

## National Fish Habitat Board Meeting

**April 30 – May 1, 2024 Washington, DC**

**Hosted by:** Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies

1100 First St NE (8<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room), Washington, DC 20002

**Web Meeting Access:**

**Teams:** [Click here to join the meeting](#)

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**Tuesday, April 30, 2024**

### Board Member Attendance:

Last Name	First Name	April 30	May 1
Allen	Stan	X	X
Austen	Doug	X	X
Booth	Austin		X
Boyles	Robert	X	X
Carter	Julie	X	X
Gilliland	Gene	X	X
Guertin	Steve		X
Harper/Wilson	Rob/Josh	X	X
Horton	Chris	X	X
Kinsinger	Anne	X	X
Kruse	Carter	X	X
Leonard/Bevan	Mike/Connor	X	X
Linnell	Karen		
Micchiche	Peter	X	X
Moore	Chris	X	X
Moore	Bryan	X	X
Nakayama	Ian	X	X
O Keefe	John	X	

Perry	Steve	X	X
Rauch	Sam	X	X
Ringia	Adam		X
Rivers	Pat	X	X
Schaeffer	Timothy D.	X	X
Slager	Jake	X	X
Trushenski	Jesse	X	X

**Other Attendees Present:**

**NFHP Board Staff:**

- Ryan Roberts (Board Staff, AFWA)
- Daniel Wieferich (Board Staff, USGS)
- Alex McOwen (Board Staff, NOAA)
- Jason Olive (Board Staff, USFWS)
- Kate Sherman (Board Staff, PSMFC)
- Gary Whelan (Board Staff)

**Federal Agency Attendees**

- Will Duncan (USFWS)
- Trevor Luna (USFWS)
- Jessica Hogrefe (USFWS)
- Moe Nelson (NOAA NOS)
- Sharmilla Jepson (BLM)

**AFWA:**

- Kurt Thiede (AFWA)
- Mark Humpert (AFWA)
- Ali Schwaab (AFWA)

**Other Attendees:**

- Christopher Estes (member of the founding NFHP team)

- Benjamin Meyer (Kenai Watershed Forum)
- Theresa Weber (ASA)

**FHP Coordinators:**

- Todd Ewing (SARP)
- Steve Krentz (GPFHP)
- Lori Maloney (EBTJV)
- JD Davis (WNTI)
- Sara Strassman (DARE)
- Debbie Hart (SEAKFHP)
- Jennifer Graves (Desert FHP)
- Joe Nohner (MGLP)

**Approved by Consensus:**

- February 6, 2024 NFHP Board meeting summary
- April 30 – May 1, 2024 NFHP Board meeting agenda

**Meeting Notes:**

Time (EDT)	Agenda Item	Tab	Lead(s)
9:00 AM	<p><b>Welcome &amp; New Board Member Introductions</b></p> <p><i>Desired Outcomes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Board action</b> to approve agenda and February Meeting summary.</li> <li>• Welcome to new Board members.</li> </ul>	1	<b>Chair Robert Boyles &amp; All</b>

NFHP Board Chair, Robert Boyles, welcomed everyone to the meeting and started a round of introductions to welcome the four newest members of the Board to their first meeting. He noted that Austin Booth and Chris Horton would be joining the Board later. Robert thanked Board member, Jake Slager for the meeting refreshments that were sponsored by Coca-Cola. Lastly, Robert shared with the Board some logistics about the 10 planned Hill visits during the week. He reminded Board members to see Kate Sherman regarding scheduling your meetings and to get the NFHP handout with talking points. Each Hill visit will have 3-5 NFHP representatives including at least one government relations person. Robert thanked the Policy Committee for their hard work in planning and organizing these meetings with the help of AFWA in coordination with Ducks Unlimited.

9:30 AM **AFWA Executive Director Welcome and Update**

**Ron Regan** (AFWA  
Executive Director)

Ron Regan welcomed the Board to the AFWA HQ facilities and provided some background on his early involvement in NFHP, and AFWA history and current organization.

