### **ACFHP Fall 2015 Meeting Summary**

November 4 – 5

St. Augustine, Florida

Attendees: Lou Chiarella (NOAA Fisheries NE), Marek Topolski (MD), George Schuler (TNC), January Murray (GA), Mark Rousseau (MA), Russ Babb (NJ), Bob Groskin (IFFF), Dawn McReynolds (NY), Kent Smith (FL, Chair), Chris Powell (RI, Vice-Chair), David Kohan (USFWS, sitting in for Callie McMunigal), Chuck Jacoby (St. Johns River Water Management District), Jaclyn Daly (NOAA SE), Jessie Thomas-Blate (American Rivers), Julie Devers (USFWS), Caroly Shumway (Merrimack River Watershed Council), Wilson Laney (USFWS SE), Alan Brown (USFWS Assistant Regional Director SE), Cheri Patterson (NH), Pat Campfield (ASMFC), Jessica Coakley (MAFMC)

Staff: Lisa Havel

*November 4, 2015*

*2 pm*

***Decision Support Tool (presentation available)***

Julie provided a status update on the fish habitat decision support tool, which is currently available online ([www.fishhabitattool.org](http://www.fishhabitattool.org)). Some of the data used in the tool came directly from The Nature Conservancy, which was presented to the Steering Committee by Erik Martin at the last fall meeting. The tool has been completed, and ACFHP is currently working with TNC to host a webinar to solicit feedback from stakeholders on the metrics and variables for the diadromous portion. Once this is complete, they will work with Downstream Strategies on a rollout strategy. One option would be to have TNC host a webinar on how to use the tool.

Action item: Lisa will find out from Pat how much a webinar usually costs.

Caroly thought that we should promote the tool a lot, and that we should include the NALCC on all of the outreach we do. George thought that it might be worthwhile for ACFHP to get familiar with the tool, and then host our own webinars.

Jessie asked about other species that we might want to include in future iterations of the tool. The problem is that there generally isn’t consistent data across a large geography to be able to model biological response.

 Jessica said that Jon Hare at NOAA Fisheries (Sandy Hook) models climate science-species interactions and would have some knowledge of data availability for species in the ACFHP region. We can ask him to our spring meeting if it’s the direction we want to take. Jessica will forward Lisa a paper of his to share with the group.

Action: Lisa will share Jessica’s paper with the steering committee.

Lou was worried about cost effectiveness associated with expanding the tool. One alternative is to adding to the tool is to gather the data that is available and then present the gaps in data.

Action item: Lisa will work with the communications subcommittee on the outreach plan, and add Bob Groskin to the subcommittee.

One possibility to expand on this tool is to put an impervious surface layer, but Julie said that for at least the diadromous range, that is already included. Chris said that we should include a disclaimer about modifying the tool, and George suggested that we can put in a disclaimer explaining the intended purpose. This is addressed on the first page of the tool, and might be enough of a disclaimer.

***Status of the Indian River Lagoon (presentation available)***

Chuck Jacoby from the St. Johns River Water Management District gave a presentation on the algal blooms in the Indian River Lagoon, the location of our field trip earlier in the day. For details, please see the presentation.

***NFHP Update***

Lisa provided the Committee with an update on NFHP since the April steering committee meeting. Updates include:

