National Fish Habitat Partnership Communications Strategy 2012

Introduction

During the July 2011 meeting of the National Fish Habitat Board, the Board moved to further enhance the brand of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan as the National Fish Habitat Partnership. While the National Fish Habitat Action Plan will always be at the foundation, collectively we are moving forward with the larger initiative identified as the National Fish Habitat Partnership.

This communications strategy framework guides the mission of the National Fish Habitat Partnership, as it strives to build an engaged community concerned with the conservation of our nation's aquatic habitats. The communications strategy as described in this document, will be implemented and, managed by the communications committee, and overseen by the National Fish Habitat Board to help meet the objectives set forth by the Action Plan for 2012 and beyond.

The communications strategy for the National Fish Habitat Partnership is critical to issuing and promoting a common message and synergy among the Board, state agencies, federal caucus, fish habitat partnerships and developing "candidate" fish habitat partnerships and the national fish habitat partner coalition. The strategy also emphasizes the importance of maintaining the National Fish Habitat Partnership as a state-led effort in cooperation with our other partners.

The direction of overall communications through the communications committee will improve the National Fish Habitat Partnership and make it a vehicle to engage additional partners as well as fuel the further growth of the Partners Coalition, bringing new opportunities to expand the constituency base of existing Fish Habitat Partnerships.

The committee emphasizes the value of communications as a tool for fostering lasting, productive relationships among diverse partners. These relationships are what makes all our efforts to revive fisheries and waterways effective and builds credibility with a growing audience.

Priority actions that this strategy will help guide in 2012 are; website update, logo and brand enhancement guidance to the Board and Partnerships and re-visioning for our legislative communications needs.

National Fish Habitat Action Plan Communications Committee

Ryan Roberts, NFHAP Communications Coordinator (Chair)

Laura MacLean, Director of Communications and Marketing, Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies (Vice Chair)

Lindsay Gardner, Communications Coordinator, Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership

Kris Gamble, Public Affairs, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

Joe Starinchak, Outreach Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Maureen Gallagher, Midwest Regional Coordinator, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Dianne Timmins, Cold Water Fisheries Biologist, EBTJV, N. Hampshire Fish & Game Department

Jeanne Hanson, Field Office Supervisor, Habitat Conservation Division, Alaska Region, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries

Stephanie Carman, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

Thomas Litts, Georgia Department of Natural Resources (Science and Data Committee liaison)

Valerie Fellows, Public Affairs, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)

Pat Rivers, Project Manager, Midwest Glacial Lakes Partnership

Cecilia Lewis, Reservoir Fish Habitat Partnership, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)

Kayla Barrett, Desert Fish Habitat Partnership, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)

Callie McMunigal, Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)

Board Liaison

Karen Abrams, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

Tom Busiahn, NFHAP Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)

Board Oversight

Mike Andrews, Chief Conservation Officer, The Nature Conservancy

Krystyna Wolniakowski, Director, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation-NW

The primary functions of the Communications Committee are as follows:

- **Serving in an advisory capacity to the National Fish Habitat Board and its staff, particularly in identifying outreach opportunities and potential challenges related to policy decisions.** Committee members have different levels of expertise, some in marketing, some in communications and others with a familiarity of working with broad partnerships to expand their appeal. Working together, the committee will operate in the most succinct manner possible, recognizing that individual efforts may be limited to advance the communications effort. Despite a short and long term focus now established, further support and investment will be needed to meet the goals of the committee.

- **Developing professional communications materials to keep partners fully informed, foster mutually beneficial relationships, and encourage new partners to join Fish Habitat Partnerships.** The committee will continue to develop communications materials that are cohesive and complementary in message, design, and delivery to have the greatest impact for advancement of the work of the National Fish Habitat Partnership.

- **Maintain and fulfill a list of measurable outcomes for the work of the communications committee and Fish Habitat Partnerships.** A list of outcomes will be maintained and built upon to show measurable results in terms of growth in media placement for Waters to Watch and other Fish Habitat Partnership related products. Growing the National Fish Habitat Partnership Partner Coalition will be viewed as the ultimate outcome measure.

