Frequently Asked Questions

New approach to allocating NFHAP project funds

Q: **When will the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) implement the new allocation method?**
A: The new allocation method will be implemented in fiscal year 2014.

Q: **How often does the FWS allocate funds to support National Fish Habitat Action Plan (NFHAP) projects?**
A: FWS allocates funding for NFHAP projects on an annual basis.

Q: **Why did the FWS decide to create a new method for allocating NFHAP project funds?**
A: The FWS identified the need to create a competitive, performance-based allocation method to achieve maximum amount of conservation benefit with a limited amount of resources. The new methodology emphasizes a more strategic landscape/watershed-scale approach. The new method allows the FWS to focus project funds on FHPs that exhibited strong past performance and demonstrate the highest likelihood of strategic implementation of future projects.

Q: **How will NFHAP project funds be allocated under this new method**?
A: NFHAP project funds will be divided into two categories –stable operational support and competitive, performance-based funds. FHPs seeking project funds in either category must submit a Work Plan and Accomplishments Report to the FWS for review. Based on the FHP's ability to meet the performance standards outlined in the allocation methodology, the FHP will be assigned one of three performance levels. The assigned performance level will determine the amount of funds the FWS allocates to projects within the FHP in a given year.

Performance Criteria, FHP Performance Levels, Evaluating FHP Performance

Q: **How were performance criteria selected for the new allocation method?**
A: Performance criteria were selected by a workgroup consisting of a FWS Fish and Aquatic Conservation (FAC) representative from each of the agency's eight Regions and additional representatives from the Office of the Science Advisor, National Wildlife Refuge System, and Ecological Services programs in the headquarters office of the FWS. The criteria were then vetted by FAC Assistant Regional Directors (ARDs) and approved by the FWS's Deputy Director.

Q: **Why did the FWS decide to use the eight (8) criteria listed in the methodology?**
A: Workgroup members and FAC ARDs determined that these criteria would best illustrate an FHP's past performance and ability to strategically implement aquatic habitat conservation by: 1) identifying whether prescribed conservation actions produced the intended conservation outcomes and 2) determining if the FHP's conservation activities

have addressed the goals of the Action Plan, the priorities of the FWS, and the conservation objectives outlined in the FHP's strategic plan.

Q: **How will an FHP's performance level be determined?**
A: FHP's must submit an annual Work Plan and Accomplishments Report (Report) to the FWS for consideration, describing past performance and detailing intended future conservation actions. The FWS will use information provided in the Report to assign the FHP a performance level. Performance levels will be based on the FHP's ability to meet an increasingly stringent set of performance criteria. At each level, an FHP must meet *all* the performance criteria in order to qualify for that level. In other words, the performance level assignment for an FHP can be no higher than its lowest score on a given criteria.

Q: **Who will evaluate FHP performance and assign FHP performance levels?**
A: FHP performance will be initially be evaluated by the FWS Regional Coordinators (RCs) with input from the National Fish Habitat Board. Recommendations from the RCs will be elevated to FAC ARDs, and then to the Assistant Director for FAC. The final determination on FHP performance levels (and subsequent funding amounts) will be made by the Director of the FWS.

Q: **When will FHPs know how much funding they will receive for the current fiscal year?**
A: FHP's will be notified of their performance level and the respective funding amount in May of each year.

Q: **Will an FHP's performance level be used to determine the amount of funding received in the current fiscal year or the following fiscal year?**
A: The performance level an FHP receives in May of each year will determine its funding amount for the current year.

Q: **Is the evaluation process outlined in the new method different/separate from the NFHP Board's evaluation of the FHPs?**
A: Yes, the evaluation process outlined in the FWS's NFHAP Project Funds Allocation Method is separate from the performance evaluation that the NFHP Board will conduct starting in 2015 and administer every three years thereafter.

Q: **What constitutes a conservation action (referring to performance criteria #8)?**
A: Conservation actions are a set of activities executed to address the stated project objective(s) directly. Conservation actions produce outputs leading to a desired conservation outcome and realization of aquatic conservation goals.

Q: **Where can I find a list of the FWS's priority areas/priority species?**
A: FWS NFHP Regional Coordinators can provide a list of priority areas/priority species for the respective Region where your proposed project will take place. Also, you can download a copy of the priority areas/priority species from the NFHP section of the FWS Fish and Aquatic Conservation website at www.fws.gov/fisheries.

Implementation

Q: **What is the timeline for implementing the new allocation method in FY14?**
A: The timeline for FY14 implementation is compressed. Work Plan and Accomplishments Reports should be submitted to the FWS no later than February 28, 2014. RCs and the Board will review FHP Reports in March/April and provide the FAC ARDs with recommended performance levels by mid-April. Final performance levels and funding amounts will be announced in May 2014.

Q: **Will the new allocation method impact when FWS NFHAP project funds are allocated to the FHPs?**
A: The new allocation method will not change when NFHAP project funds are distributed to the FHPs and/or project partners. However, the availability of project funds is subject to other factors outside of the FWS's control like the timing of Congressional appropriations.

Eligibility

Q: **Who is eligible to apply for FWS NHFAP project funds?**
A: Any individual or entity can propose projects for funding by the FWS. However, the FWS will only fund projects that address the priorities of the eighteen existing FHPs. FHPs recognized by the Board after December 26, 2012 are not eligible to receive an allocation from the existing NFHAP project funds until additional project funds become available for this purpose.

Q: **How involved will FWS Regional Coordinators (RCs) be in drafting the Work Plan and Accomplishments Report (Report)?**
A: Because the RCs will play a key role in evaluating FHP performance, they will not be involved in drafting the Report except to provide the FHP with a list of FWS priority areas/priority species or FONS numbers for proposed projects.

Q: **When is the Report due?**
A: Reports for stable operational support or competitive, performance-based funding support is due in January each year. However, for the first year of implementation, which is in fiscal year 2014, the reports are due on February 28, 2014.