



NATIONAL
FISH
HABITAT
PARTNERSHIP

BOARD MEETING BOOK

JANUARY 28-29, 2025

Photo: Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge

National Fish Habitat Board Meeting
Tuesday, January 28 – Wednesday, January 29, 2025
Hyatt Silverton
8380 Dean Martin Drive
Las Vegas, NV 89139

Tuesday, January 28, 2025 1:00 – 4:30 PM PST

[Webinar Link](#)

Meeting ID: 250 392 805 505 Passcode: 2ba6fs

Time (PST)	Agenda Item	Tab	Lead(s)
1:00 PM	<p>Welcome</p> <p><i>Desired Outcomes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around the room introductions. • Board action to approve agenda and November 2024 meeting summary. 	1	Chair Robert Boyles & All Attendees
1:20 PM	<p>2025 Board Meeting Schedule Preview</p> <p><i>Desired Outcomes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board awareness of 2025 meeting schedule. 	2	Alex McOwen (NFHP Board Staff)
1:30 PM	<p>Nevada Department of Wildlife Welcome</p> <p><i>Desired Outcomes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board welcomed by local Department of Wildlife leadership. 		Brandon Senger (Fisheries Biologist, Nevada Department of Wildlife)
1:45 PM	<p>Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council Overview and Introduction of New NFHP Board Member</p> <p><i>Desired Outcomes:</i></p>		Chris Horton (NFHP Board and SFBPC Chair)

- **Board awareness** of the purpose and mission of the SFBPC and its representative to the Board.

2:00 PM	<p>Interagency Operational Plan Update</p> <p><i>Desired Outcomes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board awareness of the IOP draft status. • Board awareness of Chair meetings with agency leadership and EXCOM discussion. • Board discussion on approval level and timing. 	3	<p>Chair Robert Boyles, Chair-Elect Tim Schaeffer & Jason Olive (NFHP Board Staff)</p>
2:25 PM	<p>NFHP Action Plan 3.0 Update</p> <p><i>Desired Outcomes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board awareness of internal survey results and Action Plan Team progress. • Board discussion of leadership endorsement strategy. 	4	<p>Alex McOwen and Jason Olive (NFHP Board Staff)</p>
2:50 PM	<p>BREAK</p>		
3:10 PM	<p>Planning Session for the 20th NFHP Anniversary Campaign</p> <p><i>Desired Outcomes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board develops ideas and desired outcomes for the communications campaign for the 20th anniversary of NFHP in 2026 via small group discussions. 	5	<p>All</p>
4:15 PM	<p>Science and Data Committee Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board awareness of assessment progress and other committee activities. 	6	<p>Gary Whelan and Daniel Wieferich <i>(NFHP Science & Data</i> <i>Committee Co-Chairs)</i></p>
4:30 PM	<p>ADJOURN</p>		
5:00 PM	<p>Social Gathering</p>		

Wednesday, January 29, 2025 9:00 – 4:00 PM PST

[Webinar Link](#)

Meeting ID: 268 221 717 948 **Passcode:** J2NH3X

Time (PST)	Agenda Item	Tab	Lead(s)
9:00 AM	Welcome Back		Chair Robert Boyles & All Attendees
9:10 AM	Policy Committee Update <i>Desired Outcomes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board awareness of ACE Act Reauthorization and Policy Committee activities. • Board awareness of FHP Advocacy Guidelines. 		Ian Nakayama (<i>TRCP, Policy Committee Chair</i>)
10:00 AM	USFWS Update <i>Desired Outcomes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board awareness of USFWS FY 2025 budget outlook and FAC Program strategic plan development. 		Steve Guertin (<i>USFWS, NFHP Board Member</i>)
10:15 AM	Fishery Management Councils and Marine Fisheries Commissions <i>Desired Outcomes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board awareness of the difference between Councils and Commissions and how each engage in habitat conservation. 		Stan Allen and Chris Moore (<i>NFHP Board Members</i>)
10:40 AM	BREAK		

11:00 AM	Governance Committee Update	7	Doug Austen <i>(Governance Committee Chair)</i>
	<i>Desired Outcomes:</i>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board awareness of committee progress towards a full NFHP Procedures manual. • Board approval of shifting Board seats post reauthorization (Councils/Commissions/Commercial Fishing). 		
11:20 AM	Communications Committee Update		Pat Rivers <i>(Communications Committee Member)</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board awareness of committee activities and plans for 2025. • Board views the new NFHP video. 		
11:40 PM	Partnerships Committee Update		Stan Allen, Bryan Moore, & Joe Nohner <i>(Partnerships Committee Tri-Chairs)</i>
	<i>Desired Outcomes:</i>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board awareness of committee progress to implementing the <i>reauthorized</i> ACE Act and key short- and long-term Board decision points. 		
12:00 PM	LUNCH		
1:30 PM	Reappointment of Tribal Representative (non-Alaska) Board Member		Chair Robert Boyles
	<i>Desired Outcomes:</i>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board vote on reappointment of Board member whose term is expiring. 		
1:35 PM	Executive Session: Selection of New Board Member Representing Tribes in Alaska	8	Chair Robert Boyles
	<i>Desired Outcomes:</i>		

- **Board vote** on one of four candidates provided by the Secretary of the Interior.

2:05 PM **NOAA Update**

Carrie Robinson (NOAA Fisheries)

Desired Outcomes:

- **Board awareness** of latest NOAA funding initiatives in support of habitat restoration and conservation.

