**2015 Multistate Conservation Grant Program**

**Letter of Intent**

**Executive Summary**

**Applicant Information**

1. **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
2. **Brief Description of Organization:** The 22-member Board was established to promote, oversee and coordinate the National Fish Habitat Partnership and implementation of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan.

The Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies represents North America’s fish and wildlife agencies to advance sound, science-based management and conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitats in the public interest. The Association provides member agencies with coordination services on cross-cutting as well as species-based programs that range from birds, fish habitat and energy development to climate change, wildlife action plans, conservation education, leadership training and international relations.

1. **Organization Website URL:** www.fishhabitat.org
2. **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

1. **Name and Affiliation of Co-Investigators(s)/Partner(s) (if applicable):**

Gary Whelan, Michigan Department of Natural Resources

Ryan Roberts, National Fish Habitat Board Communications Coordinator

1. **Have you applied for MSCGP funding before?** Yes
2. **If yes, was/were your previous proposal(s) funded?** Yes, most.
3. **Date(s) of Previous Applications(s) (if applicable):** 2014, 2013, 2012, 2011, 2010, 2007

**Program Eligibility**

1. **Organization Information.**
2. **Applicant Classification:** Nongovernmental Organization
3. **Nongovernmental Organization Classification:** 501(c)(6)
4. **State Benefit Requirement:** The outcomes of this project will benefit all 50 states
5. **States Benefitted:**
6. States: 50 States
7. **Primary National Conservation Need (NCN) Addressed:** NCN 4: Strengthening the National Fish Habitat Partnership
8. **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.* [x]  “I agree with the above terms and conditions.”

**Project Information**

1. **Project Title:** Promoting Strategic Fish Habitat Conservation through Regionally-coordinated Science and Collaboration
2. **Project Length:** 1 year. This request builds on two prior one-year MSCG projects funded for 2013 and 2014 to support FHP science and collaboration (see Funding Requested below).
3. **Funding Source:** 100%Sport Fish Restoration Fund
4. **Funding Requested:** $521,600

Amount Funded in 2013: $490,617

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

1. **Estimate of Partnership Funds/Existing Assets to be Leveraged (if applicable)**
2. **One Paragraph Description of Project (main objectives and anticipated outcomes)**

Through regional collaboration, Fish Habitat Partnerships will compile biological and process-level information on fish habitats to meet FHP 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 partners; and develop best management practices for implementing habitat conservation actions across species ranges and boundaries of jurisdiction and land ownership.

**Project Narrative and Budget**

**Objectives/Goals**

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 restoration and protection priorities for aquatic habitats across the U.S. This project would address several of those needs, building upon continued progress in 2014 and earlier years largely supported by Multistate Conservation Grants.

Through regional collaboration among FHPs,

* Collectively advance each FHP’s 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 region and system-specific fish population, habitat, and human impact data to fill regional data gaps and to assist the national Science & Data Committee in improving the 2015 national status report.
* Develop and demonstrate best management practices for habitat conservation, and methods to effectively engage local communities in fish habitat conservation projects.
* Develop and/or improve strategic plans of individual FHPs, and develop landscape-scale linkages among FHP priorities and those of other landscape conservation efforts.

**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.

In general, this project will support activities of the Fish Habitat Partnerships that will help to achieve four of the objectives in the National Fish Habitat Action Plan, 2nd Edition:

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. *Establish a consensus set of national conservation strategies* as a framework to guide future actions and investment by the Fish Habitat Partnerships.
3. *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 well-being of local communities.
4. *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.

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.

**Budget**

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| --- | --- |
| Salary |  5,000.00  |
| Benefits |  1,000.00  |
| Contract |  490,000.00  |
| Total |  496,000.00  |
| Indirect on sub-receipents |  25,000.00  |
| Indirect on personel costs |  600.00  |
| Grand Total |  521,600.00  |

**Qualifications**

*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 April 2014

<http://fishhabitat.org/contacts/board>