United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240

In Reply Refer To:
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DEC 26 2012

Mr. Kelly Hepler
Chairman, National Fish Habitat Board
c/o Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
444 North Capitol Street NW, Suite 725
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Chairman Hepler:

As a lead Federal partner in the National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) appreciates the cooperation of the many partners and the leadership of the National Fish Habitat Board (Board) that have led to significant achievements under the National Fish Habitat Action Plan since 2006. The Service has contributed funds, personnel, and technical expertise, which have been leveraged many times over by partners at local, regional, and national scales.

One of the successful aspects has been the development of diverse, dynamic Fish Habitat Partnerships (Partnerships) in all regions of the nation. The eighteen Partnerships recognized by the Board have benefited from the Board's clear guidance and, more recently, from a well-crafted approach to evaluating performance of the Partnerships. An additional four "candidate" Fish Habitat Partnerships may seek Board recognition in the future.

To date, the Service has approved and funded 432 fish habitat conservation projects addressing priorities of the Partnerships, with significant on-the-ground conservation outcomes. However, the funds available for these projects have not grown at the same pace as the number of Partnerships. As a result, funds have been spread more and more thinly among the Partnerships.

The Service has decided that we will only approve and fund projects identified by the eighteen existing Fish Habitat Partnerships, until such time as additional project funds become available for this purpose. Partnerships recognized by the Board after the date of this letter will not receive an allocation from the existing NFHP project funds.

We encourage the Partnerships to work with other Service programs to focus resources on their priorities. Other cooperative assistance programs include Fish Passage, Partners for Fish and Wildlife, and the Coastal Program. Landscape Conservation Cooperatives can help to address aquatic conservation science needs. Grant programs, such as the North American Waterfowl Conservation Act, can also help to protect and restore aquatic habitats.

With this decision, the Service re-commits to our role in helping to achieve the strategic conservation priorities of the existing Fish Habitat Partnerships. If you have questions, please contact the Service's Acting Assistant Director for Fisheries and Habitat Conservation, Mr. Jeff Underwood, at (202)208-6393, or the Service's NFHP Coordinator, Mr. Tom Busiahn, at (703)358-2056.

Sincerely,

DIRECTOR