2:20 PM **USFWS Fish Technology Centers**

Dr. Jenny Gumm
(USFWS FAC Program)

Desired Outcomes:

- **Board awareness** of USFWS Fish Technology Centers and how they may collaborate with FHPs.

2:40 PM **BREAK**

3:00 PM **Desert Fish Habitat Partnership Field Trip Preview**

9

Jon Sjoberg (Desert FHP Coordinator)

Desired Outcomes:

- **Board awareness** of the field trip to visit Desert FHP sites for Thursday, January 30th.

3:30 PM **Executive Session (if needed) or Additional Board Discussion**

4:00 PM **ADJOURN**

November NFHP Board Meeting Attendance

	Last Name	First Name	November 6
1	Allen	Stan	X
2	Austen	Doug	X
3	Booth	Austin	
4	Boyles	Robert	X
5	Carter/Clark	Julie/Andy	X
6	Gilliland	Gene	
7	Guertin	Steve	X
8	Horton	Chris	X
9	Kinsinger	Anne	X
10	Kruse/Williams	Carter/Jacob	X
11	Leonard	Mike	X
12	Linnell	Karen	X
13	Lohr/Conley	Steve/Kim	X
14	Micciche	Peter	X
15	Moore	Chris	
16	Moore	Bryan	
17	Nakayama	Ian	X
18	O Keefe	John	
19	Perry	Steve	X
20	Rauch	Sam	X
21	Ringia	Adam	X
22	Rivers	Pat	X
23	Schaeffer	Timothy D.	X
24	Slager	Jake	X
25	Trushenski	Jesse	X

NFHP Staff:

- Daniel Wieferich

- Jason Olive
- Alex McOwen
- Ryan Roberts
- Kate Sherman
- Gary Whelan

- Mark Humpert
- Paul Dey
- Sharmila Jeppsen
- Jacob Williams
- Conor Bevan
- Therese Thompson

USFWS Staff:

- Eric MacMillan
- Trevor Luna
- Will Duncan
- Jessica Hogrefe
- Nathan Clifton
- Tim Loux

Beyond the Pond:

- Kelly Hepler
- Johnny LeCoq

Approved by Consensus:

- November 6, 2024 Board meeting agenda
- July NFHP Board meeting summary

FHP Coordinators:

- Lori Maloney
- Therese Thompson
- Sara Strassman
- Simen Kaalstad
- Todd Ewing
- Trent Dodson
- Doug Nygren
- Lisa Hollingsworth Segedy

Approved by Motion:

- To adopt the NFHP Code of Conduct – motion by Pat Rivers; seconded by: Mike Leonard
- To provide a NFHP Board letter of support for the IFC/AFS In Stream Flow and Water Conservation Training Center – motion by: Jesse Trushenski; seconded by: Stan Allen

Other Participants:

- Christopher Estes

**National Fish Habitat Virtual Board Meeting
Wednesday, November 6, 2024
1:00 PM ET – 4:30 PM ET**

[Webinar Link](#)

Meeting ID: 231 812 843 335 Passcode: j5jH3c

Time (EDT)	Agenda Item	Tab	Lead(s)
1:00 PM	<p>Welcome</p> <p><i>Desired Outcomes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board action to approve agenda and August meeting summary. 	1	Chair Robert Boyles & All Attendees

Robert Boyles welcome the Board and brought the meeting to order. He reminded the Board members that he will be transitioning into retirement in early 2024 after he hands the Chair position over to Tim Schaeffer. Robert emphasized that he will remain Board Chair for the next in-person meeting in January in Las Vegas, NV and will work with staff to transition leadership to Tim Schaeffer following that meeting and pending his SC DNR successor being confirmed. The Chair also noted that the meeting should adjourn by 4:30 PM ET.

1:10 PM **2025 Board Meeting Schedule Preview** 2 **Alex McOwen (NFHP Board Staff)**

Desired Outcomes:

- **Board awareness** of 2025 meeting schedule.

Alex McOwen reminded the Board of the next in-person meeting scheduled for January 28-30, 2025 Las Vegas NV. Hotel block information from the staff will be coming soon. Spring and summer 2025 virtual Board meeting dates have not yet been set and staff will be working with Tim to identify dates to send calendar invites. The second in-person meeting of 2025 will be held during the week of September 15-19 in Minneapolis, MN. This meeting will be held in conjunction with an FHP workshop and Pat Rivers offered to arrange a canoeing trip to the Boundary Waters for anyone who is interested.

1:15 PM **Beyond the Pond Update & Discussion** **Kelly Hepler (Chairman, Beyond the Pond Board)**

Desired Outcomes:

- **Board awareness and discussion** of Beyond the Pond staffing, Board plans, and next steps.

BtP Board Chair Kelly Hepler joined the meeting as a guest speaker with Johnny LeCoq to share some next steps and planning for Beyond the Pond. Kelly reminded the Board about the *Strategic by Nature* report generated in 2023 that made suggestions for Beyond the Pond operations and synthesized input from many sources via interviews. Kelly noted personal and professional challenges have delayed Beyond the Pond progress. He highlighted and commended Ryan Roberts for maintaining a valuable relationship with Bob Ziemer of Bass Pro Shops which has resulted in another \$500K donation to fund Fish Habitat Partnership projects. Emphasizing a “one team, one mission”, Kelly identified a need to reboot Beyond the Pond and clarify the roles and functions and the connection to NFHP. He expressed that he’d like to restore the connection between the two Boards by having 3 members from the NFHP Board as members on the Beyond the Pond Board.

