



**National Fish Habitat Virtual Board Meeting Summary  
Tuesday, September 12, 2023 (1:00 PM – 4:30 PM) EST**

**Zoom link:** <https://fishwildlife-org.zoom.us/j/82854734635?pwd=N21aQWIWMDZNVVhNa3AzSDRsbmFSUT09>

	<b>Last Name</b>	<b>First Name</b>	<b>Present?</b>
1	Allen	Stan	X
2	Austen	Doug	X
3	Booth	Austin	X
4	Boyles	Robert	X
5	Cantrell	Chris	X
6	Eischeid	Ted	-
7	Gilliland	Gene	X
8	Guertin	Steve	X
9	Conley/Harper	Kimberly/Rob	X
10	Kinsinger/Beard	Anne/Doug	X
11	Kruse	Carter	X
12	LeCoq	John	X
13	Leonard/Chester	Mike/Annie	X
14	Linnell	Karen	-
15	Moore	Chris	X
16	Moore	Bryan	X
17	Perry	Steve	X
18	Plumer	Christy	X
19	Rauch/Meckley	Sam/Kara	X
20	Ringia	Adam	X
21	Rivers	Pat	X
22	Schaeffer	Timothy D.	X
23	Singler	Amy	X
24	Slager	Jake	X
25	Trushenski	Jesse	-

**Other Attendees:**

- Jason Olive (NFHP Staff)
- Alex Atkinson (NFHP Staff)
- Jonathan Watson (NFHP Staff – on detail)
- Kate Sherman (NFHP Staff)
- Gary Whelan (NFHP Staff)
- Daniel Wieferich (NFHP Staff)
- Christopher Estes
- Trevor Luna (USFWS)
- Lori Maloney (EBTJV)
- Therese Thompson (WNTI)
- Andrew Wilkins
- Michelle Bachman (NEFMC)
- Chris Haak
- Laurel Smith
- Doug Nygren (RFHP)
- Will Duncan
- Joe Nohner (MGLP)
- Jessica Coakley (MAFMC)
- Tori Kentner (MAFMC)
- Melissa Smith (KPFHP)
- Todd Ewing (SARP)
- Holly Steindorf (CFPF)

- Theresa Weber
- Jennifer Graves (DFHP)
- Sara Strassman (DARE)
- Simen Kaalstad (ACFHP)
- Rick Westerhof (GLFHP)
- Gordon Smith (HFHP)
- Debbie Hart (SEAKFHP)

**Approved by Motion:**

- September 2023 Meeting Agenda – approved as amended, by consensus.
- June Meeting Summary – approved as amended, by consensus.
- Endorse the 2023 Waters to Watch list – motion by Doug Austen, second by Steve Perry.
- Endorse the FHP /Board member buddy system – motion: Steve Perry, second by: Johnny LeCoq
- Endorse the Partnership Committee's Guidance Document – motion: Pat Rivers, second by Chris Moore

**Meeting Summary:**

Time (PM ET)	Agenda Item	Board Tab	Lead(s)
1:00	<p><b>Welcome &amp; Attendance</b></p> <p><i>Desired outcomes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Welcome</b> new Board members.</li> <li>• <b>Board action</b> to approve the September meeting agenda.</li> <li>• <b>Board action</b> to approve the June meeting summary.</li> </ul>	Tab 1	<b>Robert Boyles</b> ( <i>Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Board Chair</i> ) & <b>Board Staff</b>

The meeting began by the Chairman calling the meeting to order and the staff taking attendance. The Board welcomed its newest member Jake Slager, who is serving in the corporate industry board seat and is a senior sales executive at the Coca-Cola Company. Jake highlighted his personal connection to outdoor recreation as well as his professional work focusing on sustainable water use in his introduction. Stan Allen requested a modification to the agenda – Board endorsement of Partnerships Committee “Guidance Document”. The agenda was approved as amended. The June meeting summary was approved as amended (Pat Rivers name appeared twice in attendance table). Other updates include introducing Jonathan Watson (NOAA Fisheries), who will be serving in Alex (Atkinson) McOwen’s role as the NOAA Fisheries Board staff member while she is on detail for the next four months. The Chairman also highlighted Callie McMunigal’s contribution to NFHP as she departs for a new role within USFWS. Callie served at USFWS regional FHP coordinator in Region 5 (New England/ mid-Atlantic) for the past \_\_ years and the Chairman thanked her for many years of service in support of NFHP.

