**Fall 2017 ACFHP Steering Committee Meeting Summary**

October 16-17, 2017

Waterside Marriott Hotel, Norfolk, VA

Members present: Dawn McReynolds (NY), Mark Rousseau (MA), Jimmy Johnson (NC), Chris Powell (vice chair, RI retired), Bob Groskin (Fly Fishers), Pat Campfield (ASMFC), Jessie Thomas-Blate (American Rivers), Lou Chiarella (NOAA GARFO), January Murray (GA), Josh Carloni (NH), Kent Smith (FL)

Members on phone: Marek Topolski (MD), Russ Babb (NJ)

Staff: Lisa Havel

Other participants: Pace Wilber (day 2, NOAA SERO), Jessica Coakley (MAFMC), Aaron Kornbluth (Pew Charitable Trusts), Chris Moore (CBF), Jeff Beal (ACFHP Science and Data Committee, FL)

Welcome, Introductions, & Approval of Agenda

Kent began the meeting with a welcome and introductions. The agenda was moved around to accommodate Pace, who was attending on Day 2 and wanted to be present for the Southeast Mapping update, and Jeff, who would arrive later on Day 1. After discussing how unfortunate it was that US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) employees were barred from attending the meeting, the Steering Committee decided to draft a letter to Department of Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke expressing our concern with the current lack of support from the Service, and hope that Wilson Laney, Callie McMunigal, and Julie Devers can resume ACFHP participation soon.

**Action Item:** Lisa will work with Kent and Chris to draft a letter to Secretary Zinke, and will share with Jessica Graham (Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership, SARP), Steve Perry (Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture, EBTJV), Ryan Roberts (NFHP), and Tom Champeau (NFHP Board Chair) prior to sending to the Secretary.

Final Report on Jamestown Conservation Moorings Project *Presentation Available*

Chris provided the final report on ACFHP’s NOAA-funded project to retrofit four traditional boat moorings with conservation moorings in select Jamestown, Rhode Island boatyards. Conservation moorings use a buoyant bungee-like cord to minimize contact with the seafloor and promote SAV conservation. After two seasons of post-installation monitoring, SAV has grown in and reduced the size of the bare substrate halo around each mooring. Many of the boat yards have continued to retrofit their traditional moorings with conservation moorings following the success of our project. The project has also received press in multiple news outlets, and there is now a permanent sign highlighting the benefits of SAV and conservation moorings on display in Jamestown overlooking the moorings.

**Action Item:** Lisa will work with Chris to modify the presentation for ACFHP partners to share. Information to add to the presentation: number of new moorings installed after our 4 moorings, and the number of square feet of SAV restored.

**Action Item:** Lisa will send Lou a copy of her poster for the Restore America’s Estuaries conference (December 2016 in New Orleans), as well as a copy of the interpretive sign in Jamestown, RI.

**Action Item:** Lisa will update the ACFHP website to say that we only promote retrofitting traditional moorings, and do not endorse setting new conservation (or traditional) moorings in SAV beds.

**Action Item:** Based on the information in the PowerPoint presentation, Lisa will develop a one-pager to share with the conservation mooring company.

Black Sea Bass Habitat Project Update *Presentation Available*

Lisa Havel gave an update on the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council-funded project to assess the use of natural and artificial habitats by black sea bass (BSB), a study being conducted by Dr. Brad Stevens at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore. Dr. Stevens has led 1.5 field seasons for the project so far, and will continue to collect and analyze data through 2018.

The objective of this study is to improve our understanding of the relationship between BSB abundance and habitat characteristics in the Mid-Atlantic region. Specifically, Dr. Stevens will (1) determine the preference of BSB for particular habitats by assessing their abundance, size structure, and feeding ecology within natural and artificial reefs; (2) improve the understanding of habitat characteristics of natural and artificial reefs; and (3) determine if reduced fragmentation and increased connectivity of habitats increases fish recruitment, by experimentally manipulating corridors between isolated patches.

To date Dr. Stevens and his team have surveyed four sites consisting of artificial reefs of varying age. They have collected data on abundance, biogenic epifauna, stomach contents, and stable isotopes. They have also identified natural reefs to sample in 2018, and created an artificial reef corridor between two artificial reef sites to study the influence of habitat connectivity on BSB characteristics.