Kelly shared that Therese Thompson is on a part-time, 2-year contract starting in December 2024 to support administrative, coordination, and facilitation needs for Beyond the Pond. Therese then shared the specific work projects they have identified for her to work on including: higher organizational coordination, strategic planning sessions for business plan, Beyond the Pond brand evaluation, fundraising and communication strategy, assisting with communication, and internal organizational plan (grants, budget, etc.).

Kelly noted that Beyond the Pond plans to seek external consultants for development of a fundraising plan and will be discussing overhead with Bob Ziemer and Doug Nygren and Ryan Roberts (currently charging 5% overhead on Bass Pro Shops funding).

- Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation has offered to share strategies with BtP in January 2025.
- **Seeking 3 volunteers to serve on the BtP Board by early 2025**
 - Jake Slager is unable to join in an official capacity
 - Jesse Trushenski would like to join BtP Board – will trade off her role on the NFHP SDC
 - **Let Robert and Ryan know if you are interested in joining the BtP Board**
 - Robert suggested Board leadership circle with Kelly and Johnny to provide feedback
- **Questions:**
 - Jake Slager would like to help further connect with Bass Pro
 - Do we have budget in place to cover this support? Where do these funds come from? Will come from 5% overhead from Bass Pro funds
 - Would like to have 1-2 FHP coordinators support BtP – important voice to include in these conversations

2:00 PM

Policy Committee Update

3

Ian Nakayama (TRCP,
Policy Committee
Chair)

Desired Outcomes:

- **Board awareness** of ACE Act Reauthorization and Policy Committee activities.
- **Update** on meetings with OMB regarding science and technical support funding for agencies.
- **Board awareness of** Policy Committee Terms of Reference document.

Ian Nakayama shared that we have seen an ACE Act reauthorization bill markup in House to modify the language on Congressional designation. He indicated that we are hoping the bill will pass during the lame duck and Ian and the Policy Committee will flag engagement opportunities for the Board. Ian also reported out on an October meeting the Policy Committee had with two budget examiners from Office of Management and Budget (USFS and USGS). Those meetings were scheduled to discuss getting the authorized scientific and technical assistance funds requested by all federal agencies outlined in the ACE Act (USFWS, NOAA, USGS, EPA, and USFS). Robert Boyles provided a high-level overview of NFHP and several FHP coordinators shared examples of how USFS and USGS support specific Fish Habitat Partnerships. The meeting went well and some follow up information was requested. Ian noted that we should expect to see the President's Budget request around May 2025 and there may be another opportunity to engage in January 2025 with the new, incoming administration.

Finally, the Policy Committee has completed their Terms of Reference document.

2:30 PM

BREAK

2:45 PM **NFHP Action Plan 3.0 Update**

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

Desired Outcomes:

- **Board discussion** of draft mission and goals.
- **Board awareness** of upcoming survey of Board members.

Jason Olive and Alex McOwen presented an update on the progress made by the Action Plan revision team since it was formed at the July Board meeting. The team is comprised of six Board members and three FHP coordinators who have been focused on revising the mission and goals of the 2012 NFHP Action Plan to start. Following this content, a survey will be sent to Board members and FHP coordinators to be **completed by 12/10**. This survey will gather input to further shape and develop the goals and objectives of the Action Plan.

- Tenets of NFHP are still the same
- **Questions:**
 - Will this have a time horizon? We expect to write SMART objectives, so will be time-bound. ACE Act reauthorization could drive that time horizon.
 - We will send the PPT with the survey – goals are also in the survey
 - Board can also develop a Board Work Plan that tiers from the Action Plan. Good for the Board to identify specific actions

3:00 PM **USFWS Update**

**Steve Guertin (USFWS,
NFHP Board Member)**

Desired Outcomes:

- **Board awareness** of USFWS FY 2025 budget outlook and FAC Program strategic plan development.

After break Steve Lohr, Peter Micciche, Carrie Robinson, and Sam Rauch joined the Board meeting.

Steve Guertin shared an update that the USFWS is preparing for the administration change. Review teams will share publicly available information on programs, etc and the new leadership team will be here after January 20th. As a reminder about the status of the Federal budget, we are on a continuing resolution (CR) through December 20, 2024. We are hearing that the CR may be extended through March. Latest House and Senate versions of USFWS budget may result in a 6-8% reduction and the FY25 NFHP project funding won't be available until we know the full budget in February or March 2025.

Steve also reminded the Board that the Fish and Aquatic Conservation Program is revising their Strategic Plan via facilitated input session for FHP coordinators and 2 designees from the Board on

11/8. The draft plan will be released in Spring 2025 and will be finalized in summer 2025. They will be preparing their FY26 budget request soon after new administration is in place. FY26 is the final year for BIL fish passage funding.

3:15 PM	Governance Committee Update	4	Doug Austen <i>(Governance Committee Chair)</i>
	<i>Desired Outcomes:</i>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board vote to adopt NFHP Code of Conduct. 		

Doug Austen shared an update on the NFHP Procedures Manual development. The Committee has received several of the other NFHP committee Terms of Reference and continues to document other annual processes in writing. Finally, the Governance Committee completed the NFHP Code of Conduct and the Board voted to adopt the Code of Conduct as drafted in Tab 4.