- **Foster partnerships with organizations specializing in marketing and communications.** The committee will work to build mutually beneficial relationships with other organizations aimed at enhancing the brand and recognition of the Partnership.

- **Advance the work of the Fish Habitat Partnerships.** The committee recognizes the most important factor to promote through the National Fish Habitat Partnership is the work of the individual Fish Habitat Partnerships FHPs are the work units of the National Fish Habitat Partnership. The work of the Fish Habitat Partnerships, are of the utmost importance to showcase, especially how addressing the objectives in the National Fish Habitat Action Plan is making a difference. Input by the Fish Habitat Partnerships is critical to making this function of the committee a reality. Project updates and reports that show the Action Plan making a significant impact will be essential to elevating the work of the Fish Habitat Partnership and gaining recognition through media outlets. Full establishment of a " 10 Waters to Watch" subcommittee will help to identify stories for 10 "Waters to Watch" projects, as well as Fish Habitat Partnerships overall.

- **Work to formalize the NFHP Learning Lab education initiative.** With the current learning lab initiative in a pilot program state, a clearly defined plan to advance the program into schools and educational curriculum is needed and is a long term priority of the committee. Getting into some individual classrooms will be the best way to grow the program initially.

- **Advance the passage of the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act.** Coordinate with our legislative team to create the best communications support materials to help advance the passage of the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act. This is a primary objective for the committee to focus on as directed by the National Fish Habitat Board.

Communication Channels

National Fish Habitat Partnership communications target the following primary networks to build awareness, support, engagement, advocacy, and action in various forms. The committee will work through these networks to reach out to their constituencies and local groups.

(Internal):

National Fish Habitat Board

Communications will promote the Board's leadership, coordination, and facilitation role, and support the Board in serving as ambassadors and influential advocates for the National Fish Habitat Partnership in policy arenas.

Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and State Agencies

Communications will support the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies in serving as the main conduit for communications with state fish and wildlife agencies. Communications also will support the association's role in assisting states align priorities and resources for Fish Habitat Partnerships. The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies serves as a direct connect to State Fish and Wildlife Agency Directors and other related staff contacts that are critical to inform and seek input from on the work of the Partnership.

Federal Caucus

Communications will also benefit the cohesiveness of the National Fish Habitat Federal Caucus, by informing the Caucus of communications initiatives and outreach efforts of the committee at scheduled meetings led by the US Fish & Wildlife Service. Working to inform policy makers and political appointees within federal agencies, on the work of the National Fish Habitat Partnership, will be critical to advancing our efforts and helping them to recognize the work of the partnership as a priority within their agencies.

Partner Coalition

The Partner Coalition will serve as tool when applicable as an outlet for information sharing as well as spreading the word of NFHP in a grass roots manner.

Fish Habitat Partnerships

Developing communications that strategically illustrate what the National Fish Habitat Partnership is all about in compelling ways is one of the most important contributions the committee can make. The fish habitat conservation projects are the marketable force for communications, rather than the Action Plan. More visibility and emphasis on Fish Habitat Partnerships through website updates and media outreach will be a key to growing a community of support for future projects and assist in obtaining future sustainable funding for partnerships and their projects.

(External):

Broader visibility through the media will help grow the community of support for the National Fish Habitat Partnership and shine a light on the work of Fish Habitat Partnerships, as well as influence future policy and investments significantly. The "10 Waters to Watch" campaign is the most significant element of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan to date to receive media attention. Building upon this attention and coordinating future site visits when possible, with media outlets and policy makers, will help raise awareness of the Partnership and Action Plan, as well as the Fish Habitat Partnerships.

Social Media
The National Fish Habitat Partnership currently has a small social media presence on Facebook and LinkedIn. Working to expand our reach in these mediums could help bring additional partner coalition members into the fold in support of the National Partnership and will at a minimum serve as a forum to relay stories about the good work of the Partnerships under the guidance of the Action Plan. Staying current with these mediums will be important for us to stay on the cutting edge of social media fronts.

Trade Shows/Meeting Exhibits
Maintaining a presence among our constituents, by having displays at Trade shows and meetings across the country will help advance the work and reach of the National Fish Habitat Partnership. Whenever possible we should work to get out in front of these audiences to help grow our community of support.