* Lisa presented on behalf of ACFHP during the NFHP Symposium at AFS in Portland, OR in August.
* Lisa attended the NFHP Workshop and Board Meeting at the end of October in Sacramento, CA. Highlights from these meetings include:
* The 2015 national assessment is now complete and NFHP is currently working on the rollout. Instead of a PDF and printout like the 2010 assessment, this will be more interactive in the form of a website. Also, instead of breaking the nation up by sections of the country (e.g. New England, Pacific Coast), they will also break apart the assessment by each FHP boundary. The marine assessment only analyzes the risk to habitat (except for the Gulf of Mexico, which includes biological response), whereas the inland assessment includes response data. NFHP has asked ACFHP to let them know what we would like included for the 2020 assessment. We should also look at the 2015 Gulf of Mexico assessment and decide on whether we want to do a similar analysis for the Atlantic or try something different. For reference, the Gulf of Mexico assessment is broken down to the estuary level.
* ACFHP is now a chapter of The National Fish Habitat Fund, the 501(c)3 entity. We are also the first FHP to take advantage of the Fund, by using it to administer the MAFMC grant. NFHP has asked us to talk about how we plan to use the Fund in the future.
* We will be completing NFHP reviews again this year. In 2015 we jumped from a score of level 1 to a level 2, which gave us an extra ~$100,000 to put towards on the ground projects. Eight of the FHPs wrote a letter to USFWS with recommendations on how to improve the review process. We did not hear back, so we picked the most important issue for 2016 (question #4 on the review, discussing project completion) and asked the Board to consider changing that one question for this year’s (2016) review during the workshop and board meeting. A decision will be made in the upcoming weeks.
* During the Board meeting, a motion failed to rename NFHP to the ‘Network of Fish Habitat Partnerships.’ However, at a prior meeting, the Fund’s logo was voted to be called ‘Beyond the Pond.’
* NFHP has a new Board Chair: Tom Champeau from FL FWCC, and a new Vice-Chair: Chris Moore from the MAFMC. Both are based in the ACFHP region.
* There is a new candidate FHP: the Pacific Lamprey FHP. This FHP has strong tribal representation, and covers AK to CA. As a reminder, unless USFWS funds increase to the FHPs, new FHPs are not eligible to receive USFWS funding (the slice doesn’t get smaller for the original FHPs).

The steering committee brainstormed some ideas on how we would like to use the Fund. These included:

* We could create a list of volunteers from corporations to help with restoration projects (on the ground help). This might eventually lead to funding.
* We could pitch to organizations and corporations for funding.
* We could seek opportunities like the MAFMC opportunity.
* We could create corporate wetlands restoration partnerships.
* We could research investment firms that specialize in ‘green’ companies, and work off of that list to find potential donors.
* We could find someone in finance that would want to volunteer to put together a list of corporations.

Action item: To accomplish some of these tasks, Lisa should work with the communications subgroup to create a one-pager on ACFHP for companies.

***Overview of NFHP Evaluations***

Lisa walked the Steering Committee through the scoring and responses received from the evaluation committee for the NFHP evaluations. This was the first NFHP evaluation, and they will take place every three years. Responses will not count against the FHP; this evaluation is for both NFHP and the individual FHP to understand where their strengths and weaknesses lie.

ACFHP received perfect scores on 7 of the 10 criteria. We received a 3 out of 4 on outreach, a 1 out of 4 on science and data collaboration with NFHP, and a 1 out of 4 on measuring success.

Prior to the Steering Committee meeting, Lisa, Kent, and Chris spoke with Gary Whelan (from the evaluation committee) and we are able to re-submit responses for clarity. This should at least improve the outreach score. The science and data question could not be improved upon; NFHP was not working on the Atlantic assessment over the last 3 years, and the outreach question provides ACFHP insight into how we can improve our next Conservation Strategic Plan. In particular, more benchmarks and timelines are needed to measure success.

Action item: Lisa will update our responses for the NFHP evaluation based on our conversation with Gary Whelan and resubmit.

***Update on Coastal FHP and Whitewater to Bluewater Collaborations***

Lisa provided an update for the group on collaboration efforts with the Coastal FHPs and Whitewater to Bluewater (Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership, SARP, and Eastern Brooktrout Joint Venture, EBTJV). The Coastal FHPs continue to release a quarterly newsletter, and ACFHP has recently contributed 2 articles (on the completion of the NFWF River Herring report and on the current on the ground projects). The Coastal FHPs wanted to submit a proposal to NOAA for the coastal resiliency grant released in late spring, but NOAA was not interested in a nation-wide proposal. This led ACFHP and SARP to submit a joint proposal for a restoration project in Palm Beach County. NOAA should be announcing recipients in the upcoming month (approximately).

*Adjourned for day*

*November 5, 2015*

*8 am*

***Science and Data Committee Update (presentation available)***

Caroly gave an update on the Science and Data meeting that took place in mid-September in Hanover, MD. The Science and Data Committee discussed six possible tasks that they could work on:

* Create a searchable database of species/habitat and references for the matrix.
* Create a map of species/habitats for the matrix.
* Create decision support tools that incorporate NALCC modeling, the matrix, and assessment.
* Consider adding impervious surface layer to Downstream Strategies decision support tool.
* Improve the assessment of existing information: include climate change, add new tools (not update all references), remove links to references, remove spatial tool, break apart South Atlantic and South Florida.
* Improve the matrix, incorporate rarity/vulnerability to climate change (seasonality?).