3:30 PM	Communications Committee Update	5	Pat Rivers <i>(MN DNR, Communications Committee Interim- Chair)</i>
	<i>Desired Outcomes:</i>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board awareness of committee plans for 2025. 		

Pat Rivers shared a few Communications updates with the Board. Peter Micciche joined the NFHP Communications Committee. Pat also shared a few website metrics and that NFHP gained 51 new NFHP followers on LinkedIn and that the Waters to Watch 2024 were released today (4). The Committee also completed their Terms of Reference document which was included in Tab 5.

3:45 PM	NOAA Update		Sam Rauch <i>(NOAA Fisheries)</i> and Carrie Robinson <i>(NOAA Fisheries)</i>
	<i>Desired Outcomes:</i>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board awareness of NOAA NFHP and round 3 of BIL/IRA NOAA funding opportunities. 		

Carrie Robinson, Director of NOAA's Office of Habitat Conservation, presented to the Board on the latest funding opportunities that are available to NFHP. These opportunities include:

- [NOAA NFHP Engaging Recreational Fishing Communities](#) (closes April 18, 2025)
- [Fish Passage NOFO](#) (closes February 10, 2025)
- [Tribal Fish Passage NOFO](#) (closes February 27, 2025)

Carrie addressed a few questions about the NOAA grants and emphasized that all unsuccessful applicants received a letter encouraging them to seek the opportunity to receive feedback from NOAA staff on their application. Chairman Boyles asked about the capacity of NOAA to get these agreements in place. Carrie clarified that NOAA underwent a transition to a new financial management system and grants management system last year which caused some delays.

4:00 PM	IFC/AFS Instream Flow & Water Level Conservation Training Center		Christopher Estes
	<i>Desired outcomes:</i>		

- **Board awareness** of the Center plan and concept.
- **Board vote** on providing a letter of support.

Christopher Estes presented to the Board an ongoing effort that he is working on with the American Fisheries Society, funded by a Multi-State Conservation Grant, to develop an In-Stream Flow Water & Water Level Conservation Training Center. This new center would train people in water research and management to achieve positive water outcomes for humans and wildlife. The final phase of its development is a business plan and an RFIQ for potential host institutions. Christopher requested that the Board consider writing a letter of support for the development of this center to add strength to future funding requests and diversify the list of parties who support this effort.

There was some Board member discussion on the need for this type of center, particularly for policymakers. The Board also discussed the role of advocacy versus education on these types of technical topics. Christopher clarified for the Board that no funding has been secured yet to fully fund the center. However, this letter would be in general support of the center, not a particular funding request.

4:15 PM **NFHP Board Executive Session**

Not needed.

4:30 PM **ADJOURN**

National Fish Habitat Partnership Board Endorsement of the Creation of an Integrated Interdisciplinary National Training, Research, & Development Center to support Ecologically Sustainable Water Conservation & Management

Established in 2006 and authorized by Congress in 2020 through the America's Conservation Enhancement Act¹ (ACE), the **National Fish Habitat Partnership** (NFHP) mission is to protect, restore, and enhance the nation's fish and aquatic communities through partnerships that foster voluntary fish habitat conservation and improve the quality of life for the American people. As specified in the ACE Act, NFHP is guided by a series of key purposes, but select among them are several that inextricably link fish habitat with instream flow and water level conservation. These include the purposes to:

1. Achieve measurable habitat conservation results through strategic actions of Fish Habitat Partnerships that lead to better fish habitat conditions and increased fishing opportunities by:
 - a. improving ecological conditions;
 - b. restoring natural processes;
 - c. preventing the decline of intact and healthy systems;
2. Establish a consensus set of national conservation strategies as a framework to guide future actions and investment by Fish Habitat Partnerships;
3. To fill gaps in the National Fish Habitat Assessment and the associated database of the National Fish Habitat Assessment to:
 - a. Empower strategic conservation actions supported by broadly available scientific information;
 - b. Integrate socioeconomic data in the analysis to improve the lives of humans in a manner consistent with fish habitat conservation goals.

To fully meet these purposes, it is clear that NFHP and its Fish Habitat Partnerships are among the water stakeholders requiring the training and support services that will be provided by the proposed [*National Center for Ecologically Sustainable Water Conservation and Management*](#) (Center) to empower them to effectively conserve adequate amounts of clean water required to sustain fish habitat and productivity in our nation's freshwater and estuarine habitats.

¹ Public Law 116-188, Title II

Therefore, the NFHP Board fully endorses the [IFC and AFS 2023 Center Feasibility Needs Assessment](#) (Feasibility Assessment) and its proposed path forward to develop the Center.

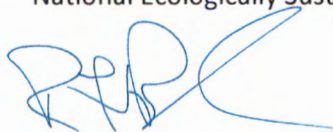
Background:

Between 1974 and 2000 the U.S. Department of the Interior’s Cooperative Instream Flow Service Group served as a clearinghouse and provided leadership, training, scientific and technical support services to agency professionals and a variety of other interested water use stakeholders involved in instream flow and water level conservation. Unfortunately, there has been no equivalent replacement established to provide these training and support services to fish and wildlife agency staff, water managers, and other water use stakeholders².

