



# Table Rock Lake, MO



## Board Meeting Book

January 28-29, 2026

Big Cedar Lodge  
Ridgedale, MO





## **Details on January 28<sup>th</sup> Pontoon Field Trip Table Rock Lake**

**When: Wednesday, January 28<sup>th</sup> (8:00 AM CT)**

**Where: \*Bent Hook Marina 612 Devil's Pool Rd, Ridgedale, MO 65739 (please arrive by 7:45 AM)**

**\*Marina is located within the Big Cedar property grounds.**

### **Background for the Field Trip:**

In 2007, the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC), in cooperation with Bass Pro Shops, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, the United States Army Corps of Engineers, Table Rock Lake Water Quality Inc. and many other partners began the National Fish Habitat Initiative (NFHI) project to sustain and improve the degrading physical habitat within Table Rock Lake. The project began in October 2007 and continued through December 2013, wherein a total of 2,024 fish habitat structures were installed in Table Rock Lake. In 2022, MDC replenished 751 of these structures using a grant from Bass Pro Shops and annual maintenance of the remaining structures is ongoing. MDC is currently working with the Missouri Department of Natural Resources to rebuilt existing habitat structures around Table Rock Lake State Park as well as create new habitat structures to improve shoreline fishing opportunities within the park. Return to Marina will be between 10:30 AM – 11:00 AM. That will provide enough time for folks to grab lunch before the Board meeting. Please dress appropriately for the weather conditions.

### **What you will see:**

The Missouri Department of Conservation is planning to start cutting/sinking trees at the state park on Monday, 1/26 and continue through the morning of the 28<sup>th</sup> for the field trip.

If plans change due to the weather, we will email the group. Please contact Ryan Roberts (202-329-8882) if you would like a ride to Bent Hook Marina for the field Trip.



# National Fish Habitat Board Meeting

## Wednesday, January 28 – Thursday, January 29, 2026

Big Cedar Lodge – Grandview Conference Center  
Lake View Room A (Ground Floor)  
Ridgedale, MO

**Day 1 - Wednesday, January 28, 2026**

**1:00 – 5:00 PM CST**

[\*\*Webinar Link\*\*](#)

*Optional Field Trip: Table Rock Lake (1/28) 8:00 AM – 11:00 AM  
(Bent Hook Marina)*

Time (CST)	Agenda Item	Tab	Lead(s)
1:00 PM	<b>Welcome</b> <i>Desired Outcomes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Around the room introductions</b></li><li>• <b>Board action</b> to approve agenda and November 2025 meeting summary.</li><li>• Board members' highlight their NFHP-related actions since the last meeting</li></ul>	1	Chair Tim Schaeffer & All Attendees
1:30 PM	<b>Upcoming Board Meeting Schedule Preview</b> <i>Desired Outcomes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Board awareness</b> of upcoming meeting schedule.</li></ul>	2	Alex McOwen (NFHP Board Staff)
1:35 PM	<b>Missouri Department of Conservation Welcome</b> <i>Desired Outcomes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Board welcomed</b> by local Department of Conservation leadership.</li></ul>		Jason Sumners (Director, MO DOC)
1:45 PM	<b>Bass Pro Shops Welcome</b> <i>Desired Outcomes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Board welcomed</b> by Bass Pro Shops leadership.</li></ul>		TBD
2:00 PM	<b>National Fish Habitat Fund Update</b> <i>Desired Outcomes:</i>	3	Julie Carter (NFHP Board)



- **Board awareness** of name change, new website, and other pending changes

2:15 PM	<b>USFWS Update</b> <i>Desired Outcomes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Board awareness</b> of FY26 budget outlook and other USFWS items of interest.</li></ul>	David Miko (NFHP Board)
2:30 PM	<b>BREAK</b>	
2:50 PM	<b>2026 Action Plan Approval</b> <i>Desired Outcomes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Board discussion and vote</b> on the 2026 National Fish Habitat Action Plan</li></ul>	Alex McOwen and Jason Olive (NFHP Board Staff)
3:45 PM	<b>Reservoir Fish Habitat Partnership Overview and Partner Presentations</b> <i>Desired Outcomes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Board awareness</b> of work of RFHP and Friends of Reservoirs Chapters to conserve reservoir habitat</li></ul>	4 Doug Nygren, Shane Bush, and Jon Stein (RFHP)
5:00 PM	<b>ADJOURN</b>	
5:00 PM	<b>Social Gathering and Presentation of the National Fish Habitat Conservation Champion Award to Johnny Morris and Bass Pro Shops</b> (Sponsored by: National Fish Habitat Fund)	Lakeview Foyer



## Day 2 – Thursday, January 29, 2026

9:00 AM – 4:00 PM CST

Big Cedar Lodge – Grandview Conference Center  
Lake View Room A (Ground Floor)  
Ridgedale, MO

### [Webinar Link](#)

Time (CST)	Agenda Item	Tab	Lead(s)
9:00 AM	<b>Welcome Back</b>		Chair Tim Schaeffer
9:10 AM	<b>20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration Update</b> <i>Desired Outcomes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Board awareness</b> of plans for upcoming activities and communications efforts</li></ul>		Jake Slager (NFHP Board) and Ryan Roberts (NFHP Board Staff)
9:45 AM	<b>Executive Session to Discuss New Board Member Nominees</b>		Chair Tim Schaeffer (NFHP Board)
10:30 AM	<b>BREAK</b>		
10:45 AM	<b>Vote on Three Board Seats</b>		Chair Tim Schaeffer (NFHP Board)
11:00 AM	<b>Partnerships Committee Proposal</b> <i>Desired Outcomes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Board vote</b> on raising the limit on FHP Operations funds</li></ul>	5	Stan Allen (NFHP Board)
11:30 AM	<b>MSCG Application Follow-Up</b> <i>Desired Outcomes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Board awareness</b> of the outcome of the grant applications and implications</li></ul>		Jason Olive and Gary Whelan (NFHP Board Staff)
11:45 PM	<b>LUNCH PROVIDED AT BIG CEDAR</b>		
1:00 PM	<b>Governance Committee Update</b> <i>Desired Outcomes:</i>	6	Doug Austen (NFHP Board) and Alex McOwen (NFHP Board Staff)



- **Board vote** on approval of procedures manual chapters on FHP funding allocations and designation of new FHPs
- **Board awareness** of upcoming NFHP Staffing Plan development