If we do create a map of habitats, it would consist of the seven habitat categories, not habitat types. If we can get funding, Caroly suggested that we should consider mapping riverine habitat types for the ACFHP region. Wilson said that Rua Mordecai from SALCC might know where to get information on riverine bottoms. TNC has river habitats mapped from ME to VA in the NEAFWA Aquatic Ecosystem Classification.

George said that he knows someone at TNC that is good with databases, and might be a good person to help put the matrix online. Also, the SAFMC has a database from which we might be able to derive information on certain species.

From this update, the Steering Committee decided to move forward with developing the Species-Habitat Matrix website, updating specific aspects of the Assessment of Existing Information, and developing a coast-wide fish habitat score and map to inform the next Conservation Strategic Plan and on the ground restoration.

As for adding impervious surface data to the decision support tool, the diadromous portion of the tool has a layer that goes down to 8%. We might consider that to be enough information for the time being, and revisit the opportunity at a later date to get better resolution.

George said that engaging with TNC throughout this process is a good idea.

To compile habitat maps and threats/indicators in order to create a map that ACFHP can use to determine areas for protection and restoration, we would need to contract an outside GIS person to help out, and funding could come from USFWS (take out more for operational funding that usual) and we could apply for NALCC funding.

***We discussed why partners might not have attended this meeting; which was open to all partners and funding was available for travel***

Bob Groskin suggested that other partners might not know what they can get out of or contribute to the organization; there isn’t much two-way communication with the partners outside of the steering committee.

Ways to engage the other partners:

* We could develop a marketing tool.
* We could include partners when we create subgroups like EBTJV (we do for science and data and for the offshore reefs project)
* We could host a workshop (e.g. an issues forum) to engage partners
* We could try to put more weight into our endorsement.

Action: Lisa will follow up with Jessie and Bob to discuss further.

***Conservation Strategic Planning (presentation available)***

George walked the Committee through the 2012 – 2016 Conservation Strategic Plan. Overall, we were much better at accomplishing restoration goals, and only have one example (conservation moorings) on protection actions that we’ve taken. We also did not do well tackling water quality issues.

Action item: For the spring meeting, each steering committee member should determine what ACFHP is good at, and what we should change/are there gaps that we’re not considering. This will help us inform the next plan.

The current Plan was designed to be broad since ACFHP was unsure of its strengths and weaknesses five years ago. Now is the time to think about what we would like to focus on, what we’re good at, and what we should leave to other entities.

***Implementation Planning (presentation available)***

Chris led the Steering Committee in a discussion on the Implementation Plan. Because we went through every task at the spring meeting, we only covered those that are ongoing, incomplete, or not started at this meeting.

Out of the 29 tasks, only 5 tasks are ongoing (with an endpoint) and one hasn’t begun (also one cannot start because the NOAA funding opportunity changed).

One option for outreach on the moorings project is to contact the mooring company and ask if they would be willing to give a discount to anyone that references ACFHP when purchasing the moorings. We can include their name and information in a brochure that we create, and then find out from the company how many discounts they’ve given to get an estimate of effectiveness. We could also engage agencies that issue mooring licenses with the brochure.

We discussed the possibility of creating outreach material for legislation. This could be a project for an ACFHP intern since we would need one-pagers for each state to be able to approach their representatives.

Action item: Lisa will discuss this possibility with the outreach subcommittee.

We can also create a one pager on our goals and message directed at businesses. This way we will have something available when it comes time to solicit donations.

Action item: Lisa will discuss this possibility with the outreach subcommittee.

It was decided by the Committee that we should focus our attention through 2016 on completing our science and data goals that we set at this meeting, as well as complete the incomplete tasks that Cheri is currently working on. We developed a subcommittee (Kent, Chris, January, George, and Lisa) to go through all 79 tasks in the Conservation Strategic Plan and determine the percentage of tasks that we completed or are ongoing.