**Notes:**

- Fond memories of NFHP, involved in the early days (2007)
- History of AFWA – first meeting in 1902, forest and stream magazines are all online, issues discussed included spring honey, licenses and migratory birds
- New Hampshire was first and mission remains the same today (Canada can be member)
- All states are members, most provinces and territories are members
- \$5M budget, no partisan organization, ~50 committees,
- Niche of being convenors, some international work, NCLI
- Key topics – landscape conservation, governance of conservation institutions, one health

9:45 AM **2024 NFHP Board Meeting Schedule**

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**NFHP Board Staff**

*Desired Outcomes:*

- **Board awareness** of 2024 Board meeting schedule.
- **Board awareness** of 2024 NFHP conference attendance.

Alex McOwen reminded the Board of the remaining meetings for 2024:

- **June 17 from 2-3 PM EDT virtually**
- **July 31 – August 2 in Anchorage, AK**
- **October 2 from 1 – 4:30 PM ET virtually**

Alex reminded the Board to make their travel arrangements to Alaska as soon as possible and that the room block for NFHP does not begin until July 31 so most attendees will have to find a nearby hotel if arriving before July 31. There are optional field trips (half day August 1, full day August 2) and Alex thanked all the Alaska FHP coordinators and Board member Peter Micciche for their help in hosting and planning this meeting's field trips. Alex reminded the Board of the NFHP Canva calendar which has events listed throughout the year and encouraged everyone to keep that calendar updated with events that are relevant for this group. Finally, Alex reviewed the upcoming conferences at which

NFHP will have a presence including: AFS, Restore America’s Estuaries, and the recently completed NEAFWA meeting. Gary Whelan also reminded the Board that he will be AFS President in 2026 and the 20<sup>th</sup> NFHP anniversary will be celebrated at the AFS meeting in Columbus, OH.

- |          |  |   |  |
|----------|--|---|--|
| 10:00 AM | <b>NFHP Communications Committee Update</b>  | 3 | <b>Pat Rivers</b> ( <i>NFHP Board member</i> ) & <b>Adela Baratech</b> ( <i>Project Coordinator, World Fish Migration Day Foundation</i> ) |
|          | <i>Desired Outcomes:</i>   |   |  |
|          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Board awareness</b> of planned NFHP website revision.</li> <li>● <b>Board awareness</b> of W2W.</li> <li>● <b>Board awareness</b> of <b>upcoming World Fish Migration Day (May 25)</b>.</li> </ul> |   |  |

Pat Rivers reported that Jake Slager has joined the Communications Committee as well as Miles Nolte (a director of marketing with 20+ yrs experience). Ryan Roberts then previewed the updated NFHP website for the Board which was last updated in 2016 by Monster Media. The new website should launch sometime in June 2024 and includes a link to 1% For The Planet of which NFHP is now a member. Pat reminded the Board that the Committee will soon open solicitations for the 2024 Waters to Watch campaign which will be released in October. Finally, invited speaker, Adela Baratech from the World Fish Migration Day Foundation, encouraged NFHP’s participation in the upcoming May 25<sup>th</sup> World Fish Migration Day. NFHP can enter their events or join other events and this year’s theme is Free Flow Rivers. Events include a variety of activities including parades, fishing, outreach, dam removal, athletic events, and more. There was some Board discussion about the importance of choosing our marketing words carefully and that fish are not a partisan thing. NFHP remains a science-based, non-regulatory approach to fish habitat conservation. The Board staff will recirculate the marketing report generated by Water Words that Work for the Board’s reference and awareness.

10:30 AM **BREAK**

- |          |  |  |
|----------|--|--|
| 10:45 AM | <b>NOAA NFHP Funding - Engaging Recreational Fishers in Habitat Conservation</b>   | <b>Kara Meckley</b> ( <i>NOAA Office of Habitat Conservation</i> ) |
|          | <i>Desired Outcomes:</i>   |  |
|          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Board awareness</b> of upcoming NMFS NFHP support and communications.</li> </ul> |  |

Kara Meckley shared a brief report out on behalf of the NOAA NFHP Board representative, Sam Rauch. She shared that NOAA is in the selection process for their annual NOAA NFHP funding award

and will announce selected projects in early June. NOAA will also be releasing a podcast episode of “Dive In with NOAA Fisheries” that features the oyster restoration project with South Carolina DNR and Title II school groups in early June. Kara recognized that while there are huge pots of funding out there for fish habitat conservation work via BIL and IRA, there remains value in smaller pots of funding, like this one, that are more approachable for capacity limited groups and smaller project needs. Finally, Kara shared that the 2<sup>nd</sup> round of the four separate competitions of NOAA’s BIL/IRA funding will be announced in the coming months. It was noted by a Board member that some of the NOAA-funded NFHP work in Hawaii with Kuleana Coral Reefs is located near where the upcoming AFS conference will be held.

