



# National Fish Habitat Partnership Board Meeting Agenda

Monday, March 22, 2021  
3:00 – 5:00 PM ET

**Zoom Meeting Information:**

<https://fishwildlife-org.zoom.us/j/96259811664?pwd=NjVGNDRTcW90eThzK3lLK3pEdHRYZz09>

Meeting ID: 962 5981 1664

Passcode: 939793

Dial by your location: 1 301 715 8592

## Attendees (56):

### Board Members Present:

1	Allen	Stan	X
2	Austen	Doug	X
3	Bowden	Allison	X
4	Boyd	Douglass	X
5	Cantrell	Chris	X
6	Eischeid	Ted	X
7	Gilliland	Gene	X
8	Guertin	Steve	X
9	Gyant	Barnie	X
10	Kinsinger	Anne	X
11	Kruse	Carter	X
12	LeCoq	John	X
13	Leonard	Mike	X
14	Moore	Chris	X
15	Moore	Bryan	X
16	Nygren	Doug	X
17	Perry	Steve	X
18	Plumer	Christy	X
19	Rauch	Sam	X
20	Schaeffer	Timothy D.	X
21	Schriever	Ed	X
22	Slaughter	Joe	X
23	Trushenski	Jesse	X
24	Wilson	Bobby	X

Jesse Trushenski introduced herself to the full Board - Agricultural representative and is the Chief Science Officer at Riverence, formerly worked for ID Fish and Game, and was a professor

at Southern IL University. Jesse is also a past president of AFS.

### FHP & FWS Present:

- Kevin Haupt
- Jessica Speed
- Karin Eldridge
- Branden Bornemann
- Louise Maldin
- Gordon Smith
- Alicia Marrs
- Joe Nohner
- Jennifer Graves
- Richard Mitchell
- Deb Hart
- Therese Thompson
- Tripp Boltin
- Mike Daigneault
- Lisa Havel
- Steven Krentz
- Callie McMunigal
- Bill Rice
- John Netto

### Board Staff Present:

- Alex Atkinson
- Ryan Roberts
- Mike Bailey
- Gary Whelan
- Daniel Wierich

### Other Meeting Attendees:



- Rob Harper (USFS)
- Eric MacMillan (USFWS)
- Susan Pultz (NOAA Fisheries)
- Kimberly Conley (USFS)
- John Young
- Christopher Estes

## Board Business:

Approved by Motion:

- February NFHP Board Meeting summary: motion by Chris Moore, seconded by Steve Perry.
- March NFHP Board Meeting agenda: motion by Chris Moore, seconded by Alison Bowden.
- The Board shall seek a virtual vote (via email or poll) of the full Board on the revised project definition put forward by the Partnerships Committee:  
*“Fish Habitat Conservation Projects include all activities that the NFHP Board, Fish Habitat Partnerships, and our partners perform, fund, or support in whole or in part, that coordinate, promote, and implement conservation (protect, restore and enhance) actions for fish and aquatic habitat.”*

## Future Board Meetings

- Following the March meeting, Board meetings via Zoom will tentatively be scheduled on **the fourth Monday of the month – April 26, May 24, June 28, and July 26.**
- The Board expressed via Zoom poll an interest in a both virtual and in-person visioning/assimilation session. The Board has availability from 2-3:30 PM ET on Monday, May 17 for the first virtual visioning session to occur.

## Summary:

Time (PM ET)	Agenda Item	Board Book Tab	Lead(s)
3:00	<b>Welcome, Attendance, &amp; Introductions</b> <i>Desired outcomes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Board staff action</b> to take attendance.</li> <li>• <b>Board action</b> to approve the agenda for this meeting.</li> <li>• <b>Board action</b> to approve the meeting summary from the February meeting.</li> </ul>		<b>Ed Schriever</b> ( <i>Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Board Chairman</i> )

Chairman Schriever welcomed everyone to the Board meeting. Alex Atkinson (Board staff) took the Board roll call and all Board members were present. Chairman Schriever reminded the Board that we are not yet a complete Board, given that we are short 2 Tribal members. Chairman Schriever outlined how the Board is operating on “parallel tracks” since it has not yet had the opportunity to formally approve Committee membership, workplans, Board procedures, etc. but has had to make quick progress on some key decisions that are provisions of the ACE Act. The Board and its Committees have legacy materials from which to draw language and develop new materials in accordance with provisions of the Act. This Board will establish its own set of National Conservation Priorities and must use what they have in the interim to navigate the transition. Chairman Schriever outlined that although the Board has not yet defined what determines a quorum, the perfect attendance of Board members on today’s call represents the diversity of perspectives that are intended to be included. He also reminded the Board that the ACE

Act requires an affirmative vote of 2/3 of all Board members to approve a recommended list of Fish Habitat Conservation Projects for the Secretary of Interior.

**3:15 2021 NFHP Board Meeting Schedule**

**Tab 1**

**Alex Atkinson** (NOAA Fisheries, Board Staff)

*Desired outcomes:*

- **Board awareness** of future 2021 meeting schedule.
- **Next NFHP Board meeting will be Monday, April 26 from 3-5 PM ET.**
- **Board discussion** of planning for a future facilitated Board visioning session.