1:10	<p><b>Board Reminders &amp; Board Member Terms</b></p> <p><i>Desired outcomes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Board awareness</b> of NFHP calendar.</li> <li>• <b>Board awareness</b> of upcoming expiring Board terms and calendar for future Board member recruitment.</li> </ul>	Tab 2	<b>Alex Atkinson</b> ( <i>NOAA Fisheries, Board Staff</i> ) & <b>Ryan Roberts</b> ( <i>AFWA, Board Staff</i> )
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Alex (Atkinson) McOwen, Board staff (NOAA Fisheries), reviewed the upcoming expiring Board terms and the plan and timing for new Board member recruitment. The Chairman will send a letter to the 9 members whose terms are up for renewal following this meeting. For those who intend to continue to serve, they should notify the Chair at least 30 days prior to the fall Board meeting, sooner if possible. For the upcoming appointments in the regional AFWA associations, Julie Carter will be representing WAFWA beginning in December, taking over for Chris Cantrell. The Chairman thanked Chris for his years of service on the NFHP Board. Also, NEAFWA reappointed Tim Schaeffer to the NFHP Board. In the case of a vacancy, the Chair will make an open solicitation at least 60 days prior to term expiration, which occurs at the end of the month/year specified on the [NFHP webpage](#). Letters of interest and CV's should be received at least 30 days prior to the Spring Board Meeting and staff will distribute to the Board at least 21 days prior. The Executive Committee will present candidates at the Spring Board Meeting prior to voting. As a reminder, all terms have been standardized to begin in February to facilitate this process.

There was discussion of the appointment voting process, which requires 2/3 vote of members of the NFHP Board (26 members). Because the ACE act stipulates that "Board members continue to serve until replaced," the Board discussed the potential for individuals to recuse themselves during votes on their own reappointment. Those reappointments could be handled first, followed by new appointments to ensure compliance with the ACE Act requirements throughout the voting process. Adam Ringia reminded the Board that the process for the Tribal representative seats should allow adequate time, potentially up to one year in advance of vacancy. There was additional Board discussion of the re-nomination process and Board members shared concepts for consideration. This could include allowing Board Members to serve for two terms, after which they would have to re-apply for their seat. Tribal, state, and federal seats will be addressed separately, in accordance with the ACE Act. The Governance Committee will consider this discussion during development of draft by-laws (see Governance Committee summary below) and further discussion is planned for the next Board Meeting.

Finally, the schedule for the rest of this calendar year includes the following items:

- Waters to Watch announced – September 22
- FHP Calls – Oct 4 and Nov 8
- FHP Coordinator Workshop – Dec 4-5
- NFHP Board Meeting – Dec 5-7

1:25

**USFWS Update**

*Desired outcomes:*

- **Board awareness** of USFWS feedback from Board FY24 proposed project list.

**Steve Guertin** (*USFWS, Board member*)

Steve Guertin announced that the FY24 NFHP project list was approved by the Department of the Interior Assistant Secretary of Fish and Wildlife and Parks, Shannon Estenoz. The letter to the Board from Assistant Secretary Estenoz was sent to Chairman Boyles yesterday. She commended the Board for continuing to engage partners to address fish habitat needs, and commended FHPs for doing their best to meet ACE Act requirements and partner with Tribes.

Steve announced that the Federal Interagency Fish Passage Task Force will be hosting a partner

workshop, co-hosted with NFHP, in Charleston, SC the same week as the December NFHP Board meeting. This workshop is a follow-up to the BIL fish-passage partner workshop that was held at NCTC in July 2022. Shannon Boyles (USFWS) is coordinating the Task Force’s activities, including the workshop. It is being held during the same week as the NFHP Board meeting to increase opportunities for engagement with NFHP.

Steve announced that the next NOFO for USFWS BIL Fish Passage funds will be released this fall. He noted that BIL provided \$200M to the USFWS for barrier removal for fish passage program, and the Service has awarded \$73M already. Steve reminded the group that it is not too early to start coordinating with USFWS Regional Fish Passage Program Coordinators on project ideas.

