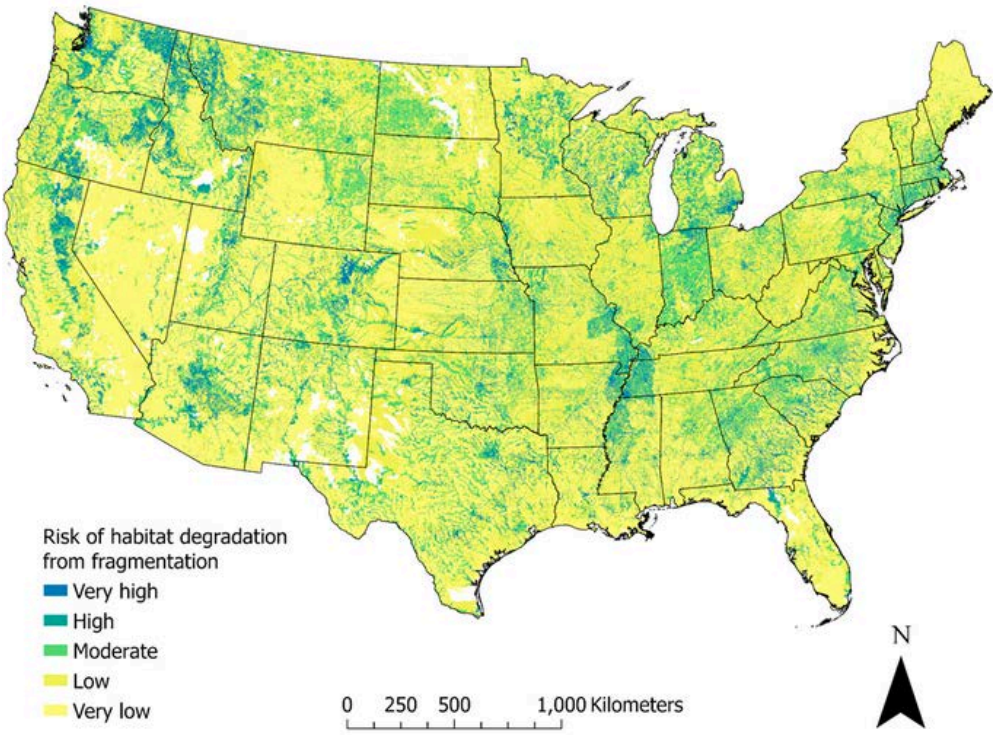


Figure 2: Current risk of habitat degradation from disturbances associated with stream fragmentation.

