

## 2016 Multistate Conservation Grant Program

### Grant Proposal

#### Executive Summary

1. **Project Title:** Advancing the objectives of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan through regional and collaborative science and priority setting.
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, 1100 First Street NE, Washington DC, 20002
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, Secretary, South Dakota Game Fish & Parks  
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@state.sd.gov  
Phone Number: 605-773-3718
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:** 3 years. **Will re-apply for year 2&3 funding.**
7. **Funding Requested:**

\$86,000 (seeking in 2016)  
\*Seeking in 2017 (\$250,000)  
\*Seeking in 2018 (\$250,000)  
3 year total: (\$800,000)
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 2: Strengthening the National Fish Habitat Partnership

**12. Summary Statement (200 words or less):**

Through regional collaboration, Fish Habitat Partnerships (FHP) will compile biological and watershed 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 complementary projects; and develop best management practices for implementing fish habitat conservation actions across the U.S. Building capacity is critical to the success and sustainability of Fish Habitat Partnerships and expanding opportunities for collaboration is an essential element to continue meeting the remaining goals and objectives set forth in the National Fish Habitat Action Plan (2<sup>nd</sup> 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** Advancing the objectives of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan through regional and collaborative science and priority setting.

**Objective(s)** Priority information needs identified by FHPs vary across regions, several of which this project will help address. In Hawaii this grant will support improving hydrography data, building upon an assessment of island estuaries and developing freshwater flow and sediment yield variability on nearshore coastal habitats. In the Midwest, this grant will help launch a basin-wide mussel initiative in the Ohio River Basin incorporating this key group of aquatic species into existing habitat assessment work. In the East, this grant will help achieve measurable habitat conservation results through strategic actions of the Eastern 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 angling opportunities through habitat improvement projects implemented by the regional fish habitat partnerships. Overall, this grant will substantially improve data resources that are required set restoration and protection priorities for aquatic habitats across the U.S. This project would address several of those needs, ensuring the continued progress that the FHPs are making on the ground and enhanced greatly recently by Multistate Conservation Grants.

Through regional collaboration among FHPs, this grant will:

- Collectively advance FHP 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 Board's Science & Data Committee in the continual improvement of the National Status of Fish Habitats Report;
- Help achieve conservation results through strategic actions that improve the ecological condition of intact systems, rehabilitate natural processes in systems currently degraded, or prevent the decline of intact and healthy systems leading to better fish habitat conditions, increased numbers of self-sustaining fish populations, and increased fishing opportunities; and
- Allow further critical collaboration to occur among FHPs on projects and initiatives, especially in regions with shared habitat and species interests amongst partners.

### **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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 identified through strategic plans.

State fish and wildlife agencies benefit through:

- continued leadership on the National Fish Habitat Board, Through AFWA regional representation;
- 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.

### **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. The second performance evaluation of the FHPs will be completed in 2015. 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 Communications and Science and Data work of the National Fish Habitat Partnership, along with priority projects of the regionally-based Fish Habitat Partnerships.

## **Approach**

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 four stated 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 #2. 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 coordinating efforts benefiting 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, increased coordination on white water to blue water priorities set by the FHPs.
- Across the U.S., facilitation and coordination of prioritized, on-the-ground, partner-led fish habitat conservation projects that achieve measurable results towards Action Plan goals and strategies.
- Build capacity to identify geographic focus areas and improve strategic prioritization of conservation actions and reporting of outcomes by FHPs across the United States.
- Assistance in increasing mussel habitat through a priority initiative in mid-western states.
- Expanded coordination among 4 Alaska FHPs on priority efforts of FHPs and the state of Alaska.
- Increasing capacity of the Western Native Trout and Desert Fish Habitat Partnership in collaborating on an integrated aquatic assessment in the Rio Grande Basin in FY16. The University of Texas has assembled data on and completed predictive distribution models for all fish species in the Rio Grande Basin (in the United States), including projected distribution under climate change.
- Coordination on developing 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.

## **Outcomes/Benefits**

The National Fish Habitat Partnership brings a focused and coordinated approach to conserving, rehabilitating, and enhancing the nation's aquatic habitats under the objectives of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan. 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 science and data driven 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, 2<sup>nd</sup> 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. *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.
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.