In 2020 the [Instream Flow Council](#) (IFC) and the [American Fisheries Society](#) (AFS) established a Steering Committee (SC) of experts who completed a [Feasibility Assessment](#) in 2023 that firmly established the need and pathway to provide a new interdisciplinary training, research, and development center (Center)³. This Center will provide these critical instream flow and water level conservation services based on the integration of eight interdisciplinary elements: hydrology, geomorphology, connectivity, water quality, biology, legal, institutional, and public involvement. The Feasibility Assessment proposed a training center design based upon a centralized, distributed network with a core staff housed at a central location, and perhaps several trainers operating on a regional basis. This approach would best serve the various needs of fish and wildlife agencies and other water use stakeholder interests. The proposed Center will support the integration of the conservation of adequate amounts of instream flows and water levels into all water management practices and uses. The Council and AFS are presently taking steps to establish a center in this format.

NFHP Endorsement:

The National Fish Habitat Board at their meeting on November 6, 2024, unanimously endorsed the efforts of the Instream Flow Council, the American Fisheries Society, and other partners to establish the National Ecologically Sustainable Water Level Conservation and Management Center.



Robert H. Boyles, Jr.
Chair, National Fish Habitat Partnership Board

² Water stakeholders include entities and individuals participating in or impacted by the interdisciplinary scientific, legal, institutional, and public involvement elements and processes that govern water allocation and use decisions and outcomes. Overarching socio-economic elements are also integrated.

³ [Instream Flow and Water Level Conservation \(IFWLC\) Training, Research and Development Center Multistate Conservation Grant \(MSCG\) Project – INSTREAM FLOW COUNCIL](#)

2025 Board Meeting Schedule

Date(s)	Location	Draft Topics to be Covered
January 28-30, 2025	Las Vegas, NV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NFHP Action Plan Update • Committee updates (<i>as needed</i>) • IOP Update • Field trip to Devil's Hole and Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge
June 10, 2025	Virtual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board vote on FY26 fish habitat conservation project list • SDC National Habitat Assessment update • Committee updates (<i>as needed</i>) • Fish Passage Task Force Update
Week of September 15 - 19 2025	Minneapolis, MN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FHP Workshop • NFHP Action Plan update • Committee updates (<i>as needed</i>) • Field trip TBD
December 2, 2025	Virtual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board vote on Revised NFHP Action Plan • Review draft Congressional report 2025 • Committee updates (<i>as needed</i>)

Interagency Operational Plan Update

Desired Outcome: Board awareness, review, and discussion of the chapter dealing with federal interagency coordination. Board awareness and discussion of timeline for completion and approval.

Background: This will be the first time the Board has received a draft copy of the portion of the IOP (attached below) that describes how federal agencies will coordinate with one another in accordance with the ACE Act. Staff will summarize what is included in the chapter.

Chairman Boyles met with USFWS Director Martha Williams and other staff last November and with USFS Director for Natural Resources Steve Lohr in January to discuss issues related to the IOP. Chairman Boyles will summarize those conversations.

The Board will be asked to decide whether to pursue additional information from the agencies prior to approval or to approve the IOP as written.

Staff Recommendation: Staff recommends the Board carefully review all sections of the IOP and decide how to proceed.

CHAPTER 4. FEDERAL AGENCY COLLABORATION STRUCTURE

The National Fish Habitat Partnership was created to promote interagency coordination around landscape-level aquatic habitat conservation work. The intent was to coordinate at all levels of government as well as the non-profit and private sector. There was (and is) a recognition among the conservation community that coordination among federal agencies is most critical given the broad scope of federal agency resource deployment in support of aquatic habitat conservation. This chapter outlines how a suite of federal agencies are collaborating to multiply their impact. A Federal Caucus made up of 19 agencies provided a forum for agency coordination during 2005-2015. Then, in 2022, the Federal Interagency Fish Passage Task Force was created to strategically deliver the significant investment of federal funds through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) that had the potential to support fish passage and aquatic connectivity. The Task Force has brought together staff and leadership from 13 federal agencies to better coordinate delivery of fish passage and aquatic connectivity actions related to the BIL funds. The BIL funds are temporary, but accomplishments achieved under BIL have demonstrated the significant benefits that can be achieved through improved communication and collaboration among federal agencies.

The Task Force has made great strides in developing efficient forums for coordination under BIL, and the Task Force intends to serve a similar role after BIL funds have been expended. In future years, the Task Force intends to expand their scope beyond longitudinal connectivity for fish passage to achieve holistic connectivity goals across diverse habitats for fish and wildlife species, including, but not limited to, streams, lakes, floodplains, and estuaries.

Some key operational elements to the success of the Task Force are the following:

- Retaining a full-time coordinator
- Developing an annual work plan (strategic action agenda) to articulate key priorities for the coming year
- Publishing an annual accomplishments report
- Meeting regularly through virtual and in person meetings and workshops
- Engaging non-federal partners through focused multi-stakeholder workshops and other venues

The Task Force Coordinator will seek further opportunities to engage the NFHP community in efforts to advance collaborative aquatic habitat conservation. This will include providing updates to the NFHP Board twice per calendar year on Task Force activities, and providing copies of the annual work plan and accomplishments report to the Board and FHPs. In addition, the Coordinator will provide responses to the Board's questions and concerns related to federal interagency collaboration in support of fish habitat conservation. Further, recognizing that FHPs serve as a key convening space for regional fish habitat conservation efforts among federal, state, and NGO partners, the Coordinator will request their assistance with Task Force related matters that are regional and multijurisdictional in nature.