11:10 AM **National Aquatic Barrier Inventory and Prioritization Tool**

**Kat Hoenke** (GIS Coordinator)

*Desired Outcomes:*

*Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership, SARP)*

- **Board awareness** of the expansion of SARP’s tool now being used nationwide.

Kat Hoenke, the GIS coordinator for the Southeast Aquatic Partnership, joined the Board virtually to present the expansion of the Southeast Aquatic Barrier Prioritization Tool since her last presentation to the Board in 2022. The tool has expanded to a national scope with over \_\_\_\_\_ dams inventoried. SARP has been actively working with other FHPs to assess barriers in other regions and FHP boundaries. This compilation inventory (<https://aquaticbarriers.org/>) is updated four times per year and relies on Aquatic Connectivity Teams in different states who implement a road stream crossing protocol to inventory barriers. The tool has added the capability for FHPs to quantify barriers within their geographic boundaries, track progress towards opening connectivity, and information about native lands. There is also a prioritization tool included that uses a variety of filters to help identify priority barriers. Kat noted that the Department of Transportation culvert program funding opportunity (funded by BIL) will be open soon to fund aquatic connectivity at culverts nationwide.

11:40 AM **Science & Data Committee Update**

**Gary Whelan & Daniel Wiefelich** (NFHP Board Staff, Science & Data Committee Co-Chairs)

*Desired Outcomes:*

- **Board awareness** of science and data committee assessment progress.

Gary Whelan shared that the assessment update (version 1.5) is ongoing and the team has started assembling background data layers. There is an FHP questionnaire out to coordinators to gather information and input from them that will feed into the assessment. It is anticipated that an initial National Assessment product will be completed in 2025 and a more polished final version will be

completed in 2026. Gary queried whether or not the Board desired to make changes to the National Conservation Priorities. Some background was provided, for new Board members, on the evolution of the conservation priorities since the beginning of NFHP – NFHP began with more quantitative metrics that were unfeasible under the funding model. **The document with the full National Conservation Priorities will be reshared with the Board for their consideration.** There was Board discussion about the pros and cons of the concept of a funding focus for NFHP or annual theme (e.g. fish passage) from year to year in order to further hone the focus of annual funding. The discussion will be raised again at the July meeting in Anchorage for a more final Board decision.

Finally, the latest product from the America the Beautiful initiative was shared (conservation.gov) since it contained the NFHP database project list. The also newly released America the Beautiful Freshwater Challenge also listed NFHP as a potential vehicle for improving freshwater conditions.

12:00 PM **LUNCH (On Your Own)**

1:45 PM **Policy Committee Update**

**Tim Schaeffer** (*Policy Committee Chair*)

*Desired Outcomes:*

- Agency Science and Tech Support Updates
- ACE Act Reauthorization update

Tim Schaeffer introduced this update by officially passing the Policy Committee Chair torch to Ian Nakayama. He encouraged all Board members interested in participating in Hill visits to schedule with Kate Sherman. Ian shared that the Policy Committee has been focused on America’s Conservation Enhancement Act reauthorization which is currently being “hotlined” in the Senate. He thanked the folks involved in the Hill advocacy efforts (Mike Leonard, Connor Bevan, Christy Plumer, and Ian Nakayama). Hill visits are planned for May 1 and 2 in coordination with Ducks Unlimited. Tim encouraged Board members to get their legislators out into the field to visit field sites. Congressional members will be seeking opportunities to show off projects in their districts since its an election year. The appropriation letter for FY25 was sent on behalf of the NFHP Board to the Hill.