1:30 PM	<b>Policy Committee Update</b> <i>Desired Outcomes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Board awareness</b> of federal agency meetings, DC Board meeting event plans, and appropriations updates.</li></ul>	<b>Ian Nakayama</b> ( <i>NFHP Board</i> )
2:00 PM	<b>Federal Interagency Task Force Biannual Update</b> <i>Desired Outcomes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Board awareness</b> of progress of the Task Force</li></ul>	<b>Jason Olive</b> ( <i>NFHP Board Staff</i> )
2:15 PM	<b>BREAK</b>	
2:45 PM	<b>NOAA Fisheries Update</b> <i>Desired Outcomes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Board awareness</b> of FY25 NOAA support of NFHP projects.</li></ul>	<b>Carrie Robinson</b> ( <i>NOAA Fisheries, Office of Habitat Conservation</i> )
3:00 PM	<b>U.S. Forest Service Update</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Board awareness</b> of USFS Good Neighbor Authority and other agency updates</li></ul>	<b>Steve Lohr</b> ( <i>NFHP Board</i> )
3:20 PM	<b>National Fish Habitat Assessment Update</b> <i>Desired Outcomes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Board awareness</b> of progress on the 2025 national fish habitat assessment</li></ul>	<b>Gary Whelan</b> ( <i>NFHP Board Staff</i> )
3:40 PM	<b>Other New Business</b>	<b>Stan Allen</b> ( <i>NFHP Board</i> )
4:00 PM	<b>ADJOURN</b>	



# Board Book Tabs

**January 28-29, 2026**

## **NFHP Board Meeting**

## National Fish Habitat Board Meeting Summary

**Tuesday, November 18, 2025**

**1:00 PM EDT – 4:00 PM ET**

**Approved by Motion:**

- September Board Meeting Summary motion by: John O'Keefe, seconded by: David Golden
- November 12, 2025 Board Meeting Agenda motion by: David Golden, seconded by: Jesse Trushenski

Time (EDT)	Agenda Item	Tab	Lead(s)
1:00 PM	<b>Welcome</b> <i>Desired Outcomes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Board vote</b> to approve September Board meeting summary</li> <li><b>Board vote</b> to approve November 18<sup>th</sup> Board meeting agenda.</li> <li>2026 Board meeting(s) preview</li> </ul>		<b>Tim Schaeffer</b> ( <i>NFHP Board Chair</i> )
1:10 PM	<b>Upcoming Board Terms Update</b> <i>Desired Outcomes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Board Awareness</b> of Board Member Terms (Conservation Seat, Sportfishing, Freshwater Recreational Anglers, SEAFWA Seat)</li> </ul>		<b>Ryan Roberts</b> <i>(NFHP Board Staff)</i>

Board Chair, Tim Schaeffer, welcomed the Board members and thanked everyone for attending this meeting. He also welcomed the Federal members of the Board back after the government shutdown and thanked all the non-Federal members and staff for keeping NFHP moving forward. The Board voted to approve the September Board meeting summary and the November agenda. Ryan Roberts reviewed the meeting dates for 2026 and reviewed some details about the next in-person meeting in January. Board members requested the agenda at-a-glance for the January meeting for receiving travel approvals.

Ryan Roberts outlined for the Board that the Board members' representing Sportfishing Industry (Mike Leonard), Freshwater Recreational Anglers (Gene Gilliland), and Conservation (Bryan Moore) terms are nearing their end. Thus, the Board staff has widely shared an announcement seeking Board member applicants for those seats by December 31, 2025. Gene Gilliland intends to be considered for a third term, but cannot run unopposed, per the ACE Act provisions on Board terms.

Finally, Ryan also shared that he received notice from the Southeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (SEAFWA) that Craig Bonds will be appointed as the SEAFWA Board representative on the



NFHP Board on January 1, 2026 as Ted Will (GA DNR Director) is retiring. Craig is the current Chief Operations Officer for TX Parks and Wildlife and familiar with NFHP.

1:20 PM **AFWA President's Task Force on NFHP Update** **Tim Schaeffer (Board Chair)**

*Desired Outcomes:*

- **Board Awareness** of 2026 AFWA's President's Task Force on NFHP

Tim Schaeffer shared that the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) will establish a President's Task Force on NFHP. This Task Force assembles state Directors and others to produce an internal report for the AFWA Board about a specific program that is meeting a major milestone and may make recommendations. Recently the [Fall Flights Program](#) underwent this process. This will be beneficial for NFHP by raising the visibility of NFHP across states where there is sometimes high turnover rate of state leadership positions.

The Task Force would meet throughout 2026 and leading up to the September Annual AFWA meeting, a NFHP report would be presented – highlighting successes, lessons learned, and recommendations for AFWA member states for how they can further engage in NFHP. A resolution would be voted upon by the AFWA Board at the September 2026 meeting in Lancaster, PA where NFHP will have a plenary role.

Ryan Roberts developed a proposal on the NFHP President's Task Force which outlines the purpose, task force membership, and process. This proposal will be distributed to the NFHP EXCOM for review and suggested revisions.

The Task Force membership is: Paul Johansen (AFWA Board Chair), Tim Schaeffer (NFHP Board Chair), Dave Miko (USFWS), David Golden, Pat Rivers, Ted Will, regional reps and Jason Olive.

1:35 PM **Update on National Fish Habitat Action Plan (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition)** **Action Plan Writing Team Member**

*Desired Outcomes:*

- **Board awareness** of the status of the Action Plan Revision

Jason Olive presented to the Board refresher about the Action Plan. First signed in 2006, and updated in 2012, the current Board convened a team in 2024 to update the Action Plan aligned with the NFHP 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2026. He shared a revised timeline for the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Action Plan since the original timeline was affected by the government shutdown. In this edition of the Action Plan, the writing team focused on crafting SMART objectives across a 5-year time horizon.

External partner review will begin following this meeting and continue through early December. Revisions will be finalized by the drafting team in early January. The finalized draft text of the Action Plan will be presented and voted upon at the January 2026 NFHP Board meeting.

NFHP was unsuccessful in obtaining a Multi-State Conservation Grant for the copy editing and printing costs (the proposal was deemed ineligible) so there is not currently an identified funding source for copy-editing and printing copies of the Action Plan. Board members expressed interest in seeing a clean copy of the Action Plan that was sent to external partners for review.

**1:45 PM      Beyond the Pond Update**

**Jesse Trushenski**

(BTP Board)

- **Board awareness** of recent activities for Beyond the Pond

Jesse Trushenski updated the Board about progress Beyond the Pond (BtP) has been making since the September Board meeting. She thanked all the BtP Board members - Julie, Jake, Debbie, and Dan Wagner – as well as Therese Thompson who is leading facilitation for this group. The BtP Board met on November 5 and mainly focused on getting their administrative house in order (e.g. bylaws, membership, governance, etc.). Carter Kruse is leading the review and revision of the BtP bylaws and the Board is carefully selecting their final two members to complete their membership.