Communication Vehicles

WEBSITE

The www.fishhabitat.org webpage is in the process of its second revision and is the most critical component of National Fish Habitat Partnership communications as the main source of information. The website builds upon and houses all of the communications documents for the Partnership. In the technologically savvy world that is a reality today our website needs to be direct and succinct to get our message and is our main vehicle for communication.

There is a need to clarify the working parts of the National Fish Habitat Partnership in a understandable way. The Partnership is built upon the National Fish Habitat Action Plan, which is at the core. The National Fish Habitat Board oversees the work of the Plan and Fish Habitat Partnerships as well as establishing policies for the Partnership. The National Fish Habitat Partnerships are the working units of the National Partnership, striving to make a significant difference through on-the-ground conservation actions that protect, restore and enhance fish habitat at a landscape scale.

- Promote broader communications flow and interaction among partners.
- Maintain the website with fresh content to reflect partner and project updates.

- The website will be used as a landing spot for all Board related decisions relevant to the Action Plan and will also house the relevant work of the three committees operating under the National Fish Habitat Partnership.

- Through the development of its revised website The National Fish Habitat Partnerships will have an opportunity to have a sub-site created, which would incorporate the look and feel of the National Fish Habitat Partnership website, while operating independently. Having this capability will help streamline our overall communications effort under the Partnership. The Fish Habitat Partnerships will also have a presence on the National Partnership website, listing a brief description about the partnership as well as listing a link for the partnership's website. Also, candidate partnerships will all have a spot on the website for informational purposes. It has also been determined that Fish Habitat partnerships, will use the moniker "Fish Habitat Partnership" at the end of the partnership name (example: Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture: a Fish Habitat Partnership.) Partnerships should also include a link back to the National Fish Habitat Action Plan website.

- The 10 Waters to Watch Initiative has been the best effort established by the committee to reach the public and our partners to fully explain what the Action Plan is and showcase some of the great work done by our partners. This continues to be an excellent way to reach our audiences. However improvements to this effort can be made by maintaining updates on projects and gathering socioeconomic data on how these projects are making a beneficial difference with minimal investment. Working on ways to improve the numbers of publications we reach out to and furthering the amount of people our message reaches will be a critical objective to the 10 Waters to Watch list for the future.

- The National Fish Habitat Awards have been the main platform to recognize the important work of our partners, in science and data, education and outreach as well as leadership. Working to increase submissions and maintain the integrity of the awards as high honor in fish habitat conservation remains a priority. Establishing the announcement for submissions and reaching a broader audience for the awards will be essential for improving the Awards for the future.

E-MAIL NEWSLETTERS

E-mail newsletters are another source of communication and are the chief outreach tool for maintaining contact with our Partner Coalition. Newsletters are the most succinct way to reach out to this audience and inform them about Fish Habitat Partnership news both locally and nationally.

Other outreach tools:

Fact Sheets including:

- National Fish Habitat Action Plan ("one-pager")
- Annual Update "Status of Fish Habitat's Report", including Q's and A's
- State Fact sheets created for "Status Report"
- National Fish Habitat Partnership Map
- 10 Waters to Watch fact/update sheets

PowerPoint Presentations

A compilation of National Fish Habitat PowerPoint presentations on the core elements of the Action Plan will be made available on the web for partner use.

Traveling Display

A traveling display describing core elements of the Action Plan has been created, and will be updated and refined as needed to meet the desires of the committee and Board. This will assist partners in establishing a prominent presence at major conferences and other venues with potential to expand awareness and support for the National Fish Habitat Partnership and work of the Action Plan.

Keystone Communications (Appendix A)
Operational Standards (Appendix B)
2012 Events (Appendix C)

APPENDIX A)
Keystone Communications

- An enhancement of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan brand in 2011 to the National Fish Habitat Partnership will help us be more identifiable and marketable in the conservation community.

- The National Fish Habitat Action Plan is modeled after the tremendously successful North American Waterfowl Management Plan, begun 20 years ago to recover plummeting waterfowl populations. The foundation of this model is a focus on "joint venture" habitat centers to leverage partners' resources and effort. In just five years the Action Plan has moved the needle in aquatic habitat conservation through the proven habitat conservation progress that our Fish Habitat Partnerships have made on the ground.

