

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

ACFHP Steering Committee

Monday, November 9, 2026

9:15 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Monday, November 10, 2026

9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Agenda

The times listed are approximate; the order in which these items will be taken is subject to change.

Monday, November 9 | 9:15 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Webinar Link: <https://v.ringcentral.com/join/133670643>

- | | |
|---|------------|
| 1. Welcome & Introductions (<i>J. Coakley</i>) | 9:15 a.m. |
| 2. Committee Consent | 9:30 a.m. |
| 3. Restoration Project Updates (<i>S. Kaalstad</i>) | 9:45 a.m. |
| • FY26 Projects – Active (<i>A. Vidal, W. Duncan, USFWS</i>) | |
| • ACTION: Review & approve final FY27 NFHP Project List (<i>S. Kaalstad</i>) | |
| <i>Break</i> | 10:45 a.m. |
| 4. NFHP Activities and Fish Habitat Fund Update | 11:00 a.m. |
| • 20 th Anniversary Celebration | |
| 5. ACFHP Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Workshop Updates (<i>E. Schneider</i>) | 11:30 a.m. |
| <i>Lunch</i> | 12:00 p.m. |
| 6. Opportunistic Project Funding | 1:15 p.m. |
| 7. 2027-2031 Conservation Strategic Plan | 2:15 p.m. |
| • ACTION: Finalize and approve 5-year Conservation Strategic Plan | |
| <i>Break</i> | 2:45 p.m. |
| 8. Draft 2027-2028 Action Plan | 3:00 p.m. |
| • ACTION: Decide on 1- or 2-year plan | |
| • Develop draft action plan | |
| 9. Adjourn | 4:30 p.m. |

The meeting will be held at Hotel Viking, One Bellevue Avenue, Newport, RI
and via webinar (see above for details)

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Tuesday, November 10 | 9 :00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Webinar Link: <https://v.ringcentral.com/join/349156847>

- | | |
|---|------------|
| 1. Reconvene | 9:00 a.m. |
| 2. Continue 2027-2028 Action Plan | 9:15 a.m. |
| • ACTION: Finalize and approve new Action Plan | |
| <i>Lunch</i> | 12:00 p.m. |
| 3. Other Business | 1:15 p.m. |
| 4. Guest Speaker(s) | 1:30 p.m. |
| 5. Adjourn | 4:00 p.m. |

The meeting will be held at Hotel Viking, One Bellevue Avenue, Newport, RI
and via webinar (see above for details)



ACFHP Steering Committee – Virtual Meeting – September 29, 2026

Participants: Robert Atwood, Russ Babb, Cassie Bauer, Jeff Beal, Cameron Brinton, Pat Campfield, Lou Chiarella, Jessica Coakley, Mari-Beth DeLucia, Tim Ellis, Alexa Fournier, Simen Kaalstad, Chris Moore, Eric Schneider, Marek Topolski, Alex Vidal

Meeting Summary

Strategic plan streamlined with simplified combined mission/vision and updated goals, objectives, and strategies. Action plan to be finalized at November in-person meeting. RFP review committee confirmed, with 12–13 proposals received and deadlines discussed.

Discussion Points

Strategic Plan Update: Structure, Language, and Content

1. Reviewed prior and draft mission/vision language; consensus to use a simplified, combined statement, incorporating both migratory and coastal fish.
2. Moved toward short, jargon-free mission/vision; preference for accessible language over technical terms.
3. Three top-level goals agreed for front of document: conservation and restoration delivery, science and data product development, and facilitation of partnerships and collaboration.
4. Discussion to add concise, goal-specific sentences under each to clarify ACFHP's role; to be drafted and reviewed later.
 - I. Conservation & Restoration Delivery *to the highest priority/ projects*
 - II. Develop Science & Data Products *that support science-based decision making.*
 - III. Facilitating Partnerships & Collaboration *across the ACFHP landscape.*

5. **Decision:** Adopt simplified, combined mission/vision language with explicit reference to both migratory and coastal fish.
6. **Decision:** Keep goals concise with potential 1-sentence explanations for clarity, to be drafted post-meeting.