Steve gave a brief update on the FY24 budget for NFHP. A \$500k increase was requested in the President’s budget but was not included in the House or Senate markups, so we expect to be at \$7.1M. It appears likely that there will be a Continuing Resolution until a larger deal is agreed upon by Congress. The Fiscal Responsibility Act, signed in June 2023, prescribes that if regular appropriation bills are not passed by January 1, 2024, an across-the-board cut of 1% will be enacted for all agency budgets.

1:40	<p><b>Northeast Regional Habitat Assessment Update</b></p> <p><i>Desired outcomes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Board awareness</b> of the recent completion of the assessment and its results and impacts.</li> </ul>	Tab 3	<p><b>Jessica Coakley</b> (<i>Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council</i>) and <b>Tori Kentner</b> (<i>Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council</i>)</p>
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Jessica Coakley (MAFMC) and Tori Kentner (MAFMC) presented an update on the development of the Northeast Regional Habitat Assessment, the latest marine assessment product that was supported by resources from NOAA and undertaken by a large and diverse team. The project team pursued four actions to meet habitat science needs: (1) Inshore fish habitat assessment (fish distribution and habitat), (2) Habitat vulnerability in response to climate change, (3) Spatial descriptions in offshore area, (4) Decision support tools. The results of this work are available through the RShiny app. For more information, see: [nrha.shinyapps.io/dataexplorer](http://nrha.shinyapps.io/dataexplorer)

2:10	<p><b>Preview of December (In-Person) Board Meeting</b></p> <p><i>Desired outcomes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Board awareness</b> and update on December National Fish Habitat Board Meeting.</li> <li>● <b>Board awareness</b> of FHP Workshop planning.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Robert Boyles</b> (<i>Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Board Chair</i>)</p>
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Chairman Boyles previewed the next Board meeting scheduled for December 5-7 at Shimano in Ladson, SC. That will be hosted immediately following the FHP Coordinator Workshop from December 4-5 to be hosted at the Embassy Suites in Charleston, SC. The overall schedule for the week includes:

- Monday (12/4) – FHP workshop all day
- Tuesday (12/5) – Half-day Board meeting. There will also be a half-day BIL workshop in downtown Charleston, and half-day FHP workshop. Travel accommodations will be available for FHP coordinators to attend portions of each meeting.
- Wednesday (12/6) – Board meeting all day at Shimano in Ladson. A full day BIL workshop is also planned in downtown Charleston. Travel accommodations will be available for FHP coordinators to attend portions of each meeting.
- Thursday (12/7) – a site visit to a SARP oyster restoration site. The Chairman extended thanks to SC DNR for allowing us to use their boats to access the site. There will also be a BIL on that date with details forthcoming.

A block of rooms is reserved (details to follow with meeting summary) and Board members are responsible reserve their own accommodations.

2:20	<p><b>World Fisheries Congress Update</b>  <i>Desired outcomes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Board awareness and discussion of</b> NFHP presence at upcoming 2024 World Fisheries Congress.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Doug Austen</b> (<i>AFS, NFHP Board Member</i>)</p>
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Doug Austen (AFS) highlighted the [next World Fisheries Congress](#), which will be hosted in Seattle, WA from March 3-9, 2024. There will be a plenary from Federal agencies and fisheries leaders across North America. Several universities will also have a large presence to showcase educational opportunities. Overall attendance is expected to be 2,000 with approximately 1,300 abstracts anticipated. AFS will work in close coordination with WFC in development of this meeting. This will be an excellent opportunity to get the NFHP message out to a worldwide audience.

2:25-2:35 **BREAK**

2:35 – 2:45	<p><b>FY25 FHP Scoring Rubric</b>  <i>Desired outcomes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Board awareness</b> of the updated FHP rubric for FY25 scoring.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Stan Allen</b> (<i>PSMFC, Board Review Team Lead</i>) &amp; <b>Bryan Moore</b> (<i>TU, Board Review Team Lead</i>)</p>
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Stan Allen (PSMFC) and Bryan Moore (TU) reviewed the updates made to the FHP Fish Habitat Conservation Project scoring rubric in collaboration with the Board Review Team. These were presented during the most-recent FHP coordination call held August 31 and are still being finalized by the Board Review Team. The Board Chair noted that we are well on target to have next round proceed smoothly and thanked everyone for their efforts work to ensure consistency across project awards.