BtP has been focused on guidance for how they can be a resource for FHPs, acting as a fiscal agent, and will charge the federal 15% de minimus rate on grants and sponsorships. However, this is negotiable depending on the type of funding (will work with FHPs).

Jesse also shared that BtP has been dealing with an issue with the Flipcause donation portal. Flipcause is likely heading for bankruptcy and has not been paying out funding that was due to be disbursed (NFHP has ~\$7600 with them). BtP determined that FHPs impacted by this Flipcause issue will be reimbursed by the BtP Board and BtP will find an alternative site to use other than Flipcause moving forward.

Finally, the BtP name and logo and tagline renewal is due towards the end of 2026 (for a fee). Jake is leading the BtP rebranding.

**2:00 PM      Science and Data Committee**

**Daniel Wieferich (NFHP**

*Science & Data Committee  
Co-Chair)*

- **Board awareness** of funding for Public RFP Process that integrates with NFHP Data System (West Coast states)

Daniel Wieferich highlighted how the staff used the NFHP project tracking data system to develop the 5-year report to Congress which was submitted at the end of October. Also, NFHP recently applied to received funding from the PSMFC to create a public Request for Proposal process that is integrated into the NFHP database to simplify the process for FHP coordinators and partners. NFHP staff will prototype this concept with WCR FHPs in FY2027 with eventual expansion in FY2028.

**2:20 PM      Communications Committee**

**Jake Slager (Coca-Cola) and**

**Ryan Roberts (NFHP Staff)**

- **Board awareness** of 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Logo.

Jake Slager reported out on efforts Communication Committee recent efforts. The Committee recently gained 2 members, Mark Taylor (TU) and Sarah. The Committee has finalized the service announcement for the 20th anniversary and created a place to accept recorded videos to gain more



## National Fish Habitat Board Meeting

January 2026

Tab 1

notoriety. A virtual celebration is scheduled for April 27, 2026 1-2:30 PM ET. The Committee has also discussed ways NFHP can be represented at various events throughout 2026 including ICAST, AFS, AFWA meetings, and other relevant events.

The NFHP Board has ~\$8,000 to invest in the events highlighted – these funds can go towards travel or sponsorship. The 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary logo has been selected! Branding guidelines will be provided for all to use shortly.

Johnny Morris may join us for a portion of our next Board meeting or for an evening event. We will be recognizing Johnny for his contributions to NFHP. Therese Thompson is also working on this with Doug Nygren to discuss ways to support planning for engaging with Bass Pro Shops.

Board members recommended that the Committee not forget marine representation – suggestion to engage at the Coastal and Estuarine Summit – Restore America's Estuaries (RAE) – November 15-16, 2026 in San Francisco, CA. The Board, through the Policy Committee, could also recognize Congressional champions in 2026 when we meet with the Board in July. NFHP will be featured on MeatEater trivia show in 2026.

2:40 PM **Policy Committee**

**Ian Nakayama (TRCP)**

*Desired Outcomes:*

- **Board awareness** of Five-Year Report to Congress (2021-2025)

Ian Nakayama reported on Policy Committee updates. The Committee submitted the NFHP 5 year report to Congress in late October 2025. Ian also noted shutdown impacts to the Policy Committee's activities – many meetings, including appropriations outreach, have been postponed. A strike team was planning to meeting with USFWS Director and other directors, this will likely be rescheduled. The Committee will be in touch about potential FHP visits around July Board meeting.

2:55 PM **Executive Session (*if needed*)**

**Tim Schaeffer (Board Chair)**

3:10 PM **Federal Government shutdown impacts**

**Ryan Roberts (NFHP Staff)**

*Desired Outcomes:*

*(Board understanding of)*

- **NFHP Impacts**
- **FHP Impacts**
- **Partner Impacts**

Finally, the Board discussed various other impacts of the government shutdown to NFHP. Those impacts included:

- Delay in the NFHP Action Plan draft completion timeline
- Postponed Policy Committee outreach to the Hill
- USFS agreement and procurement capacity issues and timeline delays
- USGS Climate Adaptation Science Centers and the related CASC grants (which have funded multiple MGLP projects) and the research Co-ops



## National Fish Habitat Board Meeting

January 2026

Tab 1

Christopher Estes shared an update on the **IFC/AFS Water Center**. There were 4 finalist institutions to host the center (OSU, Univ. of Idaho, MSU, and Univ. of Alabama) and the team has contacted the selected University and an announcement will be made soon.

4:00 PM      **Adjourn**



## 2026 Board Meeting Schedule

Date(s)	Location
January 27-29, 2026	Table Rock Lake, MO
April 28, 2026 from 1-4 PM ET	Virtual
July 28-29, 2026	Washington, D.C.
November 4, 2026 from 1-4 PM ET	Virtual

## National Fish Habitat Fund Report

**Board members:** Julie Carter (Chair), Jesse Trushenski (Vice Chair), Dan Wagner (Treasurer), Debbie Hart Pederson (Treasurer), Jake Slager, Carter Kruse.

### Update:

As reported to the NFHP Board at the November 2025 meeting, the Beyond the Pond Board began an expedited exploratory rebranding process with a short timeframe due to the NFHP 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary outreach launch in Spring 2026, and the 10 year trademark renewal for the Beyond the Pond name and logo and tagline phrase “It Starts in Your Own Backyard” also coming due in 2026. After outreach to the FHPs and discussion on potential names and acronyms, the Beyond the Pond Board unanimously voted in late December to discontinue use of the Beyond the Pond name and trademark and to operate under the organization’s legal name, the National Fish Habitat Fund.

Within NFHP circles including the NFHP Board and FHPs we are now referring to ourselves as “the Fund”. For example, if one were describing the two Boards, one could say “the Fund Board” and “the NFHP Board”. If one were mentioning the Fund outside of NFHP circles, it would be better to use the full name: National Fish Habitat Fund.

The domain name fishhabitatfund.org has been purchased and a new website will be designed and launched early in 2026, providing a stronger connection of content and look and feel to the NFHP website and NFHP Communications Committee approved language and branding. Until a logo can be designed, the Fund will use the NFHP 20th anniversary logo on the website and other Fund communications. The goal of the website relaunch is to make it clear that the Fund is the 501c3 nonprofit organization supporting the NFHP program and the 20 Fish Habitat Partnerships.



## Board Book Tab 4

# Reservoir Fish Habitat Partnership Background

# What is the Reservoir Fisheries Habitat Partnership?

The **Reservoir Fisheries Habitat Partnership** is a **national, voluntary conservation partnership** recognized by the **National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP)** and focused exclusively on fish habitat in reservoir systems.