The Committee also shared that responses from federal agencies to the Board’s inquiry about Technical and Scientific Assistance provided to NFHP (ACE Act sections 206 and 212) varied in their level of detail and that the full responses haven’t yet been shared more widely. These responses will support advocacy efforts since appropriators will often ask if agencies are supportive of efforts. The version of ACE Act 2.0 that passed out of committee in the Senate adds BLM to the list of agencies included in these sections of the Act.

**1:55 PM NFHP Interagency Operational Plan Update****Jason Olive (NFHP  
Board Staff)***Desired Outcomes:*

- **Board awareness** of progress on IOP development.

Jason provided the Board an update on the development of the NFHP Interagency Operational Plan (IOP). One of the main efforts involves re-developing the engagement table from the 2012 Action Plan that outlined the different agency contributions to NFHP. He outlined the IOP chapters including existing resources, agency benefits, agency commitments to NFHP, agency collaboration, and MOUs. Jason anticipates drafting chapters 1-3 in advance of the July Board meeting and the final, full IOP will be drafted by the October 2024 Board meeting. Jason is looping in a broader suite of Federal agencies including, NASA, BIA, BPA, and others to encourage their engagement. Recently, Anne Kinsinger, USGS, hosted a webinar with USGS leadership to increase awareness about NFHP within USGS and encourage involvement to better support the FHPs. The Board further discussed a way to jointly fund a position to keep the momentum of implementing the IOP.

**2:15 PM Governance Committee Update****4 Doug Austen  
(Governance  
Committee Chair)***Desired Outcomes:*

- **Board awareness** of development of governance documents.

Doug Austen reported on behalf of the NFHP Governance Committee on the development of a NFHP Procedures Manual. The Committee identified key components of the manual and will be focused next on developing a Code of Conduct for the manual. Several components were added since the Board last saw the proposed manual sections (e.g. IOP, budget, and NCPs) and proposed timelines for development have been added. The Committee has asked the leads of each section to revise, as necessary, the draft and final deadlines for each of the manual sections by May 10.

**2:30 PM BREAK****2:45 PM NFHP Project Tracking Database & FY24 Unfunded  
Projects****Kate Sherman (NFHP  
Board Staff)***Desired Outcomes:*

- **Board awareness** of the latest progress on the NFHP Project Tracking Database.
- **Board discussion** of opportunities to identify funding for 33 FY24 unfunded projects.



Kate Sherman shared some updates about the NFHP Project Tracking Database and the state us FY24 project funding with the Board. The database is transitioning into a newer system hosted in the Cloud by ESRI. Currently, pending final budget values, there will be ~36 unfunded projects totaling \$2M proposed by FHPs in FY24. These projects have all been highly vetted, FHP Steering Committees, Board, and Secretary of Interior, and have the potential to remove 38 connectivity barriers, open 70 miles, conserve 700 miles, and engage 900 people. Kate posed to the Board the best way that Board members would like to receive this information in the hopes that they can connect FHPs with funding opportunities that could fit well with these projects. Board members have access to a dashboard in which they can summarize and filter project data (actively working on a publicly facing dashboard with an AFWA filter).

Kate also shared that the America the Beautiful initiative (conservation.gov) included NFHP data and was also listed as a strategy in the America the Beautiful Freshwater Challenge. The Board was informed that several of the sessions at 2024 AFS meeting in Hawaii will feature NFHP data products and reporting methods.

3:15 PM      **2024 FHP Project Review Team**

**Stan Allen** (*Board Vice  
Chair*)

*Desired Outcomes:*

- **Board awareness** of process and timeline.

Stan Allen shared that all 8 team members of the Project Review Team volunteered again to participate in this year's process (thank you volunteers!). The group hosted their first meeting last week and will utilize the same team approach as last year to complete the FY25 project review process. The group is implementing a few minor improvements from the scoring process last year and will complete their review and present a recommended FY25 Fish Habitat Conservation project list to the Board in advance of June 17<sup>th</sup> for the Board's virtual vote. The final project list will be submitted to the Secretary of Interior for her approval by July 1, 2024.

3:30 PM      **Partnerships Committee Update**

**Stan Allen & Bryan  
Moore** (*Partnerships  
Committee Chairs*)

*Desired Outcomes:*

- **Board awareness** of update on the Congressional Designation Process.
- **Board discussion** on Board Buddies engagement thus far.

