2015 Multistate Conservation Grant Program

Grant Proposal

Executive Summary

1. **Project Title:** Promoting Strategic Fish Habitat Conservation through Regionally-coordinated Science and Collaboration

2. **Full Legal Name of Organization:** National Fish Habitat Board. If awarded, the grant will be administered on behalf of the National Fish Habitat Board by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, 444 North Capitol Street NW, Washington DC, 20001

3. **Organization Information:**
   - **a.** Applicant Classification: Nongovernmental Organization
   - **b.** Nongovernmental Organization Classification (if applicable): 501(c)(6)

4. **Lead Applicant's Contact Information:**
   Mr. Kelly Hepler, Assistant Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish and Game and Chair, National Fish Habitat Board
   c/o Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
   444 North Capitol Street NW, Suite 725
   Washington, DC 20001
   Email: Kelly.hepler@alaska.gov
   Phone Number: 907-242-1907

5. **Name and Affiliation of Co-Investigator(s)/Partner(s) (if applicable):**
   Gary Whelan, Michigan Department of Natural Resources
   Ryan Roberts, National Fish Habitat Board Communications Coordinator

6. **Project Length:** 1 year. This request builds on two prior one-year MSCG projects, funded in 2013 and 2014, to support Fish Habitat Partnership science and collaboration activities (see Funding Requested below).

7. **Funding Requested:**
   - **a.** Total Amount: $521,600
   - **b.** Year 1 Amount: $521,600
   - **c.** Year 2 Amount (if applicable): $
   - **d.** Year 3 Amount (if applicable): $

8. **Estimate of Partnership Funds to be Leveraged (if applicable): $ 1,300,000**

9. **Funding Source.**
   - **a.** Funding Source: 100% Sport Fish Restoration Fund

10. **State Benefit Requirement:** The outcomes of this project will benefit all 50 states through regional-based Fish Habitat Partnerships.

11. Primary National Conservation Need (NCN) Addressed: NCN 4: Strengthening the National Fish Habitat Partnership

12. Summary Statement (200 words or less):

Through regional collaboration, Fish Habitat Partnerships (FHP) will compile biological and process-level information on fish habitats to meet FHP science needs and supplement the national fish habitat assessment; establish new or improved strategic goals, objectives, and priorities for conserving fish species and habitats; expand the scope of engaged partners; and, promote best management practices for implementing habitat conservation actions. Building capacity is critical to the success and sustainability of Fish Habitat Partnerships and expanding opportunities for collaboration is an essential element to meeting the goals and objectives set forth in the National Fish Habitat Action Plan (2nd Edition)..

13. Terms and Conditions. *Use of MSCGP Grants - All applicants must ensure that their proposed project does not fund, in whole or in part, an activity that promotes or encourages opposition to the regulated hunting or trapping of wildlife or taking of sport fish.*

☒ I agree with the above terms and conditions.

Project Narrative

Title Promoting Strategic Fish Habitat Conservation through Regionally-coordinated Science and Collaboration

Objective(s) Priority needs identified by Fish Habitat Partnerships vary across regions, and include improving hydrography data in Alaska and Hawaii and engaging landowners in the agricultural Midwest, and setting conservation priorities for aquatic habitats across the U.S. This project will address these needs and build on the accomplishments made during the 2013 and 2014 MSCGP Grants.

Through regional collaboration, FHPs will:

- Collectively advance habitat assessments through identification of mutual data needs, data acquisition and landscape-level analysis for the benefit of fish, mussels, and other aquatic animals.
- Provide regional and system-specific fish population, habitat, and human impact data to fill data gaps and to assist the national Science & Data Committee in improving the 2015 national fish habitat assessment.
- Identify and promote best management practices for habitat conservation.
- Develop and implement methods to effectively engage local communities in fish habitat conservation projects.
- Improve strategic plans of individual FHPs.
- Establish landscape-scale linkages among FHP priorities and those of other landscape conservation efforts.

Problem Statement

Conservation (protection, restoration and enhancement) of intact and degraded fish habitat across the nation is recognized as a critical issue for fish and natural resource managers and stakeholders. Lost habitat undermines the health and productivity of aquatic systems and dependent fish populations and the socioeconomic benefits derived from these resources. Healthy fish habitat is essential to effectively sustaining our nation's recreational, commercial, and subsistence fishery resources and providing benefits to the American public.

In 2003 the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies took a leadership role in the development of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan, which was completed in 2006. The 2nd edition of the plan (Action Plan) was published in 2012 with new objectives focused on meeting the needs and priorities for conserving fish habitat at a landscape scale, as well as providing the over-arching principles that guide the collaborative efforts of the National Fish Habitat Partnership.