RFHP was formally recognized in 2009, and Friends of Reservoirs was created in 2010 to provide nonprofit and financial support for RFHP activities.



**Focus on Reservoir Systems:**

RFHP is unique in that it focuses specifically on man-made reservoirs, which are among the most widespread and heavily used aquatic systems in the country.



**Opportunities to Get Involved:** Individuals and organizations can support RFHP through partnerships, projects, and participation in conservation efforts at reservoirs they care about.



**Strong Partnership:** RFHP depends on collaboration among state and federal agencies, conservation organizations, anglers, academic institutions, and private industry partners.

**Bottom-Up Conservation Model:**

RFHP emphasizes locally driven, partner-led projects, empowering state agencies, local organizations, and stakeholders to design and implement solutions.



**Grants and Funding Support:** Through RFHP and Friends of Reservoirs, partners can access federal and private funding for habitat enhancement, restoration, and applied science projects.



**Education and Outreach:** Friends of Reservoirs supports awareness of reservoir conservation challenges and opportunities, engaging the public, partners, and decision-makers.



**Science-Based Decision Making:** RFHP uses data, habitat assessments, and strategic prioritization to ensure projects deliver meaningful and measurable conservation benefits.

**Part of a National Network:** RFHP is one of the 20 officially recognized Fish Habitat Partnerships under the National Fish Habitat Partnership, which coordinates habitat conservation efforts across the United States.

**Technical and Scientific Expertise:** RFHP provides tools, guidance, and expertise related to reservoir ecology, habitat improvement techniques, and fisheries management.



## Vote on Increasing Limit on FHP Allocation of Funds to Operations

**Title:** Partnerships Committee Proposal

**Desired outcome:** The Board's Partnerships Committee will present a motion to raise the limit from \$125,000 to \$200,000 beginning in FY 2027.

**Background:** The reauthorization of the ACE Act in late 2024 included a change from the original bill that allows the Board to directly fund FHP operations rather than only projects (See Section 8212). This change also exempted operations funds from the 1:1 non-federal match requirement. The limit on FHP operations funding was a legacy of pre-ACE Act policies of the USFWS. There is no provision in the ACE Act for how funds are split among operations and projects, giving the Board discretion to decide on national policy and FHP steering committees the discretion to decide what is best for their context within the limits enacted by the Board. The Board voted to increase the limit from \$85,000 to \$125,000 in 2024.

Following the presentation by Dave Smith, of the Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV), at the September 2025 Board meeting, about the results of IWJV shifting funding from projects to operations, some FHPs have expressed a desire to try this model and would like the Board to allow them that flexibility.

## Annual Fish Habitat Partnership Funding Allocation Process

### Introduction

The National Fish Habitat Conservation Through Partnerships law ([16 U.S. 101](#)) authorizes the NFHP Board to allocate appropriated funds each fiscal year to Congressionally Designated Fish Habitat Partnerships (FHPs) for operations and fish habitat conservation projects. For the latter, the statute outlines specific criteria for project selection as well as the required timelines for approval by the Board and the U.S. Secretary of the Interior. Figure 1 depicts the timeline described in the steps below.

### Board Review & Scoring

1. Board staff provide FHPs with an updated scoring rubric no later than May 1.
2. An ad-hoc Board Review Team is established by September 30 – composed of at least eight Board members, divided into teams. Board staff provide support to this team to schedule meetings and distribute materials.
3. This Board Review Team initially convenes prior to the submission deadline to review the scoring rubric and methodology.
4. FHP project submissions and coordination funding requests must be entered in the NFHP project tracking database by November 15 annually. This is also the deadline for FHPs to submit their annual accomplishments reports and work plans.
5. Upon completion of FHP submissions, the NFHP data steward verifies that data entries are complete and project proposals are free of errors.
6. FHPs' project lists and work plans are randomly assigned to Board Review Team members with each FHP being scored by a minimum of four reviewers.
7. Board Review Team members individually review and score all assigned FHP submissions to ensure they meet all statutory criteria.
8. **Scoring methodology:**
  - a. Scoring rubric is based upon the guidelines in Sections 204 and 205 of the ACE Act.
  - b. Board member reviewers score each FHP based on their complete submission.
  - c. Board member reviewers provide comments & feedback for each FHP.
9. Board Review Team scores are shared with Board staff and compiled to obtain average scores across all reviewers.
10. The full Board Review Team meets in January to discuss the project scoring, common challenges across FHPs, discuss any scoring issues, and, if necessary, identify the score cutoffs for different FHP funding tiers. FHPs may be placed in funding tiers each year based on the range of their average scores.
11. **Report cards methodology:**
  - a. Each FHP will receive a report card based on a template that is updated annually.

FHP\_FY24\_ReportCard\_Final.docx

- b. The average score (across all reviewers) is entered into the report card for each scoring criteria along with specific FHP comments (filtered) and common feedback across all FHPs (filtered).
- 12. Once report cards are all issued to FHPs, FHPs have an opportunity to ask for additional feedback from the Board Review Team on their scores.

### **Board and Secretarial Approval**

- 13. Upon completion of the scoring process, the following two lists will be compiled by staff and presented to the Board at its first meeting of the year (late January-early February) for review and approval.
  - a. Proposed fish habitat conservation projects
  - b. Proposed operational support funds for the Board and FHPs
- 14. Following the Board's approval of the annual fish habitat conservation project list (a), the Board Chair will submit the list along with a cover letter to the Secretary of the Interior for review and approval.
- 15. The Secretary (or their designee) must provide a response to the Board regarding approval of the projects on the Board's list within 90 days of receipt of the list.

### **Funding Allocation**

- 16. Regardless of the timing of prior steps, actual allocation of funding to FHPs does not begin until the President of the United States signs a full federal fiscal year appropriations bill or continuing resolution for the Department of the Interior, which contains the NFHP appropriation.
- 17. The USFWS Fish and Aquatic Conservation Program determines the amount needed to support the FHPs, administer the financial assistance process, and help award recipients meet permitting and compliance requirements for each Board-approved project. (Note: The FY25 agreed upon amount was \$850,000 (12.6%)). The USFWS then communicates the total funding amount available to the Board to distribute.
- 18. The Board then subtracts from that total the approved amount of funding to be used for Board expenses and support (managed by AFWA), database support, funds to be used for a national fish habitat assessment, and any other national appropriation desired by the Board. The difference is then allocated to the FHPs for funding operations and fish habitat conservation projects.
- 19. Funds are assigned to each FHP based on their report card score.
- 20. Each FHP Coordinator is contacted and asked to confirm the amount of operations funding they wish to take from their allotment, and, for each proposed fish habitat conservation project, they are asked to confirm the need and funding amount. For some projects, this requires checking with the applicants to confirm whether they are willing to accept partial project funding.
- 21. Each FHP Coordinator communicates their final funded list to the Board Review Team Chair and Board staff and updates the status of their projects in the NFHP project database.
- 22. If an FHP does not use its entire allocation, the remaining funds are reallocated to other FHPs based on need.
- 23. Board staff reviews list to confirm that Tribal project funding meets the 5% threshold specified in the law.