Objectives and Strategies Revision

1. Consolidated and revised high-level objectives (on-the-ground, science/data, outreach/communications, operations) to reduce redundancy and simplify structure.
2. Adjusted strategies under each objective to remove overlaps (e.g., strategies about project support and leveraging resources reworded and deduplicated as discussed).
3. **Decision:** Remove redundant strategies; subsume actions where appropriate and move some to action plan.
4. Science/data strategy and actions reorganized for clarity; strategies referencing maintenance, development, and valuation of tools and updates streamlined and merged.
5. Strategy for "prioritization of conservation areas" moved from science/data to be an action under the implementation/funding objective, reflecting actual use in RFP process.
6. Outreach and communication strategies streamlined for clarity (e.g., digital platform language simplified, but digital specificity maintained).
7. **Decision:** Retain communication strategy wording as "via digital platforms and at professional conferences/trade shows."
8. Strategy to promote practices/methodologies for conservation to be kept as specifically discussed.
9. Collaboration and outreach to funders and network partners reframed as promoting ACFHP priorities and ensuring staff engagement in broader habitat and restoration community.

Document Format and Polishing

1. Proposal to move extended background and threat information to appendices to shorten the main document for distribution purposes.
2. Updated figures, accomplishments, and partners to be reflected in next draft.
3. **Decision:** Draft to be reorganized as a short, distributable version plus a full appendix version; updated, polished draft to be presented in November.
4. Pending: Need for short and full versions confirmed, but formatting and content specifics to be finalized by Simen prior to November meeting.

Action Planning and Next Steps

1. Final action plan and strategic plan sign-off planned for November in-person meeting in Newport, Rhode Island.
2. Pending: Exact text for brief goal explanations and some wordsmithing tasks to be completed prior to meeting.

RFP Review Process and Logistics

1. Twelve (potentially thirteen) RFP proposals received; briefed on range of projects.
2. Review committee confirmed: Cassie Bauer added, replacing Alexa; other reviewers (Robert Atwood, Mark Rousseau, Kent Smith, Marek Topolski, and Simen) reconfirmed.
3. Timeline: Proposals to be reviewed, recommendations due by November 15th; Simen to circulate review process and criteria soon.
4. Travel logistics for November meeting discussed; team to coordinate arrivals/departures via spreadsheet to support carpooling.
5. Pending: Confirmation of travel details and review deadlines; last-minute proposal (shellfish project) under consideration for possible inclusion.

Action Items

Simen Kaalstad

1. Update and polish strategic plan, incorporating combined mission/vision, revised goals, and streamlined objectives/strategies for November meeting

2. Draft concise language clarifying each high-level goal as one-sentence explanation (Due: **prior to November meeting**)
3. Circulate instructions, review criteria, and proposals to RFP review committee (Due: **before first week of November**)
4. Prepare distributable short version and full appendix version of strategic plan for meeting (Due: **November meeting**)

FY27 Proposal Review Sub-Committee

Review RFP proposals and submit evaluations (Due: **before November 15th**)

- **Cassie Bauer**
- **Robert Atwood**
- **Mark Rousseau**
- **Marek Topolski**
- **Kent Smith**
- **(Simen Kaalstad)**

Pat Campfield

1. Post travel spreadsheet for November meeting; coordinate flight/carpool info

All Members

1. Confirm travel arrangements for November in-person meeting
2. Finalize wording for brief goal-specific sentences, subject to review before November meeting
3. Review and sign off on polished strategic plan at November in-person meeting
4. Decide on inclusion and support level (letter of endorsement) for FY27 proposals that are approved by reviewers but not funded due to limited budget.



Conservation Strategic Plan

2027 – 2031

OUR MISSION

Partnering to conserve and restore thriving and resilient habitats for all life stages of Atlantic coastal and migratory fish to support the quality of life for Atlantic coastal communities.

DRAFT · OCT 2026

Cover: Portland, Maine. Photo: Simen Kaalstad.



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This plan is a product of the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership with funding from the National Fish Habitat Partnership (Award Number F25AP01784-00) and the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (Wallop-Breaux) of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Award Number F25AF02522-00).

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Sunset over Bar Harbor, Maine. Photo: Simen Kaalstad.

Introduction

OUR MISSION

Partnering to conserve and restore thriving and resilient habitats for all life stages of Atlantic coastal and migratory fish to support the quality of life for Atlantic coastal communities.

MAKING THE CONNECTION

- From the headwaters to the continental shelf
- Among NGOs, state, federal, tribal, and other stakeholders
- Between people and fish habitat



Kayaking through mangroves at the Robinson Preserve, Bradenton, FL.
Photo: Simen Kaalstad.

The Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP – see Appendix A for all acronyms) is an assembly of public and private entities interested in the conservation of habitat for Atlantic coast diadromous, estuarine-dependent, and coastal fish species (see Appendix B for select definitions). ACFHP was formed in 2006 under the auspices of the [National Fish Habitat Action Plan](#) (NFHAP) and operates within the National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP) framework. The NFHAP is a non-regulatory, voluntary plan designed to protect, restore, and enhance the nation's fish and aquatic communities through regional Fish Habitat Partnerships, and to help maximize the impact of on-the-ground conservation dollars appropriated by Congress to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Every five years the ACFHP Steering Committee and partners re-evaluate and update their Conservation Strategic Plan (CSP), focused on broad coastwide strategies for determining and addressing the threats affecting habitats important for all life stages of Atlantic diadromous, estuarine-dependent, and coastal species. The CSP is used as a guidance document for the ACFHP Steering Committee, the Partnership-at-Large, state and federal agencies, and restoration practitioners. It sets out the goals, objectives, and strategies the Partnership will focus on over the next five years to improve the condition of Atlantic coastal fish habitat. When appropriate, our goals and objectives have been aligned with those of our partners. Action Plans will be developed every two years and will include steps towards achieving the objectives identified in this CSP.

The issues ACFHP addresses are complex. The Partnership is designed to bring diverse groups together to identify the causes of habitat declines, implement strategic corrective action, and measure and communicate progress. Covering a densely populated region in close proximity to some of the country's most productive and unique fish habitats, ACFHP's role in making the connection — between headwater and continental shelf habitats; among non-governmental organizations, state, federal, tribal, and other stakeholders; and between people and fish habitat — is vital to maintaining healthy fish habitat.

Habitat is the physical space an organism uses to fulfill its basic requirements for life, such as food, water, oxygen, and shelter. Sustainable recreational and commercial fisheries depend on healthy habitat: the places where coastal fishery species forage, seek refuge, grow, and spawn. Habitat loss and degradation impair fish productivity and can slow fishery recovery even after management actions have successfully reduced fishing pressure — weakfish, river herring, and Atlantic sturgeon have not recovered despite lengthy moratoriums.

Accomplishments 2022–2026

Over the last five years, ACFHP directed \$1.34 million to 19 on-the-ground projects in nine states, from Maine to Florida, reconnecting rivers and restoring the estuarine habitats that coastal fish depend on.

165 miles of river habitat reconnected through 9 fish passage and dam removal projects	8,987 acres of diadromous spawning and nursery habitat opened to fish	127 acres of tidal marsh, seagrass (SAV), and oyster reef habitat restored
\$1.34M in NFHP, NOAA Fisheries, and FishAmerica Foundation funds directed to partner projects	\$15.2M in total project value — about \$11 for every \$1 directed by ACFHP	10,000 acres of estuarine fish habitat benefiting from debris cleanup and water-quality monitoring

Projects funded by priority habitat, 2022–2026

Priority habitat (project type)	Projects	ACFHP - directed funds	Outcomes
Riverine bottom (fish passage / dam removal)	9	\$521,609	164.6 river miles; 8,987 acres opened
Tidal vegetation (marsh, living shoreline)	4	\$397,658	118.5 acres restored; 1,400 ft shoreline; 10,000 acres benefited*
Shellfish beds (oyster reef)	4	\$280,709	3.6 acres; 500 ft reef; 20,000 spat-on-shell
Submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV)	2	\$142,616	5.1 acres
Total	19	\$1,342,592	165 miles · 8,987 acres opened · 127 acres restored

Funding sources: NFHP (14 projects, \$1,029,592), NOAA Fisheries (4 projects, \$288,000), FishAmerica Foundation (1 project; \$25,000). Total project cost counts multi-phase projects once (Paulina Dam; E.R. Collins Dams). Oyster acreage counts the 2022 and 2025 Chesapeake Bay Foundation phases once. Figures for projects funded in 2025–2026 reflect expected outcomes. *Matanzas Riverkeeper debris cleanup and water-quality monitoring across the Guana, Tolomato, and Matanzas estuaries in northeast Florida; not counted as restored acreage.

