National Fish Habitat Board Meeting, October 19 – 20, 2011, Albuquerque, NM

Connecting NFHAP with the Sustainability Movement – A Rare Opportunity

Introduction: Over the past forty years, the U.S. and the world have changed dramatically. Globalization, the Internet and the financial crisis all define this new age. Global impacts of human society include declining fisheries, biodiversity losses, deforestation, mass species extinctions, climate change, degraded habitat and decreasing water quality and quantity. Intertwined with these ecological impacts are related social and economic issues that are equally as troublesome. The bottom line is that conserving the living systems that support us and our institutions is becoming a necessity and requires different ways of thinking and acting.

Problem Statement: As the world's most powerful, yet wasteful nation, the U.S. has contributed significantly to world's financial and environmental deterioration. We have placed our next generation, our natural systems and our ability to sustain our quality of life at a tipping point.

Situational Analysis: Averting these connected disasters requires us to work together and act innovatively. New expectations are such that private sector can no longer just create financial value and the public and nonprofit sectors can't focus solely on creating social and environmental value. As part of acting differently, we need to reframe our relationship with the environment, embracing it as part of the fabric of how we value and invest. This will help us to overcome our reactive, siloed approach to complexity, foster cross-sector collaboration and measure results as positive social, environmental and economic outcomes to achieve sustainability.

Some Pertinent Questions: To help resource professionals see the opportunities related to this situation, consider these questions…

- **How do citizens, businesses and communities participate in NFHAP?** As a national resource platform that elevates the aquatic habitat crisis, pools public sector financial resources and directs strategic investments toward aquatic habitat conservation, NFHAP serves as a rallying point for the conservation community, but where are the citizens, businesses and communities? And what are their specific roles in conserving our country's diminishing aquatic habitat?

- **How can the conservation community leverage the circumstances of great change that we are experiencing to improve our conservation capabilities?** Leadership, vision and cross-sector collaboration can improve the conservation community's outcomes. Leveraging our national resource platforms and collaborating with ecologically-friendly businesses, psychologists, social and financial entrepreneurs can build bridges between the environment and the economy, which can reposition conservation as a value-added for communities as they redefine themselves amidst these ecological challenges.

- **How can the conservation community apply and better integrate economics and the social sciences into its delivery?** Tapping into the social sciences and economics can open new doors – we can clearly articulate conservation's economic value, we can build constituent grass roots capacity to improve fish and wildlife advocacy at the community level and we can create market mechanisms for conservation outcomes that would attract private investments.

Expanding Conservation through Diversification and Integration: To better answer these questions and address the complex challenges we face, the conservation community needs to alter how it does business. We cannot continue to implement our resource management actions in a narrow vacuum; it is imperative to expand our conservation worldview to include social and financial issues. NFHAP is a national blueprint for 21st century conservation and consciously shaping our actions to produce social, environmental and economic outcomes at the community level is a powerful way to implement this blueprint.

Through its public-private partnerships, the Fish and Wildlife Service has convened a group of sustainable business and thought leaders at the cutting edge of the conservation community's evolution. Known as the Sustainability + Re: Footprint Collaborative (SRF Collaborative), this group is a catalyst to bring broad, deep and diverse perspectives to the launching of innovative systems-based, shared-value approaches to connect the environment with the economy at bioregional scales.

This summary describes a unique opportunity for the National Fish Habitat Board to consider formalizing; a partnership with the SRF Collaborative to address the social and financial sides of aquatic habitat conservation. This would leverage the NFHAP platform to develop local environmental markets, attract private investments and integrate Fish Habitat Partnership operations with innovative approaches to community development that focus on resource conservation. Through this partnership, we can address the root causes of our environmental degradation by engaging businesses and market forces to shape human behaviors for the better.

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