24. Board staff compiles the national list, confirms accuracy of all calculations, then communicates the list to USFWS Regional staff who will assist the awardees with their award application process.
25. USFWS staff publish a Directed Announcement for funding availability that lists each applicant that was selected for funding and shares it with all FHP Coordinators.
26. FHP Coordinators inform project applicants on the amount of funding they will receive and send those who were selected the link to the Directed Announcement.

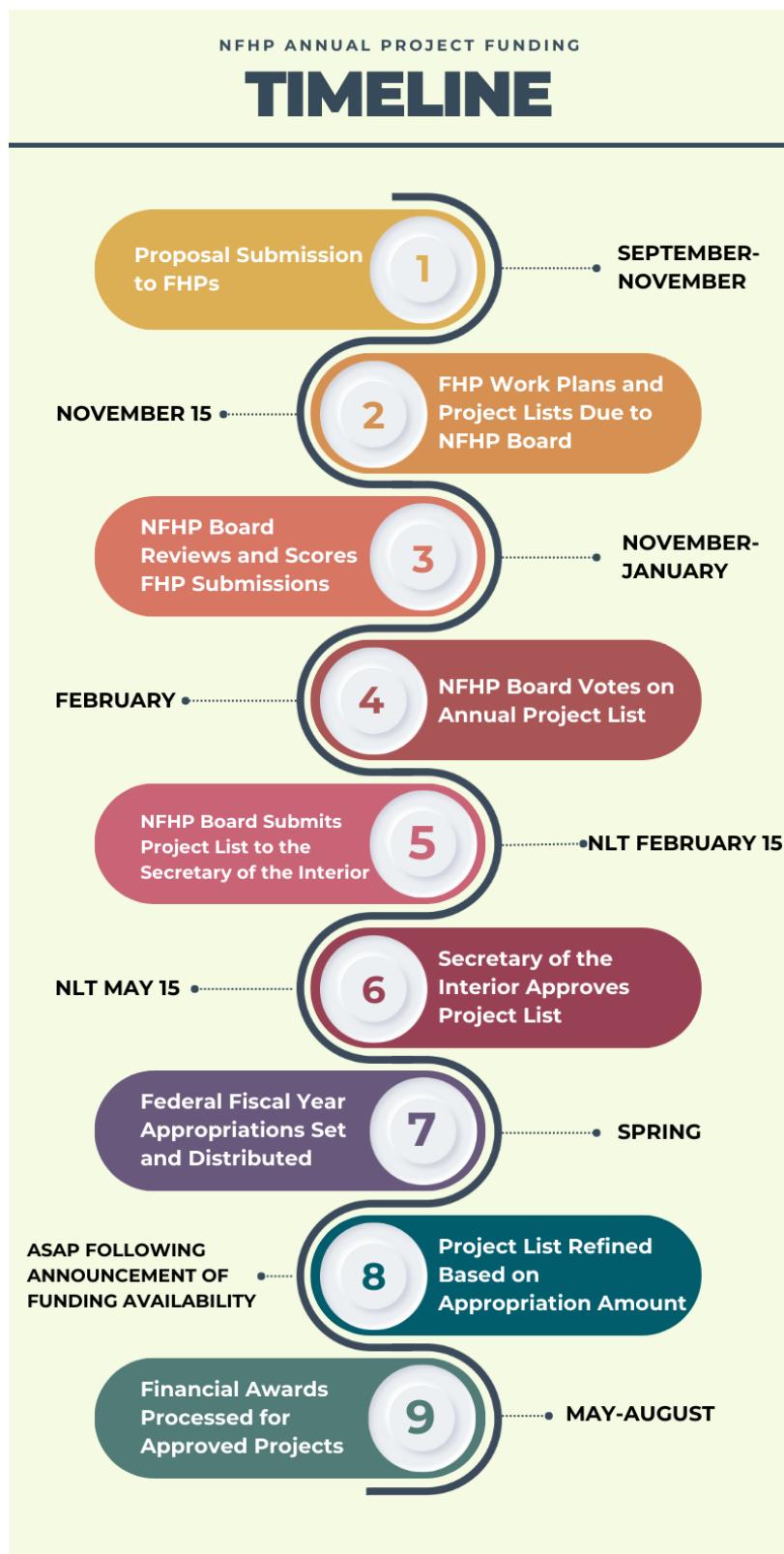


Figure 1. Annual NFHP project funding process timeline.

## NFHP Fish Habitat Partnership Designation Process

### Introduction

Fish Habitat Partnerships (FHPs) are the primary work units of the National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP). They are self-identified, self-organized, and self-directed communities of interest composed of diverse groups of public and private partners. The National Fish Habitat Board (Board) encourages all entities with an interest in fish habitat conservation to become involved with existing FHPs wherever possible. For geographic areas, keystone species, or system types that are not well-represented in existing FHPs, the Board may encourage an existing FHP to expand its scope, or it may accept applications from other partnership-based entities to be new FHPs that would address these gaps. [Title 16 Chapter 101](#) of the United States Code, “National Fish Habitat Conservation Through Partnerships” (created via the ACE Act of 2020) states that Congress shall have the exclusive authority to designate or modify a Partnership, and that only Partnerships designated by Congress may receive federal funds via this program. The law tasks the Board with recommending to Congress entities for designation as FHPs. The law further outlines requirements for designation of an entity as an FHP. This document provides the guidelines, process, and application forms the Board will use for considering designation of a new candidate FHP.

### Board Review Process

The Board will receive pre-proposals during the month of May from partnerships wishing to be considered for designation as an FHP. Board members representing state-agencies ( $n = 5$ ) will review the pre-proposals and solicit input from existing FHPs. They will then notify the partnership by June 30 whether they are invited to deliver a presentation about their partnership to the Board at the Board’s Summer (July/August) meeting. The review team will brief the full Board on their correspondence with any potential new FHPs at the summer Board meeting each year. If a partnership is invited to present at the Board’s Summer meeting, a vote of the full Board will determine whether the potential partnership will be invited to submit a full application. Full applications will be due by August 31. Board members representing state agencies will review applications and make a recommendation to the Board’s Executive Committee, who will then decide whether to submit the candidate FHP’s application to the full Board for a vote based on the criteria for consideration below. Approval of a candidate FHP by the Board requires 2/3 of members present. Following an affirmative vote by the Board, the candidate FHP will be submitted to Congress for designation. Upon inaction by Congress after 90 days, the candidate will be officially designated as an FHP.