6 project endorsements	1 peer-reviewed article in <i>Fisheries</i> (Kaalstad et al., 2026; doi:10.1093/fshmag/vuag051)
1 interactive ArcGIS StoryMap (December 2025), supported by Multistate Conservation Grant (F23AP00525) funding	9 states: ME, NH, MA, RI, CT, NJ, MD, NC, FL

Project Highlights

Baskahegan Lake and Crooked Brook Flowage Fish Passage — Danforth, Maine

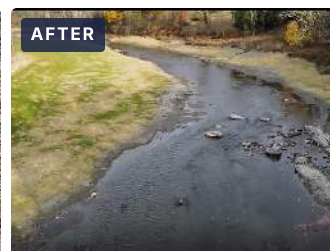
Atlantic Salmon Federation · NFHP 2022 · 137 river miles and 8,960 acres reconnected in the upper Penobscot River watershed



Photos: Atlantic Salmon Federation.

Paulina Dam Removal on the Paulins Kill — Blairstown, New Jersey

The Nature Conservancy · NFHP 2022 and 2023 · 7.6 river miles reconnected on the third-largest New Jersey tributary to the Delaware River



Left to right: before removal; 40-ft notch cut (Nov. 2023); sea lamprey moving through the notch (June 2024); dam fully removed (Oct. 2024). Photos: The Nature Conservancy.

Maryland Coastal Bays Saltmarsh Restoration — Worcester County, Maryland

Maryland Coastal Bays Program and Delmarva Resource Conservation and Development Council · NFHP 2024 · 114 acres of salt marsh restored on two privately owned properties



Photos: USFWS.

The ACFHP Region



THE REGION ALSO INCLUDES

- Fish communities ranging from cold temperate to tropical climates
- The largest number of migratory diadromous fish species in the world
- Nine of the ten most densely populated states
- The most urban estuary in the U.S. (New York Harbor)
- The most marine habitat area of any Fish Habitat Partnership

Population: 15 Atlantic coastal states incl. Pennsylvania, 125.1 million (36.6% of U.S.), U.S. Census Bureau July 1, 2025 estimates.¹

Thriving, healthy waterways and robust fish populations are vital to the well-being of our society. They provide clean water and sustainable fisheries, and they matter for less tangible reasons, as anyone who has fished wild waters or canoed a tranquil stream can attest. Although significant gains have been made, habitat protection and restoration have not kept pace with impacts from population growth and land-use change. Given the diverse array of federal, state, tribal, local, and private jurisdictions, the need has never been greater for increased action and improved coordination across boundaries.³

Seagrass beds, coral reefs, wetlands, and oyster reefs of sufficient quantity and quality are critical for healthy fish communities — and many are threatened:

- **Estuaries:** 89% of Mid-Atlantic estuaries are at high or very high risk of habitat degradation, the poorest-quality marine habitat in the country.³
- **Seagrass:** up to 7% of area lost annually worldwide;⁴ Florida's Indian River Lagoon has lost 70% of its historic 70,000 acres.⁵
- **Coral:** the southeast Florida reef tract contributes \$5.7 billion a year and 61,000 jobs,⁶ yet is dissolving faster than previously thought.⁷
- **Wetlands:** the Atlantic coast lost a net 111,960 acres of coastal-watershed wetlands from 2004 to 2009, mostly freshwater wetlands.
- **Oyster reefs:** 85% lost globally; Chesapeake Bay coverage is less than 1% of historic levels.

Economic importance

The region supports high-value commercial fisheries, including American lobster (\$581.3M), sea scallops (\$466.9M), blue crab (\$115.6M), Atlantic menhaden (\$75M), and summer flounder (\$26M). Atlantic striped bass is the nation's largest recreational fishery by weight harvested (~36 million pounds). The Atlantic coast leads the nation in seafood value (35.1%), marine aquaculture value (43%), and recreational saltwater fishing (68.3% of trips, 63% of catch). New Bedford, MA has been the nation's top port by value for 22 consecutive years (\$443.2M in 2022).

Source: NOAA, Fisheries of the United States 2022; NOAA Fisheries One Stop Shop Data Portal.