Alex Atkinson (Board staff) reminded the Board of the meeting schedule through July. At one of the upcoming meetings, the Board will need to discuss the meeting frequency needed for the remainder of the year beyond July. In addition to discussing the meeting schedule, Alex described the Board visioning session that the staff is developing with an AFWA MAT facilitator to help establish a common foundation from which the Board can operate. This 90-minute session will include both large and small group discussions and the MAT team has successfully facilitated these sessions remotely during the pandemic. Topics to be discussed include values, norms and traditions of the NFHP Board, challenges and desires of the NFHP Board moving forward, and sharing data regarding external influences to the NFHP Board.

The staff requested Board input for whether to have a visioning session virtually, in-person, or pursue one of each. With 62% of the vote in a Zoom poll, the Board indicated a preference to have one of each a virtual and in-person visioning session led by a facilitator. The Board indicated a preference for Monday, May 17 for the virtual visioning session. Chairman Schriever indicated that it would be ideal to have an in-person meeting in late summer or early fall, but time will tell whether or not that is possible. The Board and the federal agencies designated in the ACE Act will also need to be thinking about development of the Interagency Operational Plan which is due by October 30, 2021.

**3:30 Screening of NFHP “Our Story” Video and “Getting to Know the FHPs” videos**

**Ryan Roberts** (Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Board Staff)

*Desired outcomes:*

- **Board awareness** of the NFHP mission & legacy.
- **Q&A** about the FHP presentations.

Ryan Roberts (Board staff) introduced and screened the “Our Story” NFHP video that was produced in celebration of the 10-year anniversary of NFHP in 2016 with funding support from Bass Pro Shops. He also showed two “Getting to Know FHPs” videos – one from the Midwest Glacial Lakes Partnership and the other from the Western Native Trout Initiative. A Board member indicated that NFHP should be cognizant of life jacket usage in any outreach materials that show people on boats given recent boat-related fatalities in the state of PA. Chairman Schriever wrapped up the session by emphasizing that it is important for NFHP to make the link between people and fish habitats in order to help people understand the important impacts of our work.

**3:55 Updates from USFWS**

**Steve Guertin** (US Fish and Wildlife Service)

*Desired outcomes:*

- **Board awareness** of FY2021 funding and support from the USFWS.
- **Board awareness** of the status of list of Tribal member nominees.
- **Board awareness** of the status of Interagency Operational Plan discussions.

Steve Guertin thanked the Board and FHPs for their feedback and conversation during the February Board meeting about the recommendation to maintain the status quo for FY2021. That feedback was incorporated into discussions at the USFWS that resulted in the election to maintain the status quo for FY2021 and allow the Partnership more time to transition into the new funding model. Steve summarized what this will mean in terms of funding - \$6.64M in total:

- \$1.7M (base operational funding for FHPs)
- \$2.75M (FHP projects)
- \$2.25 (USFWS staff support)

And that this will mean no change in USFWS personnel support for FY2021. For FY2022, the new administration is formulating its budget. The new administration will likely align their budget with four main pillars – climate, racial justice, and economic and COVID recovery. This could mean potential additional NFHP funding opportunities via a forthcoming infrastructure bill.

Steve also informed the Board that the list of five Tribal seat nominations is currently in the hands of the Assistant Secretary and hopefully will be approved by the Secretary of the Department of Interior by the Board's April meeting to allow the Board to approve these last two members of the Board. In advance of the April meeting, the USFWS will be reaching out the Federal partners to begin work on the Interagency Operational Plan. They plan to loop in agencies beyond those described by the Act (NOAA, EPA, USFS, and USGS) to also include BLM, FEMA, Army Corps of Engineers, and Federal Highway Administration who could all be critical partners in this work.

#### **4:10 Recap of Board Priority Actions**

*Desired outcomes:*

- **Board awareness** of the upcoming decision points of the Board.

**Ed Schriever** (*Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Board Chairman*)

Chairman Schriever recapped the funding scenario described in Steve's update and re-emphasized the need for the Board to continue operating in "parallel tracks". He summarized that it will be important for the Partnership to rethink our vernacular with respect to the term "project funding". Previously, that meant a traditional on-the-ground project that moved dirt. The new NFHP model identifies \$7.2M for "projects" (this term is not defined by the Act and the Board has an opportunity to define), but also requires new 1:1 non-federal match. We no longer have a scenario by where the USFWS can provide the \$1.7M in support of base operations to the Fish Habitat Partnerships.

Since the February Board meeting, the Board has requested that the Board Committees help the Board think about a project definition. Chairman Schriever also clarified that of the \$7.2M identified for projects, 5% is allocated to Tribes and does not require 1:1 non-federal match. That means that the Board will have \$6.84M in project funding to provide for Fish Habitat conservation projects. In addition, the Board will need to discuss the multiple levels at which match can be met.