Stan Allen shared that FHPs have received feedback from the review team and is in the process of revising their FHP Congressional Designation Applications for resubmittal to the review team on May

17. The team will package this up over the summer for submittal to Congressional Committees of jurisdiction (Senate Environment and Public Works and House Natural Resources).

The Partnerships Committee also prompted Board members to share how the FHP Board Buddy System is going. Board members shared they've been attending a variety of functions including steering committee meetings and informal meet and greets and noted that they are getting a better understanding of operations and how they can provide support to the FHPs. It has also created a more open line of communication between FHPs and Board members and is not a huge time commitment. Board members have all positive feedback to share thus far about the new FHP Board Buddy System.

3:50 PM      **NFHP Action Plan 3.0 Update and Options**

**Alex McOwen and  
Jason Olive (NFHP  
Board Staff)**

*Desired Outcomes:*

- **Board discussion** of approach and timing for next Action Plan.

Jason Olive provided background on the NFHP Action Plan revision process that was underway in 2020 with a small team of Board members when the ACE Act was signed into law. He acknowledged that the Board does not appear to be driven by the timeline of ACE Act reauthorization, as originally planned. The revision process halted because the staff had to shift to focus on ACE Act implementation – re-forming the Board, understanding budget implications, interpreting and explaining the FHP provisions, etc. Staff also highlighted a potential timeline for Action Plan revision that would fit nicely with NFHP's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2026. In 2026, Gary Whelan will be AFS President and plans to highlight the anniversary at the Columbus, Ohio AFS meeting that summer. Jason asked the Board to think carefully about who they need to "get excited and re-energized about NFHP" in order to identify partners or stakeholders who should be engaged in an Action Plan update.

Alex McOwen explained that the revised Action Plan is not nullified by the ACE Act, but the Board membership has changed completely since that time. Jason and Alex asked the Board how they would like to handle an Action Plan update and Board members discussed options for updating the plan including with what frequency the Board would like to update the Action Plan. Board members emphasized they didn't want to lose the foundational tenets of NFHP and that key partners should be engaged in this update process (Board members noted not to wait too long to gather input from partners). Board members also noted the difference between a strategic plan and an activity plan and note where the NFHP Action Plan falls in this spectrum. The Board was reminded that during the 2020 revision process, the Board proposed adding a 2-year Board work plan that outlined specific, shorter term Board activities that filled a need without adding it to the Action Plan. There was general Board agreement that the Board would like to continue the discussion at the July meeting and the staff can provide an overview of the 2006, 2012, and draft 2020 Actions Plans so the Board can see the

evolution of plans and determine next steps. The Board also wanted to get FHP input on the 2020 draft revision from the FHPs before the July discussion so their input can also be included in revision plans. It was suggested that a survey could be developed in order to get specific input from FHPs on Action Plan sections that will be revised and updated.

4:30 PM     **Adjourn**

5:00 –       **No Host Happy Hour @ Wunder Garten**  
7:00 PM     **1101 First St NE, Washington, DC 20002**

## **Wednesday, May 1, 2024**

1100 First St NE (8<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room), Washington, DC 20002

### **Web Meeting Access:**

**Teams:** [Click here to join the meeting](#)

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### **See Page 1 for Board Member Attendance**

#### **Other Attendees Present:**

- Christy Plumer (TRCP)

#### **Board Staff:**

- Gary Whelan (Board Staff)
- Alex McOwen (Board Staff, NOAA)
- Kate Sherman (Board Staff, PSMFC)
- Ryan Roberts (Board Staff, AFWA)
- Daniel Wieferich (Board Staff, USGS)
- Jason Olive (Board Staff, USFWS)

**FHP Coordinator Attendees:**

- Simen Kaalstad (ACFHP)
- Todd Ewing (SARP)
- Benjamin Meyer (Kenai Watershed Forum)
- JD Davis (WNTI)
- Steve Krentz (GPFHP)
- Lori Maloney (EBTJV)
- Joe Nohner (MGLP)
- Heidi Keuler (FFP)
- Jennifer Graves (DFHP)

