

FISHERIES SCIENCE PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership

Active Committees:

Steering Committee
Science and Data Subcommittee
Communications Subcommittee
Funding Subcommittee
Project Endorsement Subcommittee
Award Subcommittee



Purpose/History:

The Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP or Partnership) is a collaborative effort involving state and federal natural resource agencies, environmental non-governmental organizations, and other groups whose purpose is to develop partnerships that extend beyond their traditional boundaries and responsibilities, and establish a commitment to work together for the benefit of aquatic resources. The mission of the ACFHP is to accelerate the conservation, protection, restoration, and enhancement of habitat for native Atlantic coastal, estuarine-dependent, and diadromous fishes through said partnerships.

Guided by its Conservation Strategic Plan, ACFHP seeks to confront priority threats to fish habitats with a coordinated coastwide approach, and has also identified subregional priority habitats, to attend to more localized issues and to focus the efforts of the Partnership so that it, together with partners, can make a measurable difference for fish habitat.

In 2006, the Commission charged its Habitat Committee with developing a coastal fish habitat partnership under the auspices of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan (NFHAP). The Commission recognized the existing NFHAP partnerships were primarily focused on freshwater species and that an important area was missing—coastal habitats. The existing infrastructure and collaboration with the Atlantic coastal states made the Commission an ideal candidate to catalyze such a partnership. Through a series of letters, information sessions, meetings, and a workshop, the ACFHP was formed. The ACFHP was officially designated by NFHAP as a ‘candidate’ FHP in 2007, and a fully ‘recognized’ FHP in 2009.

Leadership of the Partnership is independent of the Commission management structure, although Commission committee members are active on ACFHP committees. The ACFHP Steering Committee is the decision-making body of the Partnership, and has oversight responsibility for all ACFHP activities. The activities of the Steering Committee directly support the implementation of its Conservation Strategic Plan and Action Plan, which identify the

Partnership's objectives, strategies, and actions. Subcommittees are responsible for defining, refining, or accomplishing tasks that assist with meeting ACFHP objectives.

Membership: Participation on the Steering Committee is voluntary and is not to exceed 25 voting members. The Steering Committee includes no more than one voting person from each signatory to the ACFHP Memorandum of Understanding. Up to three ex-officio members, selected by the Steering Committee, may also be included. Steering Committee members should represent the highest level of their organization as feasible. ACFHP partners wishing to participate on the Steering Committee may petition the Steering Committee at any time.

Subcommittees are established by the Steering Committee. Members and chairs are either volunteers or appointed, and are not required to be Steering Committee members.

Codifying Documents: ACFHP Memorandum of Understanding (MOU); ACFHP Steering Committee Charter and By-Laws; ACFHP Conservation Strategic Plan, ACFHP Action Plan

Type and Frequency of Meetings: The Steering Committee meets twice a year. ACFHP Steering Committee members also communicate via conference calls and email. Subcommittees communicate and meet as needed to address new tasks.

Primary activities:

On the ground fish habitat conservation projects are being supported by the Partnership through priority setting, issuing of annual RFPs, and evaluation and selection of projects for funding. Over 25 projects have been funded in the past 10 years, and many have been endorsed as well. Current activities are focused on implementing the Partnership's Conservation Strategic Plan. Finance activities include identifying and pursuing opportunities for long-term operational and project funding. Communications activities include maintaining the website and outreach materials with up-to-date information on Partnership activities. Science activities include developing coastwide habitat assessments and refining habitat prioritizations.

Major accomplishments:

Restored over 1,340 acres of fish habitat
Developed the 5-Year Strategic Plan and Annual Action Plans
Published the Species-Habitat Matrix in *Bioscience*
Welcomed ten new partners since establishing the original Memorandum of Understanding
Funded scientific research in the Mid-Atlantic Bight
Created a coastwide assessment of fish habitat for coastal, estuarine, and diadromous fishes

History of Chairmanship:

Steering Committee Current Chair & Vice-Chair: Chair, Jessica Coakley, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (10/23-present); Vice-Chair, Chris Moore, Chesapeake Bay Foundation (10/23-present); Past Chair, Kent Smith, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (10/11-10/23), George Schuler, The Nature Conservancy (08/07-10/11)

Science and Data Working Group Chair: Eric Schneider, Rhode Island Division of Fish & Wildlife (06/24-present); Past Chair, Marek Topolski, Maryland Department of Natural Resources (06/16-06/24)

Staff Lead: Simen Kaalstad, ACFHP Director, skaalstad@asmfc.org