2026 Action Plan Update

Desired Outcome: Board awareness of NFHP Internal survey results (see below), details on current external partners survey, and general Action Plan development progress.

Background: The Action Plan Team conducted a survey of Board members (n = 26), FHP Coordinators (n = 19), and Board staff (n = 6) during November 2024-January 2025. 27 total responses (53%) were received.

The Action Plan Team is currently conducting a survey of key NFHP partner organizations to obtain input that will help in developing meaningful SMART objectives.

The Action Plan Team has started writing the introductory materials for the Plan, largely updating verbiage from previous plans.

2026 NFHP ACTION PLAN INTERNAL SURVEY RESULTS SUMMARY

Response Rates

Board: N = 13 (50%)

FHP Coordinators: N = 11 (55%)

Staff: N = 3 (50%)

Overall: N = 27 (53%)

1) What role should NFHP play as a national entity addressing fish habitat conservation?

THEMES

A national voice for habitat

A convener/coordinator of all potential partners

A "cheer leader"

Go after funding

Primary source of information on fish habitat conservation

Set national priorities

2) What specific actions can the NFHP Board take over the next five years to effectively support the Fish Habitat Partnerships?

THEMES

Communications/marketing

Funding

Assessment/ S&D

Beyond the Pond

Policy/Hill Visits/ Connect with new Administration

Advocacy with state F&W agencies

3) In your experience, what has NFHP done well?

THEMES

Provided "scaffolding" for FHPs

Getting ACE Act passed

Project tracking database

Raised awareness of habitat problems

Leveraged funding

4) In your experience, what has NFHP done poorly?

THEMES

Not enough funding

Communications/marketing- no increased visibility outside of fisheries profession

Beyond the Pond

Assessment- Western habitats not accurately characterized

Cumbersome and bureaucratic processes

Hasn't secured durable buy-in from federal agencies

5) In light of your answer to Question 1, what are the indicators that we should measure to determine whether or not we have been successful?

THEMES

Increased funding

Increased partner organizations

Increased use of the assessment

Increased "mentions" of NFHP by agencies and NGOs on websites, etc.

Project-related metrics (e.g., number completed, measured impact to resource)

Partner satisfaction survey results

NFHP 20th Anniversary (2026) Board Planning Session

Background:

The National Fish Habitat Partnership will be celebrating its 20th Anniversary in 2026. There will be a number of events where we will look to have a presence to highlight the National Fish Habitat Partnership, its history, and accomplishments.

Planning Session Purpose:

The purpose of the planning session is to get a sense of the Board regarding their thoughts on elements that should be included in the Anniversary celebration and where we should put our efforts.

The NFHP Staff will split the Board into groups for discussion and the focus will be on the below four questions. The staff will take notes and facilitate discussions, themes, and ideas around the questions below. Please, put some thought into your answers in advance of the planning session.

Questions:

1. What opportunities, trends, or needs should we explore to increase relevancy and/or impact?
2. How can NFHP better engage non-traditional (e.g., foundations, corporations) partners?
3. What message or theme should we communicate to our community or stakeholders as part of this celebration?
4. What are the outlets (online, in-person, events, etc.) that should be targeted during the 20th anniversary?

Report Out:

There will be a “Report Out” from the session during the Communications Committee update schedule for Wednesday, January 29th.

Science and Data Committee Report

Desired Outcomes:

- **Board awareness** of progress on the 2025 National Fish Habitat Assessment (Assessment).

Status of NFHP Assessment 1-17-2025

Contacts: Dana Infante (infanted@msu.edu), Megan Malish (malishme@msu.edu) or Jared Ross (rossjare@msu.edu) for more information

Conterminous US Assessment

- With support from AFWA, we've updated environmental datasets and stream fish assemblage data necessary for assessment for the conterminous US. Since October 2024, additional datasets were identified and incorporated into our predictor and response databases. This includes a classification of soil drainage, road salt estimates, and additional fish sampling data from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy. The environmental data are analysis ready, and so are the fish data. We met with the NFHP Science and Data committee in December 2024 and presented our approach for assessing fish habitat using the environmental and fish data that we've compiled.
- Jared Ross has been developing an analytical approach and updating coding to generate assessment scores to build on a modification of the approach applied in 2015 and a project for the Mississippi River (Ross et al. 2023; <https://doi.org/10.3390/w15132400>). The MSU team met to develop a timeline for working through the next year, and presented this timeline to the Science and Data committee in December 2024 to review and approve this approach.
- Megan Malish (post doc at MSU) has investigated four stream flow datasets for possible use in an assessment context. These include evaluating an Index of Hydrologic Alteration (McManamay et al. 2022) available for all streams of the conterminous US. Dr. Malish is additionally evaluating the feasibility of using a database of monthly streamflow estimates for the Conterminous United States (Miller et al. 2018). Additionally, she has initiated a regional pilot study to investigate relationships between stream flow and fishes that will inform how we may implement flow into the 2025 assessment. We are also exploring whether or not we might use projected stream flows to anticipate future changes in fish habitat with changes in climate. This may be beyond the scope of the analysis, but our evaluation could yield insights for future works.
- Maggie Haite (GIS technician at MSU) gave a presentation on fish data for the conterminous US at the American Fisheries Society annual meeting.
- We are currently evaluating the literature to identify efforts to conduct large-scale assessments and conduct analyses to evaluate relationships between landscape factors and stressors over large extents. Based on findings we may modify some aspects of our assessment approach (e.g., how we run threshold analyses, how we control for natural variation), and expect to have this step complete by February.