Presentations from Jeff Beal: Lake Okeechobee Water Releases and St. Lucie Reef Coral Reef Stress Responses, and Comparison of Restored vs. Natural Oyster Reefs in the Indian River Lagoon *Presentations Available*

Jeff Beal provided two presentations. The first was on Lake Okeechobee water releases and the stress responses of St. Lucie reef corals. FL FWC is using assessments of these northernmost Florida reefs to inform estuarine restoration performance measures in the Everglades and along the coast. Mr. Beal also presented on FWC’s comparison studies of oyster health between restored and natural reefs in the Indian River Lagoon. Since the meeting, Lisa has connected Chris Moore with Jeff to further discuss the 3-D artificial reefs FL is using to attract oysters for potential use in the Chesapeake Bay.

Summary of TNC/NOAA Seagrass and Salt Marsh Fishery Productivity Workshop

Kent summarized the success of a workshop he attended that was hosted by The Nature Conservancy and NOAA to develop a web-based tool that calculates the productivity of seagrass and salt marshes. Lou was also at the workshop. The tool will operate similar to The Nature Conservancy’s Oyster Calculator (<http://oceanwealth.org/tools/oyster-calculator/>).

NFHP, Coastal FHP, and Whitewater to Bluewater Update *Presentation Available*

Lisa provided the Steering Committee with an update from the National Fish Habitat Partnership. There was little to report on the coastal FHPs over the past six months. NFHP is working on a project database to keep all FHP project information in one place. She will be working to update it with ACFHP information over the next month or two. Currently, the NFHP Board is meeting in South Dakota, and she will share the updates from that meeting in the upcoming weeks as she receives them. Lisa is on the subcommittee to update the NFHP evaluation – it is a report that each FHP fills out every three years, and the next one will be in 2018. As of now the results of the report still do not count for anything other than provide information for the Board, but this might change in the future. As far as she knows, the USFWS annual report will be the same as last year.

On the legislative front, there is renewed interest in a sportsman package bill. The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee has language referencing fish habitat conservation. The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee is also working on a sportsman package but currently does not have fish habitat conservation language in it. The NFHP legislative coalition is working with both committees to combine their efforts and get this enacted.

NFHP secured the Multi-State Conservation Grant for 2018, and ACFHP will receive $13,000 from the grant. This is $4-5K higher than last year, but still less than the $50,000 we were receiving a few years ago. This is the third year in a three-year cycle for the grant, and NFHP and the FHPs will review the plan for applying for funding in 2019.

Ryan Roberts, NFHP Communications Coordinator, has created an Amazon Smile Account for Beyond the Pond. Lisa posted the link to the website and sent a newsletter about the account in June, and she will add a permanent link to the website as well. The account can be accessed directly here: <http://smile.amazon.com/ch/47-2547128>.

**Action Item:** Lisa will add a direct link to the Amazon Smile Account on the ACFHP website.

**Action Item:** Lisa will ask Ryan if ACFHP can have their own Amazon Smile Account.

The NFHP Coordinators are hoping to hold a workshop in 2018; the location, date, and topics are yet to be determined, but the Coordinators have found the workshops to be helpful in the past, and hope to continue getting together in the future, if funding allows.

Finally, Lisa shared the draft priority conservation areas (HUC8s) that ACFHP plans to recommend to SARP and EBTJV for identifying a common area or watershed in the Whitewater to Bluewater region for focusing conservation efforts. A subcommittee has reviewed the overlapping HUC8s in the Whitewater to Bluewater Region, and solicited feedback from the Steering Committee. Some Steering Committee members wanted a closer look at the selected HUC8s, so Lisa will send around the spreadsheet and presentation for final approval.

**Action Item:** Lisa will share the prioritized HUC8s PowerPoint and Excel spreadsheet with the Steering Committee for final prioritization.

FY2018 NFHP Project Rankings and ACFHP Operations Update *Presentation Available*

The Steering Committee finalized their ranking of recommended conservation projects for FY2018 National Fish Habitat Action Plan (NFHAP) funding. From 2010 to 2017 ACFHP has facilitated NFHAP in awarding >$530,000 to partners to complete 17 on-the-ground projects from Florida to Maine. Funding supported 3 tidal vegetation projects, 2 SAV projects, 3 oyster reef restoration projects, 8 fish passage projects, and 1 sturgeon spawning habitat restoration project.