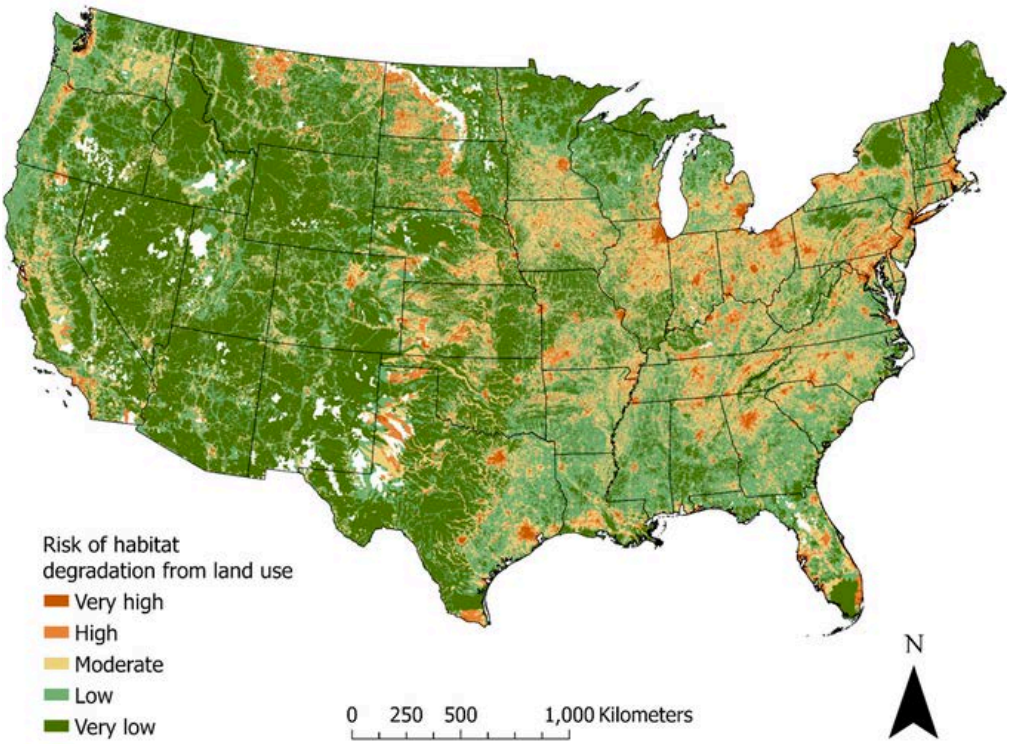


Figure 3: Current risk of habitat degradation from disturbances associated with human land uses.

Appendix

Fish Habitat Assessment (cont.)

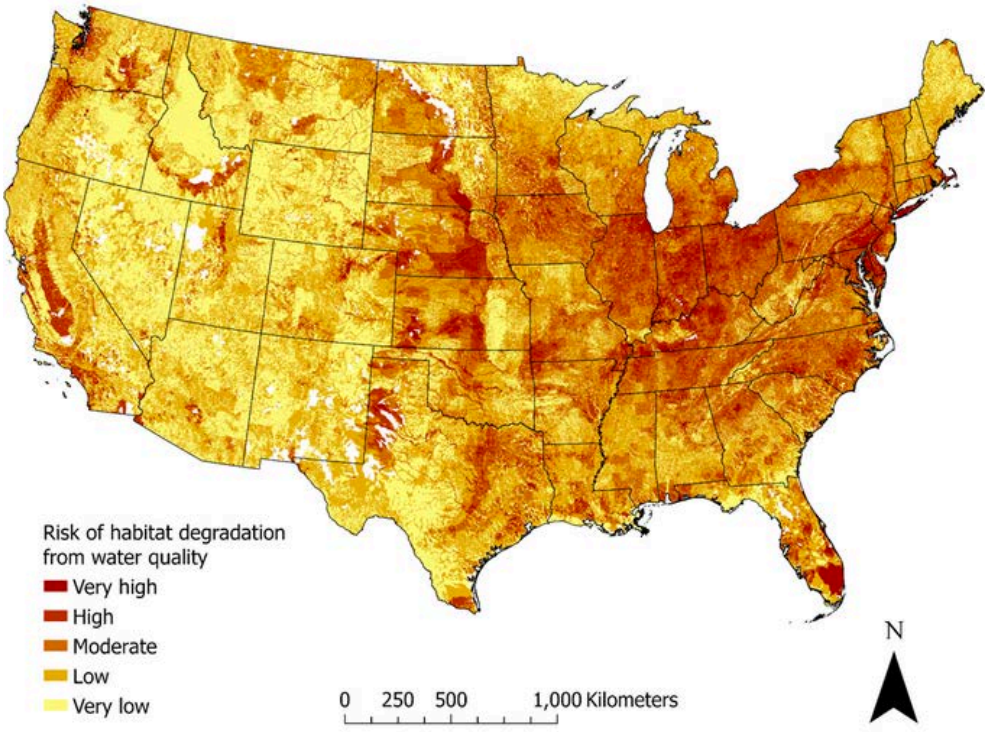


Figure 4: Current risk of habitat degradation from disturbances associated with water quality disturbances.

NFHP FUNDED PROJECTS

see attached project list,

"NFHP Projects 2021-2025"

Contact

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Photo Credits*

Cover: Recreational fishing on the Kenai Peninsula in Alaska. Source: Joan Drinkwin.
Page 2: Tribal crew installing bank stabilizing woody debris in Tongas N.F. Alaska. Source: Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition.
Page 3: Recreational fishermen in Oregon. Source: Joan Drinkwin.
Page 5: Flower Pot Creek, Oregon. Source: Trout Unlimited.
Page 8: Fly Fishing Guide Academy, Alaska. Source: Tim Troll.
Page 9: Reservoir WP-1 in Nebraska. Source: Papio-Missouri River Natural Resource District.
Page 10: Fishers and Farmers Partnership Workshop. Source: Fishers and Farmers Partnership.
Contact Page: Living shoreline in North Carolina. Source: North Carolina Coastal Federation.

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