ACFHP Partners

To address Atlantic coast fish habitat issues, ACFHP created a Memorandum of Understanding. It affirms the commitment of its 39 signatories to develop local, regional, state, tribal, federal, and private partnerships that extend beyond the traditional boundaries of resource management agencies and non-governmental organizations for the benefit of shared aquatic resources. ACFHP is one of 20 regional Fish Habitat Partnerships established under the NFHP. Its activities are led by a Director and governed by a Steering Committee of professionals from state marine fisheries agencies, NGOs, ASMFC, USFWS, and NOAA Fisheries. The Partnership welcomes additional organizations committed to conserving Atlantic coast fish habitat. ACFHP's [Charter and By-Laws](#) are available online.

[Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership](#)

[American Littoral Society](#)

[American Rivers](#)

[Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission](#)

[Chesapeake Bay Foundation](#)

[Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection](#)

[Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control](#)

[Ducks Unlimited](#)

[Environmental Defense Fund](#)

[Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission](#)

[Georgia Department of Natural Resources](#)

[Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians](#)

[International Federation of Fly Fishers](#)

[Maine Department of Marine Resources](#)

[Maryland Department of Natural Resources](#)

[Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries](#)

[Merrimack River Watershed Council](#)

[Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council](#)

[National Audubon Society](#)

[National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#)

[New England Fishery Management Council](#)

[New Hampshire Fish and Game Department](#)

[New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife](#)

[New York Department of Environmental Conservation](#)

[North Carolina Coastal Federation](#)

[North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality](#)

[Oyster Recovery Partnership](#)

[Partnership for the Delaware Estuary](#)

[Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission](#)

[The Pew Charitable Trusts](#)

[Restore America's Estuaries](#)

[Rhode Island Division of Fish and Wildlife](#)

[South Carolina Department of Natural Resources](#)

[The Nature Conservancy](#)

[U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#)

[U.S. Geological Survey](#)

[Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department](#)

[Virginia Marine Resources Commission](#)

[Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve](#)



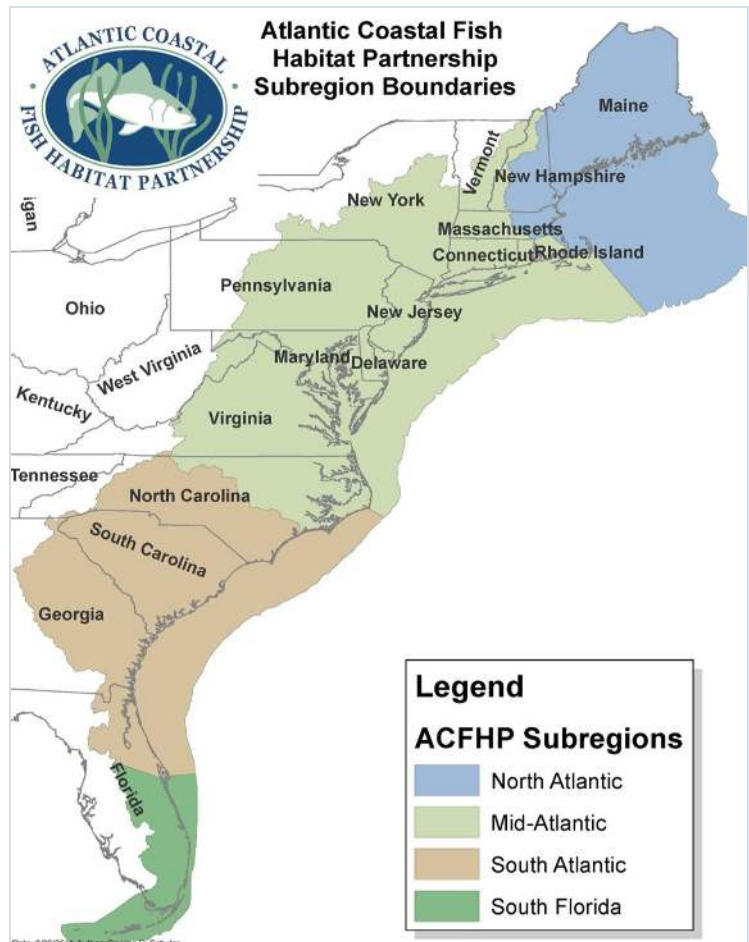
ACFHP Steering Committee Meeting, St. Petersburg, Florida, June 2026.

Scope

ACFHP uses subregional boundaries for habitat prioritization. These subregions represent ecologically distinct units derived from the Marine Ecoregions of the World⁸ (Spalding et al. 2007): the Gulf of Maine, Virginian, Carolinian, and Floridian ecoregions, which correspond to the ACFHP **North Atlantic**, **Mid-Atlantic**, **South Atlantic**, and **South Florida** subregions.