- The National Fish Habitat Action Plan provides a framework to foster more effective networking among local and regional partners so that resources can be aligned more strategically, progress can be evaluated, and conservation approaches can be continually refined.

- "Fish Habitat Partnerships" are the application of the lager National Fish Habitat Partnership. They are established voluntarily at the local and regional level and based on the consolidation of the best scientific expertise on fisheries and habitat management.

- Fish Habitat Partnerships are coordinated nationally, which helps ensure efforts are sustainable and accountable, recognizing the need for long-term investments and demonstrable results.

- The Action Plan's initial Fish Habitat Partnerships, focused on fisheries considered especially vulnerable to further habitat degradation and population declines, have shown great ability to leverage the resources of diverse partners effectively.

- Significant investments have been provided through federal appropriations and multi-state grants. These investments have proven to be a worthwhile investment, by proof that on the ground conservation activities under NFHAP are making a difference and have led to positive results in conservation.

(APPENDIX B)
Operational standards

- ***Stay Connected*:** Ensure partners are fully informed on a timely basis on current Partnership activities and significant developments. Provide multiple means of sharing among partners to facilitate more effective collaboration. Strive for a two-way communication path between staff and Fish Habitat Partnerships.

- ***Keep the Message Universal:*** Equip partners with versatile communications tools to serve as ambassadors in helping to advance partner recruitment and advocacy for the National Fish Habitat Partnership. Working with the states and purveying the Partnership, as a state-led effort, will help ensure all our efforts will resonate more clearly across the country. Maintaining the Partnership as a state-led effort is supported by the make-up of the National Fish Habitat Board (four regional AFWA representatives) and the Executive Leadership team. The Board Chairman, through the Board charter, is a state representative and by practice the Board vice-chair is a state representative. Western Partnerships who state their intent to apply for recognition by the Board are vetted through the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. Over half of the 17 established Fish Habitat Partnerships, fall within the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies regional boundaries. Federal seed monies through the Fish Habitat Partnerships are often leveraged with state funding and overall project support and coordination. The committees under the National Fish Habitat Partnership are made up of state, federal and non-governmental members and regularly coordinate with state fisheries administrators on issues that affect the National Partnership and States.

- ***Spread the Word:*** Look for and take advantage of opportunities of event venues that involve or reach large numbers of partners and potential partners to promote awareness and support for the National Fish Habitat Partnership and help to build our Partner Coalition for the future.

- ***Focus on Fish*:** A number of programs exist today at a broad national scope that center around bird conservation and wildlife conservation. However there are few national programs out there like this for fish conservation. Many specialized programs exist like fish passage however these are narrow in their charge. The National Fish Habitat Partnership offers a national program that meets a great void. Our communications efforts can help to guide a grassroots effort to further the work of the Fish Habitat Partnerships under the guidance of the Board. An additional focus on how the National Fish Habitat Partnership makes a positive impact to quality of life, healthy economies, healthy fish, healthy people and water quality is a focus of the communications strategy.

- ***Tribal Ties:*** Tying our work to the tribes nationally through the Native American Fish and Wildlife Society at the Board leadership level is an important step to enhance the status of the National Partnership with tribal agencies. Establishing better connections with tribes at the individual fish habitat partnership level will help to strengthen our overall relationship with tribal agencies.

(APPENDIX C)
2012 Events

Below is a listing of events that would be a good fit for the National Fish Habitat Partnership to have a display table at in 2012. A priority order for these events will be discussed internally, dependent on resources and timing to attend these events. These events will help grow the Partner Coalition and help get the word out about the Partnership.

The Fly Fishing show 2012 (January/February) - http://www.flyfishingshow.com/
Eastern Sports and Outdoors show (February) 2012 - http://www.easternsportshow.com/
2012 Casting Call Events (April) 2012 – http://www.nationalcastingcall.com/
River Rally 2012 (May) - http://www.rivernetwork.org/
ICast 2012 (July) - http://www.icastfishing.org/orlando.html
IFTD (August) 2012- http://www.theflyfishingexpo.com/
AFS Annual Meeting (September) 2012 - http://www.fisheries.org/afs/