After Pat’s operations update on Day 2, the Steering Committee has decided to recommend the following projects to the Service for funding in 2018, in order:

1. ACFHP Operations ($65K)
2. Columbia Dam Removal, Knowlton Township, NJ ($25K if we can split the cost with EBTJV or Fish Passage, otherwise $50K)
3. Oyster Reef Restoration in Back Sound, Rachel Carson Reserve, NC ($34K)
4. Seagrass Conservation Moorings, Coecles Harbor, NY ($32K)
5. Restoration of SAV in the Freshwater and Mesohaline Region of the Chesapeake Bay ($16K)

The Columbia Dam removal, led by The Nature Conservancy, will open 20 river miles that run into the Delaware River, benefitting species such as American shad, river herring, American eel, and native sea lamprey. The oyster reef restoration project will restore 0.11 acres of oyster reefs and protect 3+ acres of salt marsh near Beaufort, NC. It will enhance habitat for red drum, flounder, and bonnethead sharks. The project is led by East Carolina University. ACFHP will recommend to the Service that the on-the-ground portion be funded, without the overhead. The conservation moorings project will replace six traditional moorings with conservation moorings to protect seagrass in the harbor. It is led by the New York Department of Environmental Conservation, and will benefit bay scallops, fluke, river herring, American eel, and striped bass. The Chesapeake Bay project will restore 10-20 acres of SAV through seed harvest and dispersal, and is led by Maryland Department of Natural Resources. It will benefit blue crabs and striped bass, and is part of the Chesapeake Bay Program’s goal of restoring 185,000 acres of SAV.

There was a discussion about indirect costs, and whether we can put a cap on indirect future funding cycles.

**Action Item:** Lisa will ask the Service if we are prohibited from putting a cap on indirect costs, and we will discuss this further at the spring 2018 Steering Committee meeting.

**Action Item:** Lisa will ask the Steering Committee to calculate their salary with benefits x hours dedicated to ACFHP each year for a better estimate of ACFHP Operations match.

Review Mapping Project Prioritization Status

The ACFHP Steering Committee received updates on the progress of the NOAA-funded mapping project to spatially analyze fish habitat conservation areas in the southeastern United States. The ACFHP Science and Data Committee met via webinar on June 12th and in-person September 27-28th to finalize the recommended variables for diadromous, estuarine, and coastal analyses. The Steering Committee provided feedback for the Science and Data Committee, and the project is expected to be completed in the spring of 2018.

The Steering Committee discussed including a layer of Atlantic sturgeon data, which Pace said NOAA has access to (Lisa said that after discussing these data with the ASMFC stock assessment scientists, there was agreement that the data wasn’t comprehensive enough to include in a spatial prioritization). After further discussion among the Steering Committee, it was decided that we will not include fish data into this mapping effort due to different collection methods, spatial coverage issues, as well as complications associated with seasonality, among other things.

The Steering Committee also suggested replacing the word ‘inlet’ with ‘water body’, and replacing the water quality variables with the EPA’s water quality indices: <https://www.epa.gov/waterdata/waters-geospatial-data-downloads>. 303(d) waters should replace the NPDS variable, and we should consider other water quality indices for non-point source pollution. We might also want to consider the EPA’s National Coastal Condition Assessment: <https://www.epa.gov/national-aquatic-resource-surveys/ncca>. The EPA WATERS Tools (<https://www.epa.gov/waterdata/waters-tools>) might also be useful. Overall the Steering Committee recommended EPA water quality data over the variables that we had suggested in the analyses.

Regarding the coastal protection analysis, the Steering Committee recommended only mapping HAPCs, since the rest of the variables are redundant – corals are considered HAPCs, so they are already included. When the data comes out, we should add the mapped corals from Norfolk Canyon. We should also find out (from Jeff?) about Habitat Suitability Indices for coral and see if we can incorporate those into the analysis.

The Steering Committee recommended simplifying our analyses: instead of the seven maps that we proposed, they recommend creating four maps that summarize the best areas for fish habitat conservation. We should not analyze areas for restoration, and instead focus on the protection maps, and call them ‘areas for habitat conservation.’ These four maps would be:

1. Northern diadromous
2. Northern estuarine
3. Southern estuarine
4. Southern coastal

For the Northern diadromous fish habitat conservation map, we should only map the catchments with historical diadromous presence. We can contact Pace for those maps.