## Process Timeline

DATE	ACTION
<i>MAY 31</i>	Deadline for partnerships wishing to be considered for designation as FHPs to submit a pre-proposal
<i>JUNE 30</i>	Deadline for Board response to partnerships who submit a pre-proposal
<i>SUMMER BOARD MEETING (Typically July/August)</i>	Invited partnerships deliver presentation to the Board and a vote is taken on whether to invite the candidate to submit a full application
<i>AUGUST 31</i>	Deadline for invited candidate FHPs to submit full application for designation to the Board
<i>SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER</i>	Board's five state agency representatives and EXCOM consider application(s) and solicit feedback from existing FHPs
<i>NOVEMBER-DECEMBER</i>	Board votes on whether to submit a candidate FHP to Congress for consideration
<i>FEBRUARY 1</i>	Board submits designation application to Congress for approval
<i>MAY 1</i>	Upon inaction of Congress, a candidate FHP becomes designated
<i>NOVEMBER 15</i>	New FHP may submit request for funding

NOTE: A newly designated FHP will be eligible for the lesser of \$125,000 or 50% of the Tier 1 FHP allotment during the first two fiscal years following Congressional Designation.

## Criteria for Consideration

- 1) Do the state fish and wildlife agencies and FHPs in the covered geography support this candidate FHP?
- 2) Has the candidate FHP demonstrated an ability to convene a diversity of partners (e.g., Tribal, federal, non-profit, private) to achieve landscape-scale fish habitat conservation outcomes?
- 3) Does the candidate FHP clearly demonstrate reliance on the best available science and contribute to the scientific foundation of fish habitat conservation in their region?
- 4) Does the candidate FHP have a robust governance structure and clearly outlined mission?
- 5) Does the candidate FHP use strategic planning and adaptive management to guide its activities?
- 6) Has the candidate FHP demonstrated an ability to leverage various sources of funding to achieve landscape-scale fish habitat conservation outcomes?

- 7) Does the candidate FHP bring resources, connections, and credibility that will benefit the Board and existing FHPs?
- 8) To what extent, if any, are the candidate FHP's goals, activities, geographic scope, or focal species redundant with an existing FHP?
- 9) How are the candidate FHP's goals and activities complementary to the goals and activities of neighboring FHPs, overlapping Migratory Bird Joint Ventures, State Wildlife Action Plans, and other state, Tribal, or regional habitat conservation plans?

## Reference

Polices and Guidance for Fish Habitat Partnerships. 2008. National Fish Habitat Board.

## **Appendix A. Relevant verbiage from 16 CFR 101 Section 8204- Fish Habitat Partnerships**

**(a) Authority to Recommend.**

The Board may recommend to Congress the designation of Fish Habitat Partnerships in accordance with this section.

**(b) Purposes.**

The purposes of a Partnership shall be—

- (1) to work with other regional habitat conservation programs to promote cooperation and coordination to enhance fish populations and fish habitats;
- (2) to engage local and regional communities to build support for fish habitat conservation;
- (3) to involve diverse groups of public and private partners;
- (4) to develop collaboratively a strategic vision and achievable implementation plan that is scientifically sound;
- (5) to leverage funding from sources that support local and regional partnerships;
- (6) to use adaptive management principles, including evaluation of project success and functionality;
- (7) to develop appropriate local or regional habitat evaluation and assessment measures and criteria that are compatible with national habitat condition measures; and
- (8) to implement local and regional priority projects that improve conditions for fish and fish habitat.

**(c) Criteria for Designation.**

An entity seeking to be designated by Congress as a Partnership shall—

- (1) submit to the Board an application at such time, in such manner, and containing such information as the Board may reasonably require; and
- (2) demonstrate to the Board that the entity has—
  - (A) a focus on promoting the health of important fish and fish habitats;
  - (B) an ability to coordinate the implementation of priority projects that support the goals and national priorities set by the Board that are within the Partnership boundary;
  - (C) a self-governance structure that supports the implementation of strategic priorities for fish habitat;
  - (D) the ability to develop local and regional relationships with a broad range of entities to further strategic priorities for fish and fish habitat;

(E) a strategic plan that details required investments for fish habitat conservation that addresses the strategic fish habitat priorities of the Partnership and supports and meets the strategic priorities of the Board;

(F) the ability to develop and implement fish habitat conservation projects that address strategic priorities of the Partnership and the Board; and

(G) the ability to develop fish habitat conservation priorities based on sound science and data, the ability to measure the effectiveness of fish habitat projects of the Partnership, and a clear plan as to how Partnership science and data components will be integrated with the overall Board science and data effort.

(d) Requirements for recommendation to Congress.

The Board may recommend to Congress for designation an application for a Partnership submitted under subsection (c) if the Board determines that the applicant—

- (1) meets the criteria described in subsection (c)(2);
- (2) identifies representatives to provide support and technical assistance to the Partnership from a diverse group of public and private partners, which may include State or local governments, nonprofit entities, Indian Tribes, and private individuals, that are focused on conservation of fish habitats to achieve results across jurisdictional boundaries on public and private land;
- (3) is organized to promote the health of important fish species and important fish habitats, including reservoirs, natural lakes, coastal and marine environments, coral reefs, and estuaries;
- (4) identifies strategic fish and fish habitat priorities for the Partnership area in the form of geographical focus areas or key stressors or impairments to facilitate strategic planning and decision making;
- (5) is able to address issues and priorities on a nationally significant scale;
- (6) includes a governance structure that— (A) reflects the range of all partners; and (B) promotes joint strategic planning and decision making by the applicant;
- (7) demonstrates completion of, or significant progress toward the development of, a strategic plan to address declines in fish populations, rather than simply treating symptoms, in accordance with the goals and national priorities established by the Board; and
- (8) promotes collaboration in developing a strategic vision and implementation program that is scientifically sound and achievable.