**4:20 Board Priority Actions (by Committee)**

*Desired outcomes:*

**Partnerships Committee (PC):**

- **Board awareness** of PC membership.
- **Board awareness and discussion of:**
  - PC strawman “project” definition;
  - Retrospective on NFHP non-federal match

**Tab 2**

**Stan Allen** (*Partnerships Committee Tri-Chair*) & **Therese Thompson** (*Partnerships Committee Tri-Chair, Western Native Trout Initiative Coordinator*)

Stan Allen reviewed the updated membership of the Partnerships Committee since the February Board meeting (5 Board members and 11 FHP coordinators). Stan highlighted several of the Committee’s main tasks including developing a draft definition of “Fish Habitat Conservation Project”, examining non-federal match funding in previous years, and developing a recommended plan for FY2022 funding. Stan presented the draft project definition and outlined that the Committee started with the USFWS project definition making revisions so the definition would encompass a broader suite of activities including FHP operational support.

Therese Thompson introduced three different potential interpretations of the 1:1 non-federal match requirement (project level, FHP level, and NFHP level). Therese also shared with the Board that the Committee is gathering funding data to retrospectively examine match brought in by FHPs in FY2020 to see what level of match the Partnerships bring in, without that requirement.

The Board then discussed the proposed definition of Fish Habitat Conservation Project and the match funding requirement. Questions were raised about the Congressional intent of the match requirement to better understand at what level Congress expects to see this match. Christy Plumer shared that the language in the ACE Act was modeled after the **North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA)** and that the match requirement was a very important element of the bill for the Republicans of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. She also emphasized that NAWCA includes in-kind contributions which creates additional flexibility in how the match requirement can be met. Christy did not think it would be acceptable to Congress for NFHP to meet the \$6.84M in match as NAWCA funding is matched on a project-level basis. On the topic of FHP attrition, Chairman Schriever reminded the Board that all 20 FHPs have 5 years to meet the threshold of requirements outlined in the ACE Act and that the Board hopes to examine ways to help some of the less sophisticated FHPs gain the capacity needed to be fully approved by Congress.

Some Board members expressed concern about the defensibility of this very high level project definition and an interest in seeing the retrospective match data. **National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF)** was mentioned as another potential model to examine that requires match funding. Steve Guertin mentioned the importance of building good grace with appropriators and that showing previous funding cycles’ project-level match can help to document our progress as the Partnership navigates this transition. He also offered that the USFWS could look more into the match funding requirement interpretation with the help of an examiner and potentially an appropriations clerk point of contact. Chairman Schriever reminded the Board that the ACE Act outlines a deadline for FHP projects to be submitted to the Board by March 31 and a list of projects recommended for funding to the Secretary of DOI by July 1.

**Science and Data Committee (SDC):**

- **Board awareness** of SDC membership.
- **Board awareness and discussion of:**

**Tab 3**

**Gary Whelan** (*Science and Data Committee Co-Chair*)

- Process to develop FY2022 project and evaluation criteria;
- Process to develop national NFHP priorities

Gary Whelan presented briefly on behalf of the Science and Data Committee, re-established at the last Board meeting. He outlined the key priorities of the Committee including developing National Conservation Priorities, project review and evaluation criteria, reviewing FHP assessments, supporting NFHP Project tracking database needs, and supporting a new NFHP Data System.

**Legislative/Budget Committee:**

**Board discussion** of former Legislative Team of NFHP

**Christy Plumer** (*Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership*)

Christy Plumer recommended the Board rethink the former NFHP Leg Team in order to meet the Board's need to implement the ACE Act while coordinating with OMB and other partners on the Hill. This new team could be called the NFHP Policy Committee. This Committee would advance legislative and administrative policies and funding opportunities for the benefit of NFHP and its associated fish habitat partnerships. There is a recognition by members of the former Leg Team that NFHP has opportunities for new funding streams. Tim Schaeffer, NFHP Board Member and head of AFWA's Legislative and Federal Budget Committee, has agreed to serve in the Chair role of this new Policy Committee. There was no action during the meeting to form this new Committee, but was raised for the Board's future consideration.

The Board then revisited the Partnerships Committee's recommended definition of Fish Habitat Conservation project to see if it would be able to be put to a vote (that would require at least 16 "Yes" votes to adopt the definition). There was much additional discussion about the purpose of the definition and its intention to provide flexibility within the ACE Act to fund projects to include FHP base operational support. Chairman Schreiber emphasized that the Board is looking for a simple solution to this issue that will not cause NFHP to lose many of its existing Fish Habitat Partnerships and that the Board will, ultimately, be reviewing all FHP projects proposed for funding to approve and recommend to the Secretary of Interior annually.

The Board voted on a motion to accept the definition:

*"Fish Habitat Conservation Projects include all activities that the NFHP Board, Fish Habitat Partnerships, and our partners perform, fund, or support in whole or in part, that coordinate, promote, and implement conservation (protect, restore and enhance) actions for fish and aquatic habitat."*

which did not pass (16 votes required to approve, vote count was 13 yes – 3 no). The Board then discussed and approved via vote an approach to ask for a virtual vote of the full Board on the definition since the previous vote was made following some Board members leaving the call. There was some additional discussion about some of the concerns with the definition and the possibility of including overhead in project costs in order to cover FHP base operational support. The Board call adjourned around 5:45 PM ET.

**5:00      Adjourn**