The National Fish Habitat Board (Board) was established to administer the actions needed to carry out the Action Plan and support FHPs in implementing on the ground fish habitat conservation actions. The Board has identified the following operational roles for FHPs:

- Assemble the scientific assessment data needed to conserve fish habitats within their partnership areas,
- Establish strategic goals and objectives that define desired outcomes for fish species and habitats within their partnership areas,

- Identify priority places and/or issues to focus conservation action, and prioritize fish habitat conservation projects to meet goals and objectives,
- Coordinate and compile information on outputs (conservation actions) and outcomes (changes in habitat condition) for reporting to the Board and stakeholders, and
- Collaborate with other FHPs where appropriate to carry out these responsibilities.

This grant request is needed to supplement other state, federal and partner funds that are required to more fully support successful implementation of the Action Plan and further the priority work of the Fish Habitat Partnerships.

State fish and wildlife agencies benefit through:

- continued leadership on the National Fish Habitat Board;
- increased collaboration between FHPs and state fish and wildlife agencies;
- increased engagement with groups working to conserve fish habitat;
- increased coordination on marine resource issues;
- increased habitat available for fish and other aquatic organisms throughout the United States; and,
- increased capabilities to build science and data capacity.

Collaborative efforts are critical to ensuring that human and financial resources are used wisely and efficiently to effectively achieve conservation success. The nineteen Board-recognized FHPs are committed to working collaboratively to fulfill their responsibilities, as evidenced by their demonstrated willingness to work collectively to increase their abilities to implement the Action Plan (2012 MSCG) and the regional collaboration that is occurring with operational responsibilities such as resources assessments (2013 MSCG) and building FHP capacity to achieve their conservation priorities (2014 MSCG). However, to continue these collaborative efforts the FHPs need additional financial support to fully implement the objectives described in this grant proposal. Additionally, collaboration among FHPs strengthens the National Fish Habitat Partnership by focusing on processes that bring partners together to advance strategic priorities regionally as well as nationally. This approach to fish habitat conservation is a fundamental principle of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan.

Experience

The National Fish Habitat Partnership is a state-led effort to address the nation's fish and aquatic habitat conservation needs. The National Fish Habitat Board, organized in 2006, is responsible for developing policies and guidance for recognizing Fish Habitat Partnerships, and for establishing national measures of success and evaluation criteria for FHPs. Since 2007, the Board has recognized 19 FHPs and in 2012 completed its first performance evaluation of FHPs. Kelly Hepler has chaired the Board since May 2008, and is supported by an interagency staff from state and federal agencies and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies provides significant services to NFHP and the Board and AFWA have been successful in receiving and administering a number of MSCGP Grants that have supported the National Fish Habitat Partnership. This grant request represents a continuation of that support.

Approach

The National Fish Habitat Partnership brings a focused and coordinated approach to protecting, restoring, and enhancing the nation's fish habitats. This proposal strengthens that approach by supporting robust collaboration among FHPs and other large-scale conservation organizations to achieve the NFHP's national and regional priorities.

This project supports activities of the Fish Habitat Partnerships that will assist in achieving four objectives in the 2nd Edition of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan:

1. *Achieve measurable habitat conservation results* through strategic actions of Fish Habitat Partnerships that improve ecological condition, restore natural processes, or prevent the decline of intact and healthy systems leading to better fish habitat conditions and increased fishing opportunities.
2. *Broaden the community of support for fish habitat conservation* by increasing fishing opportunities, fostering the participation of local communities – especially young people – in conservation activities, and raising public awareness of the role healthy fish habitats play in the quality of life and economic well-being of local communities.
3. *Fill gaps in the National Fish Habitat Assessment* and its associated database to empower strategic conservation action supported by broadly available scientific information, and integrate socio-economic data in the analysis to improve people's lives in a manner consistent with fish habitat conservation goals.
4. *Communicate the conservation outcomes* produced collectively by Fish Habitat Partnerships, *as well as new opportunities and voluntary approaches for conserving fish habitat*, to the public and conservation partners.

Based on our previous experience, the distribution of funds among FHPs within each region will be flexible to meet specific and evolving needs of the collaborating FHPs; the distribution of funds across regions is not expected to change from that shown in the budget table. Regional sub-agreements will be structured around the five objectives of the Action Plan, and will identify specific tasks that will further the objectives. Sub-awards will be made to the Fish Habitat Partnerships broken down by regions, with fiscal agents administering funds on behalf of FHPs. These fiscal agents are long-term managing partners for the FHPs and provide services to the FHPs under partnership agreements therefore no competition is required for these services.