Alaska

- We have identified updates to environmental data and new data sets that have been developed since 2015. We plan to continue this through 2025, including attempting to identify fish data.

Hawaii

- We have identified updates to environmental data and new data sets that have been developed since 2015. We plan to continue this through 2025, including attempting to clarify if new fish data have been collected since 2015 that could be used for assessment.
- Jared Ross gave a presentation in a Hawaii focused session at AFS that updated an analysis to investigate linkages between inland and coastal environmental predictors with reef habitats in Maui, Hawaii and provided context for how these data were developed through the 2015 NFHP assessment. This presentation led to multiple discussions with session organizers and others about possible updated data since 2015.

Other Regions and Other Data

- We have identified updates to environmental data that have been developed since a previous effort to compile data for Puerto Rico in 2012. We also had a call with a colleague who has a territory wide fish dataset to discuss collaboration for analysis. Members from the lab will be attending the Society for Freshwater Science conference in Puerto Rico in May 2025 and plan to discuss this collaboration further.
- We had a meeting with colleagues from The Nature Conservancy to discuss their recently-developed resilience index for fresh waters. This index will likely provide valuable information to support conservation decision making when used along with NFHP current condition assessment scores, and we anticipate investigating patterns in the index and assessment scores when scores are complete.
- We had a meeting with developers of CreelCat, a dataset characterizing locations of angling catches across the US. We learned that currently this dataset focuses primarily on catches for inland lakes, but this may change in the future.
- We are exploring the utility of the USDA Cropland Data Layer (<https://croplandcros.scinet.usda.gov/>), a tree regrowth duration dataset (<https://doi.org/10.1080/15481603.2022.2083790>), and a satellite derived irrigation dataset (<https://doi.org/10.5194/essd-13-5689-2021>) for use in an assessment context.
- We have submitted a formal data request to the NRCS to obtain information on agricultural best management practices that have been implemented across the Conterminous United States. If we're granted access to these data, we will explore their utility in an assessment context.

Inland Lakes

- Through a project supported by the Midwest Glacial Lakes Partnership, we have environmental data for lakes >1 ha across the conterminous US.

General

- Funding from FWS has become available to MSU on 12/1/2024; and will support the bulk of analyses to generate assessment scores.

- Joel Betts (graduate student at MSU) has been working on a review of socioeconomic datasets in regions or across the US that could be helpful in an assessment context.
- Dana Infante (PI) gave a presentation at AFS on how measures of resilience could be incorporated into large scale assessments.

SCIENCE AND DATA COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE AND OPERATION

NATIONAL SCIENCE AND DATA COMMITTEE PURPOSE:

Provide scientific and data management expertise and oversight to advance the goals and objectives of the National Fish Habitat Board (Board) in a scientifically sound and strategic manner.

COMMITTEE MEMBER DUTIES AND ROLES

1. Provide advice to the Board on setting future science and data priorities.
2. Provide advice to the Board on setting national conservation priorities.
3. Develop strategies for executing and implementing Board science and data priorities by ensuring the direction, purpose, and needs for future national assessments are well-defined.
4. Oversee, coordinate, and review the development of the national fish habitat assessment including, but not limited to, assisting the assessment teams with relevant contacts, data acquisition, supporting data systems, and expertise as needed.
5. Provide expert advice and support on habitat and data issues to the Board, National Assessment Teams, and Fish Habitat Partnerships (FHP) to ensure scientific data conformity and coordination between FHPs, partner agencies, and the National Science and Data Committee. Duties may include development and review of:
 - a. Scientific and data analysis methods
 - b. Data transfer methods, standards, and policies
6. Oversee, coordinate, and review the development of the NFHP Project Tracking System.
7. Review FHP science and data work plans as requested by and for the Board.
 - a. Review FHP assessments, project effectiveness monitoring, data systems, and other science and data efforts as requested by the Board
 - b. Review proposed new FHP science and data applications as requested by the Board
8. Each member could have liaison opportunities between the National Science and Data Committee and specified FHPs to facilitate information exchange and communication of science and data efforts between groups
9. Assist the Committee's co-chairs in developing needed materials for annual updates to the Board on accomplishments and progress towards meeting significant science and data objectives.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

- a. Total committee size will be up to 25 individuals. The committee will strive to have the following representation:
 - a. At minimum 10 members having greater habitat science or watershed modeling expertise
 - b. At minimum 5 members having greater data science expertise
 - c. A minimum of four fish habitat partnership representatives. Ideally 8 representatives from the FHPs including two from each Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' regional associations. Requests for FHP participation shall align with timeline and objectives outlined in the Science Assessment Strategy, to further ensure the direction, purpose, and needs are addressed.

SCIENCE AND DATA COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE AND OPERATION

- d. At minimum 2 board members or proxies
- b. The committee will strive to maintain a diverse membership in terms of fish habitat experiences and expertise with the goal to ensure expert opinion is available for various habitat types across different geographic regions. The committee will strive for diverse backgrounds ranging in species management, data management, data processing, scientific analyses, and socioeconomic analysis.
- c. Committee members should have established relationships with partners and stakeholders that can facilitate advancing the Committee's objectives.
- d. Committee appointments will be two years. Terms of individual committee members will be reviewed every 2 years by the Committee co-chairs to ensure member's expertise aligns with the National Science and Data Committee's tasks assigned by the Board to implement the Science and Data Strategy. Members may be reappointed if the committee member has the desire, expertise, and ability to continue participation in the Committee's work.
- e. Membership selection shall occur through an iterative process between both of the Committee co-chairs and the potential participants to ensure expertise and committee membership structure and terms are fully considered.