**Board Committee Updates**

2:45

**Communications Committee**

Tab 4 **John LeCoq** (*Fishpond,  
Communications Committee Chair*)

*Desired outcomes:*

- **Board awareness and vote** on 2023 of Waters to Watch nominations.
- **Board awareness** of Communications Committee updates.

John LeCoq provided an update the Board about the 2023 Waters to Watch campaign project list and requested a motion, which The Board approved, to endorse the list. The Waters to Watch will be announced during National Hunting and Fishing Day on September 23, 2023. John noted that the annual report is slated to be completed at the end of the September. The Communications Committee will also send out a request soliciting FHPs to join the Communications Committee. John also noted that the committee is currently focused on planning FHP workshop through coordination with FHP coordinators and Board staff. Stan Allen commented that the timeline for Waters to Watch was short and suggested that we allot additional time in the future to allow FHPs to go through their review channels. Ryan Roberts noted that we were on a similar timeline as previous years, but will provide more time next year on the front end to think about the projects and the nomination period.

2:55

**Policy Committee**

**Tim Schaeffer** (*PA Fish & Boat  
Commission, NFHP Policy Committee  
Chair*)

*Desired outcomes:*

- **Board awareness** of Policy Committee activities and discussions.
- **Board awareness** of benefits to estimating of Federal agency activities contributing to NFHP in support of Sections 206 & 212 of the ACE Act.
- **Board awareness** of ACE Act reauthorization budget.

Tim Schaeffer, chair of NFHP Policy Committee, provided an update on the committees' discussions and upcoming activities. Tim welcomed Austin Booth to the committee, as well as Ali Schwaab of AFWA, who will attend meetings. The committee is still seeking an FHP representative for the committee. The Policy Committee is planning on making visits to Capitol Hill in the fall of 2023 and the spring of 2024 to raise awareness of NFHP with current authorizing committee staff and begin ACE Act reauthorization discussions. The Committee is drafting talking points for these visits, which will be shared with the NFHP Board and can be used by NFHP partners if/when they make Hill visits. The Committee is also working with the Partnerships Committee to survey FHPs about ACE Act challenges.

During the June Board meeting, the Committee raised the question of whether or not the 5 Federal agencies authorized to receive scientific and technical assistance funds have requested the \$400K. Thus far, the USFWS is the only agency that has requested and received the \$400K in scientific and technical assistance funds, however, other agencies provide support to NFHP through other avenues without requesting the technical assistance. The Committee would like to share information with the authorizing committees on

the current staff and programmatic resources provided by the federal agencies engaged with NFHP. This will help to support not only a reauthorization request of funding for scientific and technical assistance for the 5 key federal agencies named in the ACE Act (NFHCTPA) but also bolster our pitch that this program is a growing success and additional federal resources are needed to leverage the non-federal commitments of time and funding provided to this program. In order to provide this information, the policy committee and Robert are interested in a back-of-the-envelope estimation of federal agencies existing support of NFHP. There was discussion among the Board about the request. NOAA expressed that they would provide examples of how the agency supports NFHP and express support themselves, but they will not provide a full accounting of estimated dollars that support NFHP. USFS agreed with NOAA's approach. Robert will follow up this discussion with a formal request for information via email.

Tim requested that the Board discuss potential levels for an ACE Act reauthorization budget request. He highlighted the current funding level written into the Act (\$7.2 million in project and operations funding and a separate budget for \$2 million in Federal agency scientific and technical support). He also highlighted that in FY 23, 48 projects proposed by FHPs went unfunded, which equated to approximately \$3 million in additional funds needed. ACE Act re-authorization provides an opportunity to request a larger budget. There was discussion among the Board and general support for an increased budget request. A request of \$3 million in addition to what is already outlined is just a start, there is also a need to increase operational support funding, and there are additional projects available by FHPs that are not submitted to the Board. There is a clear return on investment with additional support of FHPs. The Board noted that there needs to be a balance between budget request and what can realistically be implemented on the ground by FHPs. This topic will be re-visited at the next Board meeting in December.