(e) Report to Congress

(1) In general

Not later than February 1 of the first fiscal year beginning after October 30, 2020, and, subject to paragraph (3), each February 1 thereafter, the Board shall develop and submit

to the appropriate congressional committees an annual report, to be entitled "Report to Congress on Future Fish Habitat Partnerships and Modifications", that—

- (A) identifies each entity that—
  - (i) meets the requirements described in subsection (d); and
  - (ii) the Board recommends to Congress for designation as a Partnership;
- (B) describes any proposed modifications to a Partnership previously designated by Congress under subsection (f);
- (C) with respect to each entity recommended for designation as a Partnership, describes, to the maximum extent practicable—
  - (i) the purpose of the recommended Partnership; and
  - (ii) how the recommended Partnership fulfills the requirements described in subsection (d).

(2) Public availability; notification

The Board shall—

- (A) make the report publicly available, including on the internet; and
- (B) provide to the appropriate congressional committees and the State agency of any State included in a recommended Partnership area written notification of the public availability of the report.

(3) Limitation

The Board shall only submit a report required under paragraph (1) in the fiscal years in which the Board is proposing modifications to, or new designations of, 1 or more Partnerships.

(f) Designation or modification of Partnership

(1) In general

Congress shall have the exclusive authority to designate or modify a Partnership.

(2) Designation or modification process

A Partnership designation or modification the Board recommends to Congress shall be deemed to be approved by Congress if Congress does not pass a joint resolution of disapproval with respect to the designation or modification by the date that is 90 days after the date on which the relevant congressional committees receive such recommendation.

(g) Existing partnerships

(1) Designation review

Not later than 5 years after October 30, 2020, any partnership receiving Federal funds as of October 30, 2020, shall be subject to a designation review by Congress in which Congress shall have the opportunity to designate the partnership under subsection (f).

(2) Ineligibility for Federal funds



A partnership referred to in paragraph (1) that Congress does not designate as described in that paragraph shall be ineligible to receive Federal funds under this chapter.

#### **Appendix B. Fish Habitat Partnership Designation Applications**

Attached.



## INSTRUCTIONS FOR SUBMITTING A FISH HABITAT PARTNERSHIP APPLICATION

The form for submitting a Fish Habitat Partnership application begins on the third page. If you have questions about these instructions or the form, please contact Jason Olive at [Jason\\_olive@fws.gov](mailto:Jason_olive@fws.gov).

Applications must be submitted between no later than August 31.

Submit an electronic copy of the completed application and all supporting materials to [info@fishhabitat.org](mailto:info@fishhabitat.org).

- Provide files in either PDF or Microsoft Word format.

Do not exceed the specified maximum length for each section of narrative.



## National Fish Habitat Board FISH HABITAT PARTNERSHIP APPLICATION

Date:

### PARTNERSHIP INFORMATION

Partnership Name:

Primary Contact (address, email, and phone):

Partnership web site:

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (500 word maximum)

*Note: Provide a summary of this application by briefly restating the high point(s) of each section to justify your partnership's consideration for designation under [16 USC 101](#).*

### PARTNERSHIP OVERVIEW

- a. Describe the fish habitat focus or purpose around which your partnership is organized (e.g., species, geographic area, habitat type, etc.).
- b. Provide your partnership's most recent strategic plan that includes the mission, vision, goals, and objectives of your partnership.
- c. Describe how the geographic boundaries of your partnership are appropriate to prioritize and address regional habitat needs.
- d. Do your partnership's boundaries overlap with any existing Congressionally designated Fish Habitat Partnerships (FHPs), and if so, how do you (or how would you) differentiate/coordinate/collaborate on fish habitat conservation efforts?

e. Describe your partnership's contributions to regional or national science and data efforts related to fish habitat.

## PARTNERSHIP PURPOSE

- a. Describe other regional habitat conservation programs with whom you work and the nature of that collaboration.
- b. Describe how you outreach to local and regional communities to build support for fish habitat conservation.
- c. Describe how you involve diverse groups of public and private partners in all of your efforts. Specifically, list state and federal agencies, Tribes, and NGOs with whom you regularly work.
- d. Give examples of how you have leveraged funding from multiple sources to accomplish your aquatic habitat conservation goals.
- e. Describe how you evaluate the effectiveness of the work of your partnership.

## PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE

- a. Describe the organizational structure and personnel capacity of your Partnership including the duties and responsibilities of each position and organizational layer (including board of directors or equivalent).
- b. Describe the governance structure of your partnership and the decision-making protocol(s) (e.g., consensus, majority vote).
- c. Describe how your partnership conducts fiscal administration including your ability to accept, manage, track, disburse, and report on federal and state grant income.
- d. Describe the technical and financial resources your partnership has to support its work.
- e. How does your partnership governance structure promote joint strategic planning, establishment of partnership priorities, and decision-making among partners?
- f. Provide copies of your partnership's governance documents (e.g., charter, memorandum of understanding, other).

## PARTNERSHIP OPERATIONS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- a. Describe the procedures in place for communicating with your partners and for recruiting additional partners.
- b. Provide documentation (e.g., letters of recommendation) indicating support



and commitment to your partnership by key partners (e.g., federal or state agencies, Native American governments),

regional Associations of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, or similar entities.

- c. Provide summary statistics of numbers and types of projects that conserve fish habitat (including but not limited to on-the-ground projects, scientific assessments, communication and outreach products) implemented over the history of your partnership to demonstrate activity, capacity, and success in promoting fish and fish habitat conservation.
- d. With examples, describe resources and capabilities that partner organizations have made available to your partnership to measure progress in habitat conservation.
- e. Describe any regional habitat assessment criteria or decision support tools which your partnership has developed, consulted on, or adopted.
- f. Describe how your partnership connects its priorities to state wildlife action plans, watershed plans, recovery plans, land and water use plans, or other regional-scale plans (does not need to be an exhaustive description but demonstrate this connection with key examples and/or summary statistics).