ACFHP works throughout these subregions, with less emphasis on upstream headwaters and offshore marine ecosystems and more on the approximately 29,000 miles of shoreline and coastal waters. ACFHP coordinates with adjacent Fish Habitat Partnerships to ensure contiguous watershed coverage while minimizing overlap, so that the Partnership works in concert — not in competition — with existing efforts.

From the headwaters of coastal rivers to the offshore waters of the Gulf Stream, ACFHP's on-the-ground habitat conservation benefits more than 130 fish species and the many people who depend on them.



ACFHP subregional boundaries.

Climate change

Climate change affects fish habitat throughout the ACFHP region, though impacts vary. The Gulf of Maine is a climate hotspot, with temperatures predicted to rise three times faster than the global average.⁹ Sea level rise, ocean acidification, warming water, more frequent and severe storms, habitat expansion, contraction, and fragmentation, species range shifts, and eutrophication will all modify fish habitat. In south Florida, sea level rise already causes flooding during peak lunar tides and may squeeze mangroves and fringing seagrass against developed shorelines.

This CSP does not set climate-specific objectives; instead, ACFHP will develop, recommend, and implement restorative and adaptive solutions (e.g., living shorelines) across all of its conservation work, and will adapt its approach as understanding of changing ocean and atmospheric conditions improves.

Habitats

The habitats below are excerpted from the ACFHP Species-Habitat Matrix. The list is not a comprehensive index of all Atlantic coast habitats; rather, these habitats best represent the range supporting Atlantic coastal, estuarine-dependent, and diadromous fishes at a coastwide level. The table shows 25 habitat types organized within seven habitat categories. Detailed habitat characterizations are available in the ACFHP Habitat Characterizations supplement.

Habitat category	Habitat types
Marine and Estuarine Shellfish Beds	Oyster aggregations/reef; scallop beds; hard clam beds; shell accumulations
Coral and Live/Hard Bottom	Coral reefs; patch reef, soft corals, or anemones; live rock
Macroalgae	<i>Fucus</i> spp., <i>Laminaria</i> spp., <i>Ulva lactuca</i>
Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV)	Tidal fresh & oligohaline plant species; mesohaline & polyhaline plant species
Tidal Vegetation	Estuarine emergent marsh; tidal freshwater marsh; mangrove
Unvegetated Coastal Bottom	Loose fine bottom; loose coarse bottom; firm hard bottom; structured sand habitat
Riverine Bottom	Higher gradient headwater tributaries; lower gradient tributaries; higher gradient large mainstem river; lower gradient large mainstem river; low order coastal streams; non-tidal freshwater mussel beds; coastal headwater pond; non-tidal freshwater marsh



ACFHP priority habitats. Photos: riverine bottom, Onne van der Wal; SAV, Chris Pickerell; shellfish beds, DNREC; tidal vegetation, Matt Poole; coral reef, Simen Kaalstad.

Subregional Priority Habitats

ACFHP has selected three to four priority habitats within each subregion, using the Species-Habitat Matrix as a guide and professional judgment to consider the threats facing each habitat. Given limited resources, projects addressing the Priority Habitats for a given subregion will receive heightened consideration and ACFHP support during the next five years (2027–2031). ACFHP will also continue to support efforts to conserve, protect, restore, and enhance all of the habitats listed on the previous page. Priority habitats are not ranked within a subregion.

North Atlantic Riverine bottom SAV Marine and estuarine shellfish beds	Mid-Atlantic Riverine bottom SAV Marine and estuarine shellfish beds Tidal vegetation	South Atlantic Riverine bottom SAV Marine and estuarine shellfish beds Tidal vegetation	South Florida SAV Coral and live/hard bottom Tidal vegetation (mangrove)
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Restoration in progress at Robinson Preserve, Bradenton, Florida. Photo: Simen Kaalstad.



Maine boasts several miles of rocky intertidal coastal habitat. Photo: Simen Kaalstad.