Expected Results or Benefits

The project will achieve results compatible with desired outcomes identified in NCN #4. All of the expected results build upon prior work of the FHPs, much of which was supported by MSCGP funds previously awarded. Expected results and benefits include:

- Enhanced regional aquatic habitat condition assessments and landscape-scale conservation design for coastal habitats on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts (including Hawaii), coldwater habitats in the Appalachians and interior west, and the southeastern United States through collaborative efforts of FHPs.
- In three eastern FHPs, creation of an Aquatic Connectivity Assessment Program.
- Across the U.S., facilitation of prioritized, on-the-ground, partner-led fish habitat conservation projects that achieve measurable results towards Action Plan goals and strategies.

- Integrated use of habitat assessments to identify geographic focus areas and improve strategic prioritization of conservation actions and reporting of outcomes by FHPs across the United States.
- Expansion of landowner engagement in four Midwestern states by establishing landowner committees, utilizing training provided to land conservation employees in 2013. Landowner committees help to prioritize projects, record monitoring data, and showcase measurable habitat/sport fish outcomes on farms and in communities. For four Midwest Fish Habitat Partnerships, improved utilization of fish habitat condition assessments completed in 2012 to identify spatially explicit focal areas in which to prioritize limited conservation resources, building upon the example of the Ohio River Basin FHP. This grant would improve the GIS data behind the habitat condition assessment and track monitoring data from NFHP and other fhp habitat projects. An Angler economic impact survey for the Midwest will also be developed under this application.
- Building upon progress made on the Kenai Peninsula (Alaska) in 2013, application of advanced remote sensing information (LiDAR) to map stream networks in the Mat-Su Basin to standards of the National Hydrography Dataset (NHD). This effort will be enhanced by a recently funded Alaska LCC project to establish a statewide framework to incorporate and steward updated local and regional level hydrography data into an improved NHD for Alaska.
- Through the Campaign for Western Native Trout (initiated in 2012), building and strengthening grassroots networks of support by communicating conservation needs and results using new and traditional media and events.
- Production of a spatial framework that delineates key nursery habitats on the Pacific coast, overlaying existing datasets describing potential threats to habitats and the fish inhabiting them, and integrating these analyses to set priorities for restoration and protection. This work builds upon results of a scoping "summit" held in 2013.

Outcomes/Benefits

The National Fish Habitat Partnership brings a focused and coordinated approach to protecting, restoring, and enhancing the nation's aquatic habitats. This proposal strengthens that approach by linking the oversight responsibility of the Board and the operational responsibility of the FHPs to achieve national and regional scientific and conservation goals.

More specifically, the project will:

- Enhance regional aquatic habitat condition assessments and landscape-scale conservation design for coastal habitats on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts (including Hawaii), coldwater habitats in the Appalachians and interior west, and the southeastern United States through cooperative efforts of FHPs.
- Improve strategic prioritization of conservation actions and reporting of outcomes by FHPs across the United States.
- In three eastern Fish Habitat Partnerships, initiate connectivity teams in participating FHP states and bring these teams together to initiate and develop working relationships. Collectively define and communicate the scientific basis of river restoration through connectivity improvement throughout the FHP regions. Share, update and develop

connectivity assessment tools and resources specific to FHP state needs. Communicate among FHP state connectivity teams to support and build on past experiences.

- Building on work to expand landowner engagement in four Midwestern states the Midwestern FHPs will be assembling a landowner engagement guide, beginning work on an angler economic impact study, updating websites, and conducting strategic habitat conservation/GIS analysis.
- Building upon progress made on the Kenai Peninsula (Alaska) in 2013 and 2014, apply advanced remote sensing information (LiDAR) to map stream networks to standards of the National Hydrography Dataset (NHD).
- Through the Reservoir FHP analyze data sets to gain a better understanding of how reservoirs interact with their catchment. These analyses will produce criteria and guidelines that reservoir managers can advocate when partnering with agencies responsible for managing catchments.
- Support a West Coast-wide workshop to convene partners, share the results of work accomplished to date (which includes a West Coast-wide classification and inventory of databases, and collection and assimilation of fish and habitat datasets for the West Coast), and chart the course for next steps in achieving priority tasks associated with identifying and prioritizing juvenile fish habitat on the West Coast.
- In California, the CA Fish Passage Forum will refine APASS Optimized Fish Passage Barrier Prioritization Tool. This will further improve habitat quality attributes, unknown barriers and cost criteria to enhance the utility and reliability of APASS barrier optimization and support maintenance and California's fish Passage Assessment Database. In addition, they may contract with counties to obtain cost information on 71 fish passage projects in California.