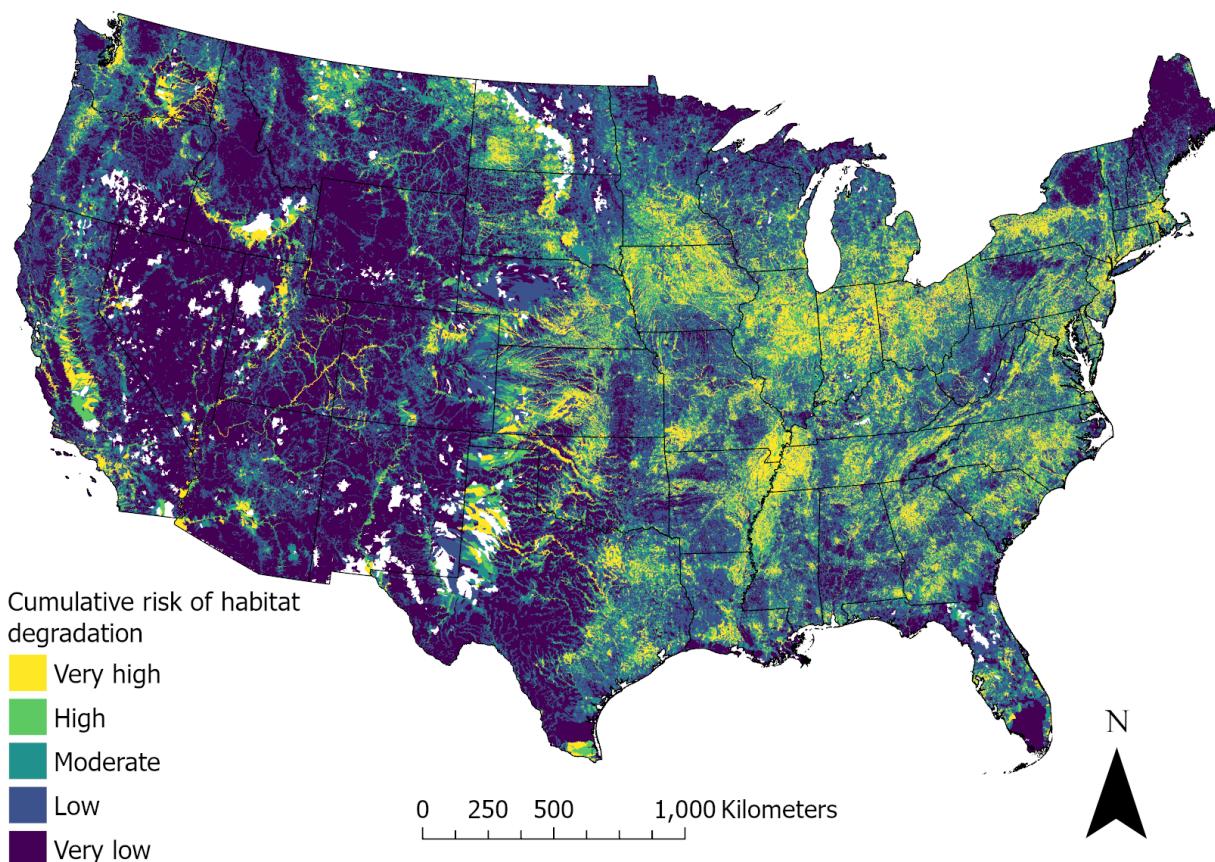
## **PARTNERSHIP ALIGNMENT WITH NFHP ACTIVITIES AND PRIORITIES**

- a. Describe how your partnership's activities support the current national conservation priorities established by the National Fish Habitat Board (Board).
- b. Describe how your partnership could contribute to the execution of one or more objectives of the 2026 National Fish Habitat Action Plan.
- c. Please list and describe any partner organizations or resources with whom you regularly engage that you would connect with the Board and/or existing FHPs.

2025 National Fish Habitat Partnership Board's

National Assessment of Fish Habitat Condition in the United States Report

Congressional Synopsis



Ross, Jared A.<sup>1</sup>, Megan Malish<sup>1</sup>, Gary Whelan<sup>2</sup>, and Dana M. Infante<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Michigan State University

<sup>2</sup>NFHP Board's Science and Data Committee Co-Chair, Michigan Department of Natural Resources – Fisheries Division - Retired

### *Synopsis*

The National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP) is a nationally coordinated, locally driven conservation program that has used a cooperative, non-regulatory, science-guided approach since 2006 to improve fish habitat through 20 regional Fish Habitat Partnerships across the country. Congress formally codified this model through the America's Conservation Enhancement Act of 2020 (Public Law 116-188), which directed NFHP to continue assessing the nation's fish habitat and address data gaps from the 2010 and 2015 assessments. This report highlights initial results of the 2025 national assessment, which integrates new data sources, expands spatial and temporal coverage of fish data inputs, and applies updated analytical methods to evaluate risks to fish habitat in rivers, streams, and watersheds across the conterminous United States (CONUS).

To assess risk of habitat degradation a process was developed to analyze field collected survey data (n=51,382) of individual fish species (n=783) with surrounding landscape disturbances. The analysis evaluated degradation on each of ~2.3 million stream reaches (3,059,651 miles) across CONUS, where a reach represents uniform segments of stream between confluences. Analyses controlled for natural variations occurring across the landscape. Species responses were tested against a broad range of disturbance variables representing to identify 1,926 statistically significant thresholds—points where small increases in disturbance cause abrupt declines in number of a given fish species.

Each stream reach was first scored across five risk categories (very low to very high) for each individual disturbance variable. These disturbance-specific scores were then combined into three subindices—land use, fragmentation, and water quality. A fourth subindex for hydrologic alteration was also developed using a smaller set of disturbance variables. Finally, a cumulative habitat condition score was calculated for each stream reach using a weighted average of the three primary subindices, providing a conservative, holistic measure of overall stream habitat condition.

Key national findings include:

- Fragmentation limited 51% of species and caused 353,008 stream and river miles (11%) to be classed as high or very high risk, and 2,127,226 miles (70%) as very low or low risk.
- Land use limited 39% of species and caused 180,175 stream and river miles (6%) to be classed as high or very high risk, and 2,302,812 miles (76%) as very low or low risk.
- Water quality limited 61% of species and caused 355,455 stream and river miles (12%) to be at high or very high risk, and 2,087,459 miles (68%) as low or very low risk.



- Initial analyses show hydrologic alteration limited 27% of species and caused 366,468 stream and river miles (12%) to be classed as high or very high risk, and 1,811,874 miles (59%) as very low or low risk.
- When all disturbance groups were combined, 366,468 stream and river miles (12%) were classified as high or very high risk of degradation, 1,811,844 miles (59%) as low or very low risk, and 880,685 miles (29%) as moderate risk. Higher degradation risks occurred throughout much of the Mississippi River basin, especially reaches draining to the mainstem Mississippi river downstream of the confluence with the Missouri River.

This assessment represents a CONUS-wide analysis that directly links fish species responses to disturbance thresholds, offering a powerful tool for setting conservation targets and prioritizing management actions. The report demonstrates how results can guide decision-making—for example, identifying where water quality best management practices, connectivity restoration, or land-use interventions would be most effective—and includes case studies such as Brook Trout fragmentation impacts and analyses of nitrogen fertilizer loading and freshwater resiliency.

While the assessment is the most comprehensive of its kind, data gaps remain, including incomplete species distribution information, limited understanding of species interactions, and coarse resolution for some disturbance variables. A complementary assessment covering Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and additional disturbance variables for CONUS waters is planned for 2026 to help address some of these gaps. All data for NFHP reports are available upon request.