**USFWS Attendees:**

- David Miko (USFWS)
- Eric MacMillan (USFWS)
- Will Duncan (USFWS)
- Jessica Hogrefe (USFWS)
- Louise Mauldin (USFWS)
- Trevor Luna (USFWS)

**Other Attendees:**

- Ali Schwaab (AFWA)
- Moe Nelson (NOAA NOS)
- Christopher Estes (*former NFHP Board Member*)
- Sharmilla Jepsen (Bureau of Land Management)

**Board Meeting Summary:**

<b>Time (EDT)</b>	<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Tab</b>	<b>Lead(s)</b>
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9:00 AM	<b>Welcome Back</b>		<b>Chair Robert Boyles</b>
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Chair Robert Boyles started off Day 2 of the Board meeting by welcoming everyone back and also welcoming former Board member, Christy Plumer (TRCP), to the room. Robert thanked Christy for her long-standing engagement on the NFHP Board and for her efforts to pass the legislation authorizing the Partnership. Christy shared a few remarks and noted that she will be joining the Inter Mountain West Joint Venture Board and trusts that Ian Nakayama will do an excellent job representing TRCP on the Board.

The Board briefly discussed logistics for Hill visits including that Robert, Tim, and Ian will have to depart at 11:00 AM at which time Stan Allen, NFHP Vice Chair, will take over leading the meeting. The Hill visits start at 1:00 PM and Ian suggested that teams meet in the Hart Senate Office building atrium. Hill visit attendees have been provided a one-pager and talking points and there will be a

government relations person in each meeting. Ian reminded teams to not forget “the ask” of the member as meetings can often go quickly.

9:15 AM	<b>USFWS Update &amp; Presentation from FAC Assistant Director David Miko</b>	<b>Steve Guertin</b> ( <i>NFHP Board Member</i> ) & <b>David Miko</b> ( <i>Assistant Director Fish &amp; Aquatic Conservation, USFWS</i> )
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Steve Guertin provided an update on the USFWS. He noted that the Sport Fishing and Boating and Partnership Council is re-chartered and looks forward to co-leadership with NOAA. The Council will meet in DC in 2 weeks. Steve also shared that the USFWS is facing budget cuts that have impacted the fish passage program (\$4M cut) and cautioned that when BIL and IRA funding sunsets, the agencies will be rebuilding budgets to get back to baseline. The USFWS is working on the FY26 budget.

Dave Miko, the Assistant Director of Fish and Aquatic Conservation (FAC), provided an overview of his background, the FAC program, and his philosophies about conservation work and the importance of collaborative conservation work. Dave spent 23 years at the PA Fish & Boat Commission and the last 10 years at the USFWS. He highlighted that NFHP is uniquely positioned in local communities to understand what is needed and how NFHP can best fit into the conservation conversation. Dave shared that FAC has begun a 5-year strategic planning process. Finally, Dave shared the USFWS’s work leading the Interagency Fish Passage Task Force which has made strides in coordinating multiple agency funding targeting fish passage improvements nationwide.

Following Dave’s remarks there was some Board discussion about efforts like the Interagency Fish Passage Task Force, comparable to the NFHP Interagency Operational Plan (IOP), and how they require a full-time person to shepherd progress and maintain momentum. Board members discussed a possible option for NFHP IOP implementation that included multiple agencies contributing a small portion to fund an FTE.

**Action Plan Remarks (Christopher Estes):**

Christopher Estes encouraged the Board to think hard about why a new Action Plan is needed and ask what it will provide. He framed that the 2006 NFHP Action Plan is the “NFHP Constitution” and the 2012 Action Plan as an update that included the formulation of the Board. They’re really one large document.

10:00 AM	<b>Interagency Coordination by FHPs</b>  <i>Desired Outcomes:</i>	<b>Jason Olive and FHP Coordinators – Simen Kaalstad</b> ( <i>ACFHP</i> ), <b>Lori Maloney</b> ( <i>EBJTV</i> ), and <b>Todd Ewing</b> ( <i>SARP</i> )
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Board awareness</b> of FHP coordinator roles beyond annual project cycle.</li> </ul>	

Jason Olive introduced this session which was designed to help Board members better understand the many coordination roles that FHP coordinators play beyond the annual USFWS funding cycle. He reminded the Board that NFHP was established to address fish habitat loss and reduce silos and increase partnering on this common mission. Jason highlighted that FHPs also coordinate meetings and symposia, stakeholder outreach, and science and data products. Three FHP coordinators then each briefly shared their specific FHP coordination roles.