**Action Item:** Lisa will contact Pace for historical diadromous fish presence maps to limit the northern diadromous fish habitat conservation analysis to only focus on areas with (current or historical) diadromous presence.

To account for areas with ‘rare’ habitats, e.g. the only remaining seagrass bed in an estuary, a qualitative assessment should be conducted after the maps are created to ‘flip’ certain areas to ‘high priority.’ This will reduce possibility of marking certain parts of the country (e.g. Long Island Sound) as low-priority, as well as highlight important habitats that might not have been captured in the analysis. We should continue to account for corridors in the diadromous analysis as planned.

**Action Item:** Lisa will share this feedback with the Science and Data Committee and GIS contractors to continue moving this project forward.

Discuss Ideas for New ACFHP Website

The Steering Committee brainstormed ideas for ACFHP’s website update. Lisa displayed the American Bird Conservancy’s website for inspiration, as well as ACFHP’s current website.

Suggestions include:

* Website needs to be mobile-friendly
* We should have a page on ACFHP staff and the Steering Committee
* Wordpress has a lot of features and since ACFHP’s current website is on Wordpress, it could be a smooth transition
* We should remove the list of projects under the map on the ‘funded projects’ page since it’s redundant.
* Before and after photos of our restoration work should be highlighted on the main page.
* We should have multiple administrators on the website.
* Tabs can include: how we can help you (products, publications, on the ground projects), and how you can help us (donate, partner, funding)

The subcommittee to work on the website includes: January, Kent, Chris, Tina, and Bob. We will have to decide what the purpose/goal of the website is (recruitment tool, information for current members, congressional support, move our mission further, highlight services we provide to secure future funding, etc.).

**Action Item:** Lisa will convene a conference call and webinar with the website subcommittee to develop our website goals and RFP for a website developer.

2017 – 2019 Action Plan Check-In

The Steering Committee checked in on the progress of their two-year Conservation Action Plan. The status of each Strategy and Action is as follows:

A.1.1.1: ongoing and meeting targets

A.1.1.2: we discussed submitting a proposal for Saltonstall-Kennedy funding but there was a conflict due to ASMFC’s involvement in the process. We will create a draft list of things we need funding for in early 2018.

A.1.1.3: we have endorsed 2/4 projects this year, and Kent and January plan to submit two more this year.

A.1.4.1: completed; Marek presented to the MAFMC on the Species-Habitat Matrix.

A.3.3.1: ongoing and meeting targets

B.1.1.1: will be completed in 2018 with website redesign

B.1.2.1: will be completed in 2018

B.1.2.2: will be completed in 2018

B.1.2.3: will be completed in 2019

B.1.3.1: will be completed by the end of 2017

C.1.2.1: will be completed in 2018

C.1.3.1 and C.1.3.2: will be completed after the website redesign

C.1.4.1: will be completed in 2018 after the website redesign

C.1.4.2: ongoing and meeting targets

C.2.1.3: completed

C.2.3.2: this will be completed along with the website redesign in 2018

C.3.1.1: we have participated in 2/4 in 2017, and will aim to attend all board meetings in 2018.

C.3.1.2: ongoing and meeting targets

C.3.2.1: we have written articles for each coastal FHP newsletter, but there hasn’t been a newsletter in the last few seasons

C.3.2.2: ongoing and meeting targets

D.1.1.1: ongoing and meeting targets

D.1.1.2: ongoing and meeting targets

D.1.1.3: ongoing and meeting targets

D.1.2.1: ongoing and meeting targets

D.2.1.1: ongoing and meeting targets

D.2.1.2: this will be discussed at the spring 2018 meeting

D.2.2.1: ongoing and meeting targets

D.3.1.1: will be completed by spring 2018

D.3.1.2: will be completed in 2019

D.4.1.1: completed

D.4.1.4: completed

Other Business

The ACFHP Steering Committee would like to meet in early May, possibly with the SAFMC Habitat Advisory Panel (AP). Top locations include Charleston (where the SAFMC Habitat AP will be meeting) and Savannah. The fall meeting will be in NYC.

**Action Item:** Lisa will talk with Roger Pugliese, Pat, and Toni Kerns, about a possible joint meeting with the SAFMC Habitat AP.

*Meeting Adjourn*

Action Items

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