Priority Threats

Habitat destruction and degradation in Atlantic coastal drainages must be reversed, and threats to spawning and nursery habitats are of particular concern. ACFHP has identified Priority Threats that it has the capacity to address as a Partnership, recognizing that its ability to reduce some threats is limited. Climate change, addressed under Scope, is a major threat the Partnership will seek to manage adaptively. Priority Threats were first informed by the Partnership's 2009 [Assessment of Existing Information](#), a database of more than 500 documents, datasets, and portals,¹⁰ and were re-affirmed by the Steering Committee in 2026.

Obstructions to Fish Passage / Habitat Connectivity	Dams; hydropower facilities; hurricane and storm barriers; road crossings and culverts; tide gates; thermal barriers; reduced or diverted flow; jetties and breakwaters; tidal turbines. Barriers limit survival of diadromous and estuarine fish and can cause local extinctions.
Dredging and Coastal Maintenance	Dredging; blasting; port expansion and maintenance; dredge spoil disposal; beach fill, sand mining, and shoreline stabilization. Removes, smothers, or shades habitat — often repeatedly — with greatest impact on nursery and spawning areas.
Water Quality Degradation and Eutrophication	Point and non-point source pollution; nutrient loading; atmospheric deposition; low dissolved oxygen. Among the most pervasive causes of habitat loss; sources often must be addressed for restoration to last.
Consumptive Water Withdrawal	Industrial, agricultural, residential, and energy withdrawals; desalination; freshwater withdrawal near the salt front. Reduces flow, degrades water quality, and shifts fresh-salt water interfaces.
Sedimentation	Suspended and deposited solids; impervious surfaces; runoff; shoreline and riparian development. Smothers eggs, shellfish, and SAV; reduces light penetration.
Vessel Operation Impacts	Recreational and commercial vessel operation; prop washing; anchoring; grounding; discharge. Propeller scarring, wake erosion, and shading, especially in shallow estuarine habitats.
Contamination of Water and Sediments	Heavy metals; acid precipitation; pesticides and herbicides; petrochemical spills; pharmaceuticals. Bioaccumulates in tissues and sediments, causing lethal and sub-lethal effects.
Invasive Species	Introduced plants, invertebrates, and vertebrates (e.g., PHRAGMITES, zebra mussel, mitten crab). Outcompete or displace native habitat; prevention through education and BMPs is most effective.

Other threats considered lower priority or beyond ACFHP's ability to address: fishing gear impacts; aquaculture; inadequate regulatory systems (permitting, zoning, land-use planning, sewage treatment, floodplain and fishery management); and physical impacts to fish (entrainment, impingement, propeller strikes, turbines). All threats can be cumulative.

Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

Three goals guide ACFHP’s work for 2027–2031. Each goal is supported by objectives and strategies on the following pages; biennial Action Plans will set out the specific steps toward each.

1

CONSERVATION & RESTORATION DELIVERY

Deliver strategic, on-the-ground conservation to the highest-priority fish habitats and projects

2

SCIENCE & DATA PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Advance research and data tools that support science-based decision making and management

3

FACILITATING PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATION

Maximize conservation outcomes across the Atlantic coast through partnerships, outreach, and communication



The Town of Braintree, MA removed the Armstrong Dam to open 36 miles of river for American eel and river herring and reconnect 180 acres of river herring spawning habitat on the Monaquot River. Photo: Town of Braintree.

A. On-the-Ground Implementation Objectives

OBJECTIVE A.1 Conserve¹ and connect priority aquatic habitats to improve the environment for fish, people, and nature.

Strategy A.1.1 Fund on-the-ground projects that conserve and/or connect Subregional Priority Habitats.

Strategy A.1.2 Improve access to fish habitat conservation funding for organizations working in/with under-resourced communities.

OBJECTIVE A.2 Identify and direct additional resources towards fish habitat conservation.

Strategy A.2.1 Leverage relationships to support transformational² projects at the landscape scale that conserve and/or connect Subregional Priority Habitats.

Strategy A.2.2 Provide support such as project endorsements, technical expertise, and letters of support, for partner projects that conserve and/or connect Subregional Priority Habitats.

OBJECTIVE A.3 Utilize funding and expertise to achieve the greatest benefits for fish habitat conservation.

Strategy A.3.1 Provide and direct funds to high-quality conservation projects through targeted, science-based decision making.

¹ Conserve is to protect, restore, and enhance. ² Transformational: catalyzing landscape-scale conservation projects.



Marsh restoration underway at the USS Battleship North Carolina to address worsening tidal flooding and habitat degradation along the Cape Fear River, Wilmington, NC. Photo: University of North Carolina Wilmington.

