National Fish Habitat Board
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Ongoing organizational development needs of Fish Habitat Partnerships

Need The 18 regional FHPs are important pilot projects providing "proof of concept" about the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder collaborative conservation. This is a nationally significant model. They are the aquatic version of the LCC system and share the unique potential to yield pro-active environmental protection and restoration results. However, their strength are also their potential weaknesses. Because they engage not only state and federal agencies but local government, non-governmental groups and private entities, they need flexible governance structures and a high level of public accountability. They need strong, network-based leaders, cutting-edge organizational best management practices and communications tools to create an interlocking national program.

Situational Analysis River Network is under a one-time contract from AFWA to provide capacity-building assistance to the regional FHPs. As capacity-building professionals we have experience working with both agency and traditional non-profit organizations. It is our experience that no two regional FHP have the same organizational structure. Some have MOU's, others bylaws, some work with allied NGO's, others are developing their own 501 organizations. Some Partnerships are highly effective, leveraging tens of millions of dollars in restoration funding, coordinating complex scientific assessments, and solving complex technical problems. Others are just starting out. Most have the potential to be effective but either do not have the financial resources or institutional support to take the next leap forward.

We see that FHP steering committee members and coordinators are highly committed – they make special efforts and go way beyond their job descriptions. *However, their commitment is made largely within the context of their respective agencies or NGOs*. Their actual roles and responsibilities within their respective Partnerships is not structured enough to reliably grow the capacity of the FHP program as a whole. Further, some Partnership leaders feel just loosely connected to the work of the NFHP Board and the national plan and are largely unaware of the successes of FHPs outside of their region.

Long term ideas to further the program:

1. Support for annual or **biennial meeting** of FHPs - Many people mentioned this in their evaluation of our workshop in Portland.

2. Support for continuation of the **peer learning networks**. This is just getting started, but while River Network could continue this, it might be maintained as a function within the NFHP staff.

3. Support for customized **distance-learning activities**. Quarterly webinars, on-line forums and other distance-learning tools should be developed specifically for these regional FHPs. These could be coordinated by a third-party and feature leaders within the NFHP program.
    - *Business Planning process*
    - *NGO collaborative fundraising*
    - *Public education/ reaching target audiences*
    - *Recruiting new Partners*

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- *Effective organizational leadership*
- *Developing organizational sustainability plans*
- *Training SC members in roles/responsibilities;*
- *Annual organizational planning*

4. **Assistance Pool Support** for follow-up coaching/ mentoring and direct facilitation assistance. Most FHP coordinators do not have the time and support to apply state-of-the-art network communications and management tools. The lessons provided at face-to-face biennial meetings or through distance-learning programs will require focus and consistent follow-up. We would suggest implementing an organizational-support "circuit rider" system, or assistance pool to put experienced organizational experts in the field to work directly with groups. The primary focus of the circuit rider would be around three areas:
   (1) business development (broadening "fund raising" to make it applicable to all groups, including *readiness for business planning* for groups with less capacity).
   (2) communications planning for Partner recruitment/ engagement
   (3) leadership and steering committee training (roles and responsibilities, governance, organizational best practices)

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