

Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership Steering Committee Meeting Notes

May 10-11, 2016

The Grand Hotel

1045 Beach Avenue

Cape May, New Jersey 08204

ACFHP Steering Committee Members Present: Russ Babb (NJ), Lou Chiarella (NMFS-NE), Jessica Coakley (MAFMC), Julie Devers (USFWS-NE), Robert Groskin (Fly Fishers), Jimmy Johnson (NC), Wilson Laney (USFWS-SE), Gary Mahon (USGS-SE), Callie McMunigal (USFWS Region 5), Dawn McReynolds (NY), January Murray (GA), Cheri Patterson (NH), Mark Rousseau (MA), George Schuler (TNC), Caroly Shumway (Merrimack), Kent Smith (FL), Jessie Thomas-Blate (American Rivers), and Marek Topolski (MD).

ASMFC Staff Present: Pat Campfield, Lisa Havel.

Guests: Jason Clingerman (Downstream Strategies)

Introduction to the Fish Habitat Decision Support Tool

Jason Clingerman (Downstream Strategies, LLC) provided background information and a 2.5 hour tutorial on the Fish Habitat Decision Support Tool, which ACFHP in part helped to develop with North Atlantic LCC funding. The tool is available at www.fishhabitattool.org. ACFHP helped with five of the assessments in the tool (out of 37+ assessments). These are winter flounder in Narragansett Bay, winter flounder in Long Island Sound, and diadromous fishes in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, and Southeast. The last three assessments were built through collaborating with Erik Martin and Alison Bowden at The Nature Conservancy (TNC). Erik presented the data that went into the assessment at the fall 2014 steering committee meeting (presentation available from Lisa and on the tool's website). This tool provides stakeholders access to data, models, and prioritization capabilities using intuitive basemaps and mapping features. The tutorial is available as a pdf (from Lisa).

NFHP, Coastal FHP, and Whitewater to Bluewater Update

The committee had an extensive discussion on funding for the upcoming year. Both the Multi-State Conservation Grant and US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) funding will be much lower than the previous year. The Service funding amount is based on the annual report that each Fish Habitat Partnership (FHP) sends to the Service, and this year ACFHP scored low on project funding match (because we have to match overhead in Region 5), which dropped their overall score (since scoring is based on your lowest score). The committee decided that we will write a letter to the Service about the criteria that we find unfair. ACFHP will also be more diligent about keeping track of our time as match for operational funding. The committee decided to award the Service funding as follows for 2017: \$50K towards operations, \$20K towards science and data mapping in the northeast, and \$15K towards on the ground restoration. If we receive our full ask for 2017 Multi-State Conservation Grant funding, we will direct \$20K of the operational funds towards more on the ground restoration. We are also considering alternative funding sources like small grants (e.g. International Federation of Fly Fishers) and crowd sourcing.

Melissa Laser Award Discussion

We received four nominations this year, of which the subcommittee decided to consider the two nominations that complied with the instructions posted on our website. The subcommittee decided to nominate Jim Long and Bonnie Bick of the Mattawoman Watershed Society, who were nominated by Tom Pelton of The Environment in Focus, a public radio program in Baltimore. The steering committee supported the subcommittee's decisions. The goal is to award Bonnie and Jim at the ASMFC Annual Meeting in Bar Harbor, Maine, and have Melissa's family attend to present the award.

Black Sea Bass Habitat Project Update

The committee was updated on the status of the black sea bass project that was funded by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council in the summer of 2015. The funding for this project is being handled by the National Fish Habitat Fund (Fund), the 501(c)3 entity associated with NFHP. ACFHP is the first FHP to take advantage of the Fund. Since the fall meeting, the subcommittee released the RFP and received seven diverse, innovative projects. The subcommittee selected a proposal by Dr. Brad Stevens of University of Maryland Eastern Shore for funding. The purpose of the proposal is to improve understanding of the relationship between black sea bass abundance and habitat characteristics in the Mid-Atlantic region. Dr. Stevens will use underwater video and photography to document habitat structure, and isotope analysis to conduct trophic studies. The contract for the grant was sent by the Fund, and Dr. Stevens is currently reviewing it.

Update on Science and Data Committee Meeting

The science and data committee chair presented the steering committee with the outcomes and recommendations following the 1.5 day meeting that immediately preceded the steering committee meeting. The Species-Habitat Matrix is on track to be developed into a website, thanks to TNC. The science and data committee recommended changes in habitat priorities based on the Species-Habitat Matrix and ACFHP's ability to address protection and restoration within those habitats. The committee also recommended new groupings for the threats, prioritizing the threats, and breaking them down by subregion. Kristan Blackhart from NOAA gave a presentation on the 2015 National Estuarine Assessment, which is close to publication. The science and data committee was granted ~\$30,000 to complete a mapping project that will prioritize restoration and protection areas within the southeastern ACFHP region. A good portion of the meeting was spent brainstorming the threats, fish presence/absence data, and habitats that they want to include in this mapping project. The science and data committee wants to emphasize that they are going to be compiling existing information for the ACFHP region, not synthesizing new data.

Conservation Strategic Planning

One full day of the steering committee meeting was spent in a facilitated discussion about the 2017-2021 Conservation Strategic Plan. Notes on this planning session are available, and are not included here.

Other Business

Kent Smith was unanimously voted in as chair for another two year term (with Chris Powell to continue as vice-chair). The committee also voted to have science and data chair terms last two years, on alternate years as the steering committee chair terms.

The committee decided that due to time constraints related to meeting during the annual meeting, they would prefer to meet the week prior (week of October 17th). Location options include Annapolis, Portland (ME), and New Hampshire. Lisa is working with Pat and Toni on locations.

Action Items (from meeting notes)

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Action Item: Lisa will follow up with Jason to rename the TNC Mid-Atlantic Study area to the TNC Diadromous Study area, and to add in the ACFHP boundaries.

Action Item: Lisa will re-send Ryan the ACFHP proposal list. *Completed via email.*

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Action Item: ACFHP is going to write a letter to send to USFWS about the overhead and lowest common denominator scoring. We should invite any partners and FHPs(?) who want to do so, to sign as well.

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Action Item: Lisa will send the table of potential projects for FY2016 to the steering committee. *Completed via email.*

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Action Item: George will look into whether others have crowd sourced restoration projects. Lisa will ask NFHP and ASMFC if they are okay with the idea. If so, the subcommittee to move this forward is Jessie, George, Lisa, and Bob.

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Action item: Marek will send George the final Matrix data. *Completed via email.*

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Action Item: Lisa will follow up with George on website progress and will relay discussion with Jake about concerns regarding data usage and citation of the data. She will ask George to track TNC's hours for match when reporting to USFWS. Lisa will work with Caroly and George to compile links to state data for maps. We can look into riparian buffers to add to the maps as well.

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Action Item: Lisa will work with Callie and NFHP to figure out the answers to the following match questions: can Jessica Coakley's time count as match even if she is not a member? Does NOAA funding for the SE mapping count as match if we are using operational funding towards the NE?