More specifically, the project will:

- Improve strategic prioritization of conservation actions and reporting of outcomes by FHPs across the United States.
- In three eastern Fish Habitat Partnerships, collectively define and communicate the scientific basis of river restoration through connectivity improvement throughout the Eastern U.S. Develop, update and share connectivity assessment tools and resources specific to FHP state needs.
- In Alaska, the Kenai Peninsula FHP, Mat-Su Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership, Southwest Alaska Salmon Habitat Partnership, Southeast Alaska FHP will coordinate on priorities including the National Hydrography Dataset (NHD+) in Southcentral Alaska. This data is imperative for FHPs to fully implement a complete fish habitat assessment and make sound science-based conservation decisions.
- In the Midwest, coordination on a basin-wide Mussel Initiative through the Ohio River Basin Fish Habitat Partnership will be implemented in the Ohio River Basin (ORB) that will cover 9 states. This initiative will look to broaden partner involvement in the Ohio River Basin and Identify challenges, opportunities, and path forward for the protection and restoration of mussel populations in the ORB that has large implications for water quality and fish populations in this area.
- In the West, continue a successful collaboration between the Western Native Trout Initiative and Desert Fish Habitat Partnership to coordinate on an integrated aquatic assessment in the Rio Grande Basin in FY16.
- In Hawaii, build upon a newly developed spatial framework and habitat assessment for island estuaries and also develop freshwater flow and sediment yield variability model for nearshore coastal habitats across Hawaii that will great inform decisions on priority habitat work.
- 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 by developing new process level and fisheries datasets.

- In California, the CA Fish Passage Forum will continue to refine APASS Optimized Fish Passage Barrier Prioritization Tool. Coordination on this effort will further describe habitat quality attributes, document unknown barriers and develop improved cost criteria to enhance the utility and reliability of APASS barrier optimization algorithms supporting the operations of California’s Fish Passage Assessment Database. The Forum will also initiate developing a stream temperature network database that has become an issue that is increasingly important with long-term drought.
- The Pacific Marie and Estuarine Partnership will coordinate to develop an improved inshore fisheries spatial framework that will be the foundation for inshore-offshore fisheries management, oil spills, and a variety of other uses. A West Coast-wide classification and inventory of fish and habitat databases will be improved, including the collection, attribution and assimilation of fish and habitat datasets for the West Coast, and chart the course for next steps in achieving FHP strategic plan goals associated with identifying and prioritizing juvenile fish habitat on the West Coast.

**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**

**Funding Requested: \$300,000**

Expenses		2016	Total MSCGP
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<b>Region</b>	<b>Fish Habitat Partnerships</b>	<b>MSCPG</b>	<b>P.F.*</b>	<b>Costs Only</b>
AFWA	Personnel Costs			
Eastern U.S.	Atlantic Coastal FHP, Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture, Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership	11,944.44		11,944.44
Midwest U.S.	Ohio River Basin FHP	11,944.44		11,944.44
Western U.S.	Desert FHP Western Native Trout Initiative	11,944.44		11,944.44
Pacific Coast	Pacific Marine & Estuarine Partnership, California Fish Passage Forum	11,944.44		11,944.44
Alaska	Kenai Peninsula FHP, Mat-Su Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership, Southwest Alaska Salmon Habitat Partnership, Southeast Alaska FHP	11,944.44		11,944.44
Hawaii	Hawaii Fish Habitat Partnership	11,944.44		11,944.44
Total direct costs		71,666.67		71,666.67
Indirect costs		14,333.33		14,333.33
<b>Total Expenses</b>		86,000		86,000

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

### **Qualifications of Key Personnel**

*Kelly Hepler, Chairman, National Fish Habitat Board*



Kelly Hepler was appointed the Secretary of South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks in January 2015. 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 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan (2012).

*Gary Whelan, NFHP Board Science and Data Committee Co-Chair*

Gary Whelan is one of the two co-chairs of the NFHP Board Science and Data Committee and has worked on NFHP since its inception. Mr. Whelan is a Program Manager for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources – Fisheries Division where he manages the Research Section and a Habitat Management Unit. His fisheries career has spanned over 32 years and he has worked in nearly every aspect of fisheries in the State of Michigan. In his role for NFHP, he has been responsible for all of the Board's Science and Data efforts including the development and release of the Status of Fish Habitat Partnership 2010 and 2015 Assessments. He was also deeply involved in the development of the 1<sup>st</sup> (2006) and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Editions of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan (2012). Mr. Whelan holds a B.S. in Zoology (Fisheries Management focus) from the University of Wyoming and a M.S. in Fisheries Management from the University of Missouri.

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 2015

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