Action item: Lisa will follow up with the subcommittee to set a time to get together to form a consensus.

We discussed that for the new Implementation Plan (to compliment the Conservation Strategic Plan), we might want to consider having a yearly action plan with specific tasks. This will help us better achieve milestones, and give us a more directed approach on accomplishing our goals. The MAFMC has a conservation strategic plan as well as a yearly action plan, as does the Habitat Committee (which falls under the umbrella of ASMFC).

We created a subgroup to begin collecting information for the new Conservation Strategic Plan (2017 – 2021) via polls, surveys, etc: Jaclyn, George, Caroly, Chris, Lou, Kent, Julie, Lisa, and Mark. This group will not have to meet until after the new year.

Action item: Lisa will be in touch with the strategic planning subgroup to coordinate. This group will decide on whether we need a facilitator at our spring meeting.

One idea for a facilitator is to use a NOAA coastal facilitator. They are free and provide their own travel. Jaclyn can contact them when necessary.

***Implementation Plan Action Items Update (presentation available)***

Dawn presented the results of the survey on habitat restoration priorities according to restoration practitioners. This survey gave insight into not only the projects that restoration practitioners are currently working on and plan to work on in the future, but also the benefits that they think ACFHP can provide. These results can be used in our next Conservation Strategic Plan.

Action item: Lisa will work with the steering committee to solicit peer reviews, and then publish the report to the ACFHP website.

Chris Powell gave an update on the conservation mooring project in Jamestown, RI, which is close to completion. The moorings have been installed and the interpretive sign has been printed and is being delivered. Post-installation monitoring has to take place, and the outreach subcommittee needs to come up with an outreach plan. Mark, who works with the moorings in Massachusetts, warned Chris that there is maintenance involved with these moorings, including fouling. Also, people are putting the moorings in water that is too shallow, which also has negative repercussions for seagrass beds. We need to be careful not to say that minimal maintenance is involved.

Action item: Lisa will work with the communications subcommittee and try to get data on the moorings from Mark in December so that it can be included in the outreach materials.

We could potentially host a workshop in Long Island to transfer the technology from those in New England that have been working with the moorings.

***USFWS-NFHP Funding 2015 – 2016 (presentation available)***

Julie reviewed the applications received for fish habitat restoration project funding with the steering committee. ACFHP funded 3 projects in 2015 (two fish passage projects in ME and MA, and a riverine enhancement project in NC) and the evaluation subcommittee decided to recommend five highly ranked projects to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for 2016. Three are fish passage projects (in RI, MA, and MA), one is a mangrove restoration project (in FL), and one is a shellfish project (in NY).

The evaluation subcommittee made some changes to the evaluation criteria for 2016 funding:

* Applicants had to coordinate with their USFWS contact at least 3 weeks prior to the application deadline.
* ACFHP highlighted the fact that we are not soliciting research projects or feasibility, design, or engineering projects.
* If the project was based on living shorelines, the applicant had to demonstrate how it would benefit fish.
* We test ran some decision support tools: Northeast Aquatic Connectivity, SEACAP, Chesapeake Bay Habitat tool, and Chesapeake Bay Fish Passage tool. These were not scored in the evaluation.

It was suggested that one way we can engage youth and increase our outreach is to have local students film a day in the life of a restoration project, and then have them present it at Annual Meeting or an AFS Chapter meeting.

For the future, if we want to target other projects we can go back to Dawn’s survey and find gaps to fill.

It was decided that we should limit the types of project each year or change the evaluation criteria so that dam removals don’t always score so high.

Action item: The evaluation subcommittee should meet in March after the Science and Data Committee meeting to discuss changes.

The Committee agreed to set aside operational funds to support a contractor to develop our science and data needs in the upcoming months. Therefore, in 2016 we will be requesting the full $75,000 available for operational funding (approximately $30,000 for ACFHP operations and $45,000 for GIS support for science and data needs).

***Update on the ACFHP Business Plan***

The current draft of the Business Plan was discussed and areas of improvement are being considered for the next Conservation Strategic Plan.

Action item: Lisa will send the business plan to Chris, Bob Groskin, Jessie, and Matt Menaches to get second opinions on the layout and content.