3:35

**Partnerships Committee**

*Desired outcomes:*

- **Board awareness** of the FHP Buddy system.
- **Board awareness** of Partnerships Committee Guidance Document.

Tab 5

**Stan Allen** (*PSMFC, Partnerships Committee Co-Chair*) & **Joe Nohner** (*MGLP Coordinator, NFHP Partnerships Committee Co-Chair*)

Joe Nohner presented the concept of the Board/FHP "buddy system." Stan Allen noted that he has a similar connection with an FHP, described the benefits of such relationships, and provided some examples of what this involvement could look like (e.g., attending an FHP annual meeting). The Board approved the motion to endorse this "buddy system" as presented. The Partnerships Committee will work to develop this system in the coming weeks and request Board Members provide updates at the December Board Meeting.

Stan Allen informed the Board about the Committee's newly updated guidance document that outlines Committee operations and decision-making processes. This document could serve as a template for other Board committees. The Board approved the motion to endorse this guidance document.

There was discussion among the Board concerning FHP operational funding. This has not been updated since 2018 and, if adjusted for core inflation, would be approximately \$97k in today's dollars. There was discussion of employing language setting a cap for operational funding (i.e., "not to exceed") to provide FHPs with flexibility to set their budgets based on available matching funds. Further discussions is needed at Partnership Committee level along with support from USFWS for any change. Board Members should anticipate a motion at the next Board meeting in December. This would represent good timing for FHPs

3:45 **Governance Committee**

*Desired outcomes:*

- **Board awareness** of progress on NFHP Board by-laws and Board member guidance.

**Doug Austen** (*AFS, NFHP Governance Committee Chair*)

Doug Austen presented and overview of the draft NFHP Bylaws on which the Governance Committee (GC) has been working. A preliminary version was sent to all Board members the morning of the meeting, but a new draft that includes line numbers will be sent in the next 24 hours. Doug asked for each board member to provide edits and other feedback within 30 days. Sections that were highlighted where feedback is especially encouraged include addressing Board member vacancies, election of a Vice-Chair, what Board actions require a 2/3 majority for approval, and Board member responsibilities. The GC will address all comments and edits in a Comment Resolution Table to be provided to the Board, and the revised document will be sent to NFHP's consulting attorneys for review. The plan is to present a final draft for approval at the December Board meeting. Much of the content in the bylaws comes directly from the ACE Act, so if there are any suggestions related to that language, it will be shared with the Policy Committee for their consideration during the reauthorization effort.

Doug also announced that Simen Kaalstad (ACFHP Coordinator) has joined the Governance Committee as an FHP representative.

4:15 **Science & Data Committee**

- **Board awareness and discussion** of the 3 RFPs for the National Assessment.
- **Board awareness** of Board virtual decision on the NCPs.

Tab 6 **Gary Whelan** (*Board Staff, Science and Data Committee Co- Chair*), **Daniel Wieferich** (*USGS, Board Staff, Science and Data Committee Co-Chair*), & **Kate Sherman** (*Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, Board Staff*)

Gary Whelan started the presentation on behalf of the Science and Data Committee (SDC) with a discussion on the National Assessment that is due in 2025, as required by the ACE Act. The prospectuses on each of the three opinions (updated 2015 Assessment, updated 2015 Assessment plus key macrohabitats, and updated 2015 Assessment plus a climate change module) have been drafted and are in review by the SDC. Once review is completed the prospectuses will be sent to all Board members and FHP coordinators for review, comment, and input on best option from their perspective after a 1-month review period. Information will be collected and presented for a final Board decision at the December Board meeting. Daniel Wieferich followed up with the results of the virtual Board vote on the National Conservation Priorities (NCPs) Decision Document and over a 2/3 majority agreed with keeping the current NCPs through FY2025. Only 1 Board member voted in opposition expressing concerns with broadness of the current NCPs. Kate Sherman completed the update with a discussion about coordination efforts between the Board's Project Tracking Database and the USFWS FIS system staffs to reduce redundancies and improve efficiency in information flowing into the two systems.

4:30 **Adjourn**