COMMITTEE CO-CHAIRS

1. The committee will be co-chaired by two individuals. One chair will have more of an emphasis on science and the other chair will have more of an emphasis on data. At minimum, one of the co-chairs should be from a state fisheries agency or fish habitat partnership.
2. Committee co-chair appointments will be approved by the Board Chair on a three-year term. Co-chair appointments will be evaluated by the Board Chair every three years. Terms between two co-chairs will be staggered to ensure continuity.
3. Co-chairs are a part of the Board staff and are expected to attend all Board and Board staff meetings, including EXCOM meetings where co-chairs will act as liaisons to provide updates on committee tasks and priorities.
4. Both co-chairs will share in all of the tasks required to properly operate the Science and Data Committee including providing, at minimum, annual updates to the Board on accomplishments and progress towards meeting significant science and data objectives.

MEETINGS AND DECISIONS

1. The Science and Data Committee will strive to meet face-to-face at least bi-annually as a group.
2. The committee will conduct at minimum quarterly conference calls to conduct business.
3. The committee will routinely hold a conference call or meeting scheduled at minimum 1 month prior to each Board meeting. Timing and frequency will provide the committee opportunity to assist with development and review of informational and decisional materials presented to the Board.
4. For effective transparency and communication, items requiring Science and Data Committee review, comment, and decision will be documented.

SCIENCE AND DATA COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE AND OPERATION

- a. Documentation will include: background on the issue; decision options; decision-making process; and final decision.

Governance Committee Update

Desired Outcome: Board awareness of committee progress towards a full NFHP Procedures manual and Board approval of shifting Board seats post reauthorization (Councils/Commissions/Commercial Fishing). Also, we’d like to have a discussion about a future Board evaluation.

Background on Board Member Seats:

Section 203 of ACE Act Reauthorization states “The Regional Fishery Management Councils established by section 302(a)(1) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1852(a)(1)); and the Marine Fish Commissions.”

Suggested shift in Board membership:

<i>Board Member</i>	<i>Currently Representing</i>	<i>Representing (2025 onwards)</i>
Stan Allen	Councils & Commissions	Marine Fisheries Commissions
Chris Moore	Commercial fisheries	Fishery Management Councils
<i>Vacancy to be filled</i>		Commercial fisheries

The Governance Committee seeks a motion to approve this suggested shift in Board membership to address the new provisions in the reauthorized ACE Act.

Background on Board Evaluation:

In 2013, the NFHP Board underwent an evaluation of their membership and function. This evaluation took the form of a survey to FHPs, Board staff, state fish chiefs, and leads of federal agencies involved in NFHP requesting participants to rate the Board’s performance on their role outlined in the Action Plan.

As the Governance Committee developed their Terms of Reference document, the concept of a Board evaluation arose and could be included if the Board is interested in pursuing another evaluation in the near future. The Governance Committee would like to discuss this concept with the Board to identify interest and the desired frequency for performing another Board evaluation.

Election of Board Member Representing Tribes in Alaska

Desired Outcome: The Board will vote to elect one of four candidates provided by the Secretary of the Interior to serve a three-year term representing Tribes in Alaska.

Background: The ACE Act outlines membership categories for the National Fish Habitat Board as well as how certain representatives are selected to serve. For the two seats representing Tribes, the Secretary of the Interior has the responsibility to supply a minimum of three names to the Board for consideration. Outgoing Secretary Haaland nominated four individuals who represent Tribes in Alaska. Information on each candidate was provided to the Board members via email.

DESERT FISH FIELD TRIP- JANUARY 30, 2025

Ash Meadows NWR and Devil's Hole Unit of Death Valley National Park

People should also be prepared that it is a short walk from the road to Devils Hole and the terrain down to the water is moderately steep and rocky. Nothing extreme and many do just fine with it in tennis shoes. But if anyone has ankle/knee/mobility issues, they may want to bring heftier footwear.

7:00 am – Meet in Hyatt parking lot

7:15 am – Depart Hyatt

9:00 am – Arrive at Devils Hole, meet with Kevin Wilson (Supervisory Aquatic Ecologist, National Park Service), tour Devils Hole

10:30 am – Tour of Ash Meadows Fish Conservation Facility, meet with Olin Feuerbacher (Facility Manager)

11:30 am – Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center visit, lunch (**provided**), and tour of Crystal Spring

2:00 pm – Tour Point of Rocks

2:30 pm – Depart back to Vegas

4:00 pm – Arrive back at Hyatt

IMPORTANT BIOSECURITY INSTRUCTIONS FROM NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

We have a strict decontamination protocol for people visiting Devils Hole up close. Please make sure the clothes and shoes you wear are clean. Especially your shoes. They should not have been worn near or in another aquatic ecosystem. You can freeze your shoes for 24 hours if you need. You can also clean

with a bleach solution of 10%. If you use chemicals to decontaminate your shoes please be sure to rinse them with plenty of water.