Certification Regarding Fishing/Hunting

"By submitting this proposal, the organization's primary contact and/or authorized representative identified in this grant application certifies that the (National Fish Habitat Partnership) (1) will not use the grant funds to fund, in whole or in part, any activity of the organization that promotes or encourages opposition to the regulated hunting or trapping of wildlife or the regulated taking of fish; and (2) that the grant funds will not be used, in whole or in part, for an activity, project, or program that promotes or encourages opposition to the regulated hunting and trapping of wildlife or the regulated taking of fish."

Certification Regarding Partnership Funds (if applicable)

"By submitting this proposal, the organization's primary contact and/or authorized representative identified in this grant application certifies that the (National Fish Habitat Partnership): 1) understands that partnership fund contributions are assessed in the Association's review and selection of its priority list of MSCGP projects, but are not considered by the USFWS to be an official non-federal match/cost-share; 2) will provide the partnership funds identified in order to complete the proposed project; 3) understands that if the promised partnership funds are not provided, and there is not a sufficient explanation, potential consequences could include a poor "quality assurance" evaluation by the National Grants Committee for the organization's future MSCGP applications; the imposition of "special award conditions" on this proposed grant and/or future grants (pursuant to 43 CFR 12); and if the failure to provide partnership funds affects the

scope/objective or deliverables or other terms and conditions of the grant, then the USFWS could take necessary enforcement and termination actions (pursuant to 43 CFR 12)."

Budget

1. Funding Requested: $521,600

Amount Funded in 2013: $490,617

Amount Funded in 2014: $344,500 (of a total NFHP project of $544,500)

Expenses		**2014**		**Total MSCGP Costs Only**
Region	**Fish Habitat Partnerships**	**MSCPG**	**P.F.***	
AFWA	Personnel Costs	$ 6,000		$ 6,000
Eastern U.S.	Atlantic Coastal FHP, Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture, Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership	$150,000		$150,000
Midwest U.S.	Fishers & Farmers Partnership, Driftless Area Restoration Effort	$ 80,000		$ 80,000
U.S.	Reservoir FHP	$ 75,000		$ 75,000
Pacific Coast	Pacific Marine & Estuarine Partnership, California Fish Passage Forum	$ 85,000		$ 85,000
Alaska	Kenai Peninsula FHP, Mat-Su Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership, Southwest Alaska Salmon Habitat Partnership, Southeast Alaska FHP	$ 70,000		$ 70,000
Hawaii	Hawaii Fish Habitat Partnership	$ 30,000		$ 30,000
Total direct costs		$496,000		$490,500
Indirect costs		$ 25,600		$ 25,600
Total Expenses		$521,600		$521,600

Budget by Cost Category

Expenses	**2015**		**Total MSCGP Costs Only**
	MSCGP	**P.F.***	
Personnel	$ 5,000		$ 5,000
Fringe (__%)	$ 1,000		$ 1,000
Travel			
Supplies			
Equipment			
Contractual	$490,000		$490,000
Other			
Total Direct Costs	$496,000		$496,000
Indirect Costs (20%)	$ 25,600		$ 25,600
Total Expenses	**$521,600**		**$521,600**

*** Estimate of Partnership Funds to be Leveraged: $ 1,300,000**

Qualifications of Key Personnel

Kelly Hepler, Chairman, National Fish Habitat Board
Kelly Hepler began working at the Alaska Department of Fish and Game in 1979 as a fisheries biologist and has held increasingly complex positions throughout his career. Kelly served as director of the Division of Sport Fish and most recently as a special assistant for the previous commissioner. He represents the department in numerous national forums and is presently chair of the National Fish Habitat Board. Kelly holds a B.S. in Fish and Wildlife Management from Montana State University.

Ryan Roberts, Communications Coordinator, National Fish Habitat Board
Ryan Roberts is the Communications Coordinator for the National Fish Habitat Partnership. Mr. Roberts has 8 years of experience in public relations/communications and has worked on the National Fish Habitat Partnership since 2008. Mr. Roberts created several communications toolkits for use by National Fish Habitat Partnerships and created an overall communications strategy for the partnership. Mr. Roberts' contributions were key in the development and release of the Status of Fish Habitat Partnership 2010 Assessment and the 2nd Edition of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan (2012).

Staff level leadership and management support of the work of the Board group will be provided by AFWA, USFWS, NOAA, state agencies and other partners such as NGO's.

National Fish Habitat Board Members August 2014
http://fishhabitat.org/contacts/board