Todd Ewing, Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP) coordinator, shared that SARP's coordination falls into three main categories: restoration, coastal planning and research, and aquatic connectivity. Todd highlighted that SARP facilitates the development and training of state aquatic connectivity teams (ACTs) to assess barriers across the U.S. SARP is adding ACTs in Kentucky and Puerto Rico and engaging with the state Departments of Transportation on these teams.

Simen Kaalstad, Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP) coordinator, shared the many groups with which ACFHP partners including: the South Atlantic Ecosystem Advisory Panel, the East Coast SAV Collaborative, South Atlantic Salt Marsh Initiative, and oyster shell recycling programs. In addition to partnering with many organizations to endorse and support projects, ACFHP is also involved in science and data products including a mapping and prioritization project.

Finally, Lori Maloney, Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture (EBTJV) coordinator, shared a collaborative effort from EBTJV that engaged partners like the Chesapeake Bay Program and NFWF. This salmonid assessment has undergone three iterations since 2006 for use in management including data at the catchment level that can now begin to assess causes behind changes in specific areas.

Jason posed several discussion questions to the Board. First, the Board discussed what limits this type of coordination. Most FHPs currently have between 0.25 - 1 full time equivalent in the coordinator role, which is significantly less when compared to the Migratory Bird Joint Ventures who have 3-17 FTEs coordinating their partnerships. Jason reminded the Board that, in an effort to ease some of the strain on coordination in FHPs, the ACE Act reauthorization bill would remove the non-Federal match requirement for coordination funds. Kara Meckley (NOAA) informed the Board that NOAA's BIL/IRA funding competitions also include funding for capacity building across multi-year awards and encouraged sharing that information with all FHPs. The Board discussed emphasizing the importance of coordination roles by highlighting them in a campaign similar to the Waters to Watch campaign.

11:00 AM      **BREAK**

At this stage of the meeting, Chair Robert Boyles handed over the role to the Vice Chair, Stan Allen, so he could step out and attend Hill visits.

11:25 AM      **Facilitated Discussion on Increasing Interagency  
Coordination and Guiding Funds**      **All**

*Desired Outcomes:*

- Continuation of December Board meeting discussion about interagency coordination.

The Board continued a discussion on how the Board can support and facilitate breaking down silos and encourage further interagency coordination and expanding awareness of NFHP. Jason shared how he recently attended and presented at the Director's business meeting of the Northeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. There he met with state agency directors and fish chiefs. The meeting also included a field trip where Jason was able to further connect with state agency directors and USGS, USFS, and USFWS regional leadership. The Board agreed that NFHP should be an item on all regional Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' meetings and that making State Directors and Fish Chiefs aware of NFHP is essential to gain their support for staff to partner with or engage with FHP's. However, with somewhat frequent turnover in State Directors, consistency in engagement with those groups is critical for success.

Another example of increasing interagency awareness of NFHP recently occurred at USGS. Board member, Anne Kinsinger, hosted an informational webinar that included USGS Ecosystems Mission Area staff and NFHP FHP Coordinators to increase awareness and encourage collaboration among the groups.

Board members noted that in times when funding is scarce, collaboration tends to increase and we know we're facing a drop off in funds when BIL/IRA funding closes out so the time is ripe to increase awareness of NFHP. The Board discussed increasing engagement with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) state technical committees as Farm Bill conservation title funding is set to increase substantially in FY25 due to the IRA. There are a large number of aquatic habitat conservation activities eligible for these funds, but they must compete with other conservation activities, so connecting with the state technical committees is key.

Finally, the Board discussed how to better support FHPs in applying for larger scale funding – could multiple projects be packaged up by Fisheries Commissions or groups of FHPs in order to reach the scope and scale of these BIL/IRA funding. The idea of NFHP hiring a technical editor for grant applications was also discussed in order to help FHPs with their capacity gaps.

12:15 PM      **Adjourn**

Vice-Chair Stan Allen adjourned the meeting at 12:15.