***Discussion on ACFHP Operations and potential NOAA funding opportunity***

At lunch, Ginny Fay from NOAA SE said that she was interested in partially supporting our science and data needs in the southeast if we are willing to apply for a grant. We discussed applying for funding a pilot project in the SE, and then applying our lessons and protocol there to the northeast with ACFHP operational funding. We could try to find a graduate student to save money, though they cannot dedicate full time to the project.

Action item: A follow-up call with Caroly, Marek, Kent, George, Pat, Chris, and Jaclyn will be scheduled in the coming weeks to determine scope of work, goals, and transfer of funds.

Finally, Lisa provided a summary of the status of a new grant that ACFHP received from the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council to research and/or restore offshore reef in the Mid-Atlantic. The subcommittee is currently working on the RFP, which will be released by the end of the year. We received $250,000 (- $25,000 in NFHP overhead) to administer the grant.

***Discussion on Next Meeting Location***

The committee is considering New Jersey for its spring meeting, possible locations include:

* Island Beach State Park (2 hr from Philadelphia and 1.5 hr from Newark)
* Forsyth National Wildlife Refuge
* NOAA Sandy Hook
* NERR facilities

New Hampshire and Roanoke Island, NC (Coastal Studies Institute) were also suggested.

We hope to have the meeting in early May, and Bob Groskin can help with hotel rate negotiations.

***Action items:***

Lisa will find out how much a webinar costs to host.

The Science and Data Working Group will decide on if we want Jon Hare to work with us on more species for the Decision Support Tool, and follow through as necessary.

Lisa will forward Jon Hare’s paper from Jessica Coakley to the Steering Committee.

Lisa will work with the communications subcommittee on the outreach plan for the Decision Support Tool, and add Bob Groskin to the subcommittee.

ACFHP has to decide and let the NFHP Science and Data Committee know what we’d like to see in the 2020 assessment. We also have to look at the 2015 Gulf of Mexico assessment and decide on whether we want to do a similar analysis for the Atlantic or try something different.

ACFHP members should continue to think about how we plan to use the Fund in the future.

Lisa should work with the communications subgroup to create a one-pager on ACFHP for companies.

Lisa will edit the NFHP evaluation responses for clarity and resubmit to NFHP in the hopes of improving the score.

Lisa will work with Jessie and Bob to discuss ideas on how to better include partners in the Partnership.

For the spring meeting, each steering committee member should determine what ACFHP is good at, and what we should change/are there gaps that we’re not considering. This will help us inform the next plan.

Lisa will discuss the possibility of creating outreach material for legislation with the communications subcommittee. This could be a project for an ACFHP intern since we would need one-pagers for each state to be able to approach their representatives.

Lisa will discuss the creation of a one-pager targeted at businesses with the communications subcommittee.

The task subcommittee (Kent, Chris, January, George, and Lisa) will go through all 79 tasks in the Conservation Strategic Plan and determine the percentage of tasks that we completed or are ongoing. Lisa will follow up with the subcommittee to set a time to get together to form a consensus.

The subgroup to begin collecting information for the new Conservation Strategic Plan (2017 – 2021) via polls, surveys, etc will include Jaclyn, George, Caroly, Chris, Lou, Kent, Julie, Lisa, and Mark and will meet after the New Year. Lisa will be in touch to coordinate.

Lisa will work with the steering committee to solicit peer reviews of the restoration practitioner survey, and then publish the report to the ACFHP website.

Lisa will work with the communications subcommittee on the plan for highlighting the conservation mooring project, and contact Mark for data regarding the moorings in December. We could potentially host a workshop in Long Island to transfer the technology from those in New England that have been working with the moorings.

Lisa will work with the evaluation subcommittee after the Science and Data Committee meeting to determine which types of projects we would like to focus on for next year, or how we want to change the scoring criteria.

Lisa will send the business plan to Chris, Bob Groskin, Jessie, and Matt Menaches to get second opinions on the layout and content.

Lisa will host a follow-up call with Caroly, Marek, Kent, George, Pat, Chris, and Jaclyn in the coming weeks to determine scope of work, goals, and transfer of funds for the potential NOAA SE funding.