B. Science and Data Objectives

OBJECTIVE B.1 Develop, synthesize, and share scientific information that improves conservation outcomes for Atlantic coastal fish habitats.

- Strategy B.1.1** Develop fish habitat conservation tools and resources that support managers and practitioners by promoting best restoration practices.
- Strategy B.1.2** Compile the value of restoration efforts across ACFHP subregions (North Atlantic, Mid-Atlantic, South Atlantic, and South Florida).
- Strategy B.1.3** Strategically utilize science and data tools for prioritization of conservation areas.



Ongoing monitoring by UNCW labs provides hands-on research opportunities for students, establishing the USS Battleship North Carolina site as a “living laboratory” and a model for coastal communities seeking effective, nature-based solutions, Wilmington, NC.
Photo: University of North Carolina Wilmington.



Restored oyster reefs improve water quality, support fish populations, and enhance local angling opportunities.
Photo: Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

C. Outreach and Communication Objectives

OBJECTIVE C.1 Promote ACFHP's mission and vision, in partnership with the NFHP Board and National Fish Habitat Fund, to target audiences to grow our influence and impact.

Strategy C.1.1 Develop new and update current printed and digital content.

OBJECTIVE C.2 Share and disseminate information about the products, projects, and services of ACFHP and its partners to further the conservation of fish habitat.

Strategy C.2.1 Disseminate communication materials via digital platforms and participation at professional conferences and/or tradeshows to extend our coverage.

Strategy C.2.2 Seek opportunities to expand media engagement with ACFHP products, projects, and services.

Strategy C.2.3 Publicize partners' actions, projects, and products via various communication platforms.

Strategy C.2.4 Promote effective practices and methodologies for conservation of Subregional Priority Habitats.

OBJECTIVE C.3 Collaborate with the NFHP Board, fellow Fish Habitat Partnerships, and National Fish Habitat Fund.

Strategy C.3.1 Elevate ACFHP's priorities to the National Fish Habitat community.



Former ACFHP Steering Committee Chair, Kent Smith, Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), gives a tour of a successful large-scale wetland restoration project. Photo: Simen Kaalstad.

Acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
ACFHP	Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership
ASMFC	Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
BMP	Best management practice
CSP	Conservation Strategic Plan
FHP	Fish Habitat Partnership
NFHAP	National Fish Habitat Action Plan
NFHP	National Fish Habitat Partnership
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
SAV	Submerged aquatic vegetation
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



The USFWS, Delmarva Resource Conservation and Development Council, Maryland Coastal Bays Program, and other collaborators are establishing a first-of-its-kind model for the Maryland Coastal Bays, having identified more than 1,000 acres of suitable private land with willing landowners for restoration. Photo: USFWS.

Glossary

Term	Definition
Bioaccumulate	The concentration of substances within an organism
Coastal resiliency	Building the ability of a community to 'bounce back' after hazardous events rather than simply reacting to impacts (modified from NOAA National Ocean Service)
Connectivity	The degree to which streams and rivers facilitate or inhibit movement among resources ¹¹
Consumptive water withdrawal	The permanent removal of water from its source, through natural or anthropogenic processes
Diadromous	Fish that spend part of their life cycle in fresh water and part in salt water
Dredge	The removal of sediment, plants, etc. to maintain a desired depth and width within a waterway
Estuarine-dependent	Fish that reside in the estuary for at least part of their life cycle
Eutrophication	Excessive nutrients in a body of water, causing an increase in primary producers and a decrease in oxygen upon their decay
Fragmentation	When continuous habitat divides into smaller, separated habitats, usually due to habitat loss
Headwaters	The tributaries or streams closest to a river's source
Living shoreline	Shoreline stabilization that uses natural materials such as marsh plants, oyster shell, and sand
Riparian	Areas adjacent to rivers and streams
Shoreline hardening	The use of groins, jetties, breakwaters, sea walls, or other hardened structures on the shore
Spawn	To deposit eggs or sperm directly into the water
Threat	A thing likely to cause damage
Transformational	Catalyzing landscape-scale conservation projects



Photo: Simen Kaalstad.

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Removal of the Dana Dam on the Norwalk River opened 6.5 miles of riverine habitat for diadromous fish, Wilton, CT. Photo: Save the Sound.



Photo: Simen Kaalstad



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