National Fish Habitat Board
June 25-26, 2013
Tab 5

Report of the Joint Project Review Team
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service / National Fish Habitat Board
National Fish Habitat Partnership
May 2013

In 2013 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will provide funding to support projects that protect, restore, or enhance fish and aquatic habitats, or otherwise directly support habitat-related priorities of 18 Fish Habitat Partnerships.

A national review of proposed projects was done by a joint FWS / Board Project Review Team. Members of the Team were:

- Mike Andrews, The Nature Conservancy, Board member
- Steve Moyer, Trout Unlimited, Board member
- Krystyna Wolniakowski, National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, Board member
- Mike Carrier, Assistant Regional Director-Fisheries Resources, Region 1
- Steve Klosiewski, Deputy Assistant Regional Director-Fisheries & Ecological Services, Region 7
- Tim VanNorman, Acting Deputy Chief, Division of Fish & Aquatic Conservation, FWS Headquarters

The Team was staffed by Tom Busiahn, FWS NFHP Coordinator.

Each Team member received electronic files containing:

- Lists of projects as ranked by each FWS Region and FHP, including more projects than can be funded from available funds.
- Narrative descriptions of individual projects from FWS' Fisheries Operational Needs System (FONS).
- FWS Director's guidance on selecting and submitting projects for approval.

The Team met by conference call on May 8, 2013. Krystyna Wolniakowski and Tim VanNorman were unable to attend. FWS Regional NFHP coordinators on the call were Shauna Ginger (R1, on detail), Karin Eldridge (R2), Maureen Gallagher (R3), Tripp Boltin (R4), Callie McMunigal (R5), Steven Krentz (R6), Cecilia Lewis (HQ), and Umi Muawanah (HQ Sea Grant Fellow).

The Team reviewed its charge, i.e. to review projects submitted and ranked by Fish Habitat Partnerships (through the FWS Regions); consider whether to recommend re-ordering projects for funding; provide recommendations on improving quality of projects and the review process; submit recommendation to the FWS Director and the National Fish Habitat Board.

General comments and recommendations

The Team recommends that the slate of projects be approved for implementation as submitted.

The list of projects does not show the full scope of what is being done by the Fish Habitat Partnerships. A variety of funding, from FWS and other sources, is being used to address the priorities of the FHPs. We need to find a way to show the progress being made by the FHPs in a more comprehensive manner.

For several of the FHPs, FWS will use Fish Passage Program funds to implement projects that cannot be reached with the NFHP funds. These include the Great Plains FHP, Atlantic Coastal FHP, Ohio River Basin FHP, and others.

The project lists contain a good mix of "traditional" habitat projects, with performance measured in miles or acres restored, and "innovative" projects whose performance cannot be measured in similar terms. Examples of the latter include the WNTI Small Grant Funding Program and the Green Infrastructure Retrofit project of the Ohio River Basin FHP.

It is important to capture the results of the "innovative" projects, even though they are not so easy to measure, and to ensure that we are testing those results and learning from the projects, whether or not the projects are successful in achieving their objectives. It was suggested that a set of these projects be described in a series of short presentations to the National Fish Habitat Board so that results can be shared and lessons learned.

The Team discussed how the projects align with priorities of FWS, including Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) and the Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC) approach. The Director's guidance stated that projects should focus on *conservation delivery*, and that projects addressing *biological planning*, *conservation design*, and *outcome-based monitoring and adaptive management* may also be funded when they are precursors to conservation delivery. The projects clearly embrace SHC, with a good mix of conservation delivery and other elements. The projects do not include much outcome-based monitoring, but that is hard to do at the project scale. There is a need to show the bigger picture of outcomes that result from the full spectrum of NFHP projects. Collaboration between LCCs and FHPs is growing, as documented by surveys of FHPs in 2012 and 2013. The majority of FHP projects also address various adaptation objectives of the FWS climate change strategic plan.

The Team expressed support for the projects that fill needs for FHP coordination and operations. This is important for the success of any FHP, and these projects should show a strong partner contribution to complement the FWS funds. Some projects with a science outcome have a coordination component, so FWS should clarify its guidance on how these projects are defined and how performance is reported.

The Team emphasized that the results of projects in which science tools are developed (e.g. web based mappers and decision support tools) should be shared across FHPs and with other partners.

Some projects lack performance measures. In some cases (e.g. Reservoir FHP), FWS does not have measures to adequately describe lake or reservoir projects. In some cases (e.g. WNTI),

there appears to be inconsistent data entry, due to the large number of FWS Regions involved. FWS should continue to emphasize the need for performance measures, or narrative descriptions of desired results where performance measures don't fit the project.

Comments and recommendations on specific projects

A question was asked about the value of PVC fish attractors proposed in the fifth project of the Reservoir FHP. Cecilia explained that these structures increase biological production by providing substrate for microfauna, and that PVC structures can be installed by volunteer labor. Natural materials (stone, wood) usually require heavy equipment, and are not amenable to volunteer labor.

A request will be made to the Western Native Trout Initiative to provide a report on results of the WNTI Small Grant Funding Program after 2013, its third year of implementation. The Team recognizes that this effort addresses Objective 3 of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan, to "broaden the community of support for fish habitat conservation", and would like to ensure that results are documented and lessons learned.