



2016 Executive Summary

ACFHP has continued to help restore and protect fish habitat through on the ground conservation projects along the coast, addressing science and data needs, and collaborating with partners to address fish habitat concerns in 2016.

The Partnership spent the better part of this year updating their five-year Conservation Strategic Plan, setting new objectives and strategies based on subregional priority habitats and threats. It will be finalized by the end of 2016.

On the Ground Conservation

ACFHP has partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the seventh consecutive year to fund one new on-the-ground restoration project in 2016. The project, located on the Pawcatuck River in Westerly, Rhode Island, will improve riverine fish habitat through the removal of the Bradford Dam. This work is being led by The Nature Conservancy Rhode Island and will restore access to 32 miles of spawning and nursery habitat, benefitting species such as shad, river herring, and American eel.

ACFHP has continued to make progress promoting research on offshore black seabass habitat in the Mid-Atlantic through a grant from the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council. The project, led by Dr. Brad Stevens of University of Maryland Eastern Shore, will combine SCUBA, photography, videography, controlled angling, and stable isotope analysis techniques to better understand the importance of habitat and prey community structure on black sea bass feeding ecology.

Science & Data

After years of collaboration and analysis, ACFHP published the results of the Species-Habitat Matrix in the journal *BioScience* in April. The article, titled 'The Importance of Benthic Habitats for Coastal Fisheries,' presents the evaluation of the relative importance of coastal, estuarine, and freshwater habitat types as living space during the major life stages of over 100 fish species. The results can be used to evaluate trade-offs and develop habitat management strategies. Access to the abstract and instructions to download the full article can be found at <http://bioscience.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2016/03/04/biosci.biwo14.abstract>

The Decision Support Tool to Assess Aquatic Habitats and Threats in North Atlantic Watersheds & Estuaries has been completed. This North Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative-funded project modeled species distributions associated with documented habitat use. ACFHP has contributed to the winter flounder and diadromous fish components. The tool is available online at www.fishhabitattool.org, and ACFHP will be assisting with an online workshop later this year.

This year, ACFHP received funding from NOAA to spatially prioritize fish habitat protection and restoration sites through GIS mapping and analysis for the southeast region of the U.S. from North Carolina to Florida. The resulting maps will help ACFHP identify where best to invest effort and future NFHAP funds. Phase I of the project, which includes identifying species of concern, prioritizing spatial locations for protection and restoration, and compiling, reviewing, and scoring existing GIS layers is currently underway.

