

Aquatic Habitat Conservation

Aquatic Habitat Conservation Committee

Meeting Time and Place:

The Aquatic Habitat Conservation Committee did not meet in 2013. An initial meeting of the committee representatives will be held via conference call in the summer of 2014 after the Directors' June meeting.

Attendance:

The committee has not held an initial meeting. Each Midwest member state will have a single representative. The committee is currently confirming each member state's representative.

Executive Summary:

The committee is in the organizational phase. Progress was delayed with the loss of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Midwest Regional Fish Habitat Partnership Coordinator in 2013. New committee staff has recently been assigned and the committee has resumed formation. Immediate actions for the committee are to confirm the membership roster, finalize organizational guidelines, and convene an initial committee meeting.

Director Action Items:

None at this time.

Director Information Items:

In 2013, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service adopted a new competitive, performance-based method to allocate project funds under the National Fish Habitat Action Plan. Implementation of the new allocation methodology began in fiscal year (FY) 2014. Fish Habitat Partnerships seeking Action Plan project funds were required to submit a Work Plan and Accomplishment Report to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for review and ranking. In 2014, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will provide \$3,301,155 for cost-shared projects that address the priorities of Fish Habitat Partnerships organized under the National Fish Habitat Action Plan. The five Midwest Fish Habitat Partnerships will receive a total of \$801,817 in 2014 funding to support on-the-ground fish habitat conservation projects and to help with operational needs.

Brief updates on the major activities and accomplishments of the Midwest Fish Habitat Partnerships over the last 6-12 months are provided in Appendix 1.

Time and Place of Next Meeting:

Time and place of the initial committee meeting is to be determined. The committee will meet via tele-conference or web-conference when possible.

workgroups. Example projects include the evaluation of watershed-wide impacts of agricultural BMP's on physical, chemical, and biological stream mechanisms; removal or augmentation of up to 8 barriers that could open over 1,000 miles of stream; re-establishing and monitoring of freshwater mussel populations including two federal trust species; stream restoration projects; and an innovative approach to storm water discharge releases. The ORBFHP also completed a Programmatic Environmental Assessment to facilitate the NEPA process during project development and implementation. This PEA covers all of the watersheds in Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio within the Ohio River Basin.

In 2013-14, multiple restoration/conservation projects came to completion including the removal of three barriers to open up over 200 miles of river; evaluation of hundreds of off-channel habitats to re-establish connectivity to the Ohio River; innovative detection, control, and outreach efforts to cease the spread of submerged aquatic AIS; and feasibility studies as a first step to achieve desired conservation outcomes.

Great Plains Fish Habitat Partnership

The Great Plains Fish Habitat Partnership has primarily been focused on the implementation of the prioritized projects using 2013 conservation funds; review of the Habitat Assessment for the five species guilds that was completed in 2013; development of the 2014 project priorities; and evaluation of past performance for the newly developed funding allocation of the FWS dollars. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Branch of Fisheries and Aquatic Conservation and the Great Plains Fish Habitat Partnership are working in concert to strategize how to effectively implement project completion for priority species using both the National Fish Habitat Partnership funds as well as Fish Passage funding where priorities overlap. The new funding allocation was an excellent exercise to move all the Fish Habitat Partnership's toward success that was originally envisioned when this initiative began. It focuses the attention on the individual Fish Habitat Partnership's accomplishments and success, not developing a competition between the Fish Habitat Partnership's.

Reservoir Fisheries Habitat Partnership

The focus of the Reservoir Fisheries Habitat Partnership's (RFHP) activities over the past year has been partner expansion and laying the foundation for corporate sponsorship. RFHP had booths at the Bassmaster Classic and ICAST aimed at recruiting individual and corporate sponsorships. Sponsorship brochures were developed and initial contacts with target corporations were made. To date, RFHP has 35 angling /conservation group members and three corporate sponsors. RFHP's funding strategy is to use private donations for the RFHP-sponsored grant programs and to work with individual grantees to help secure additional funds (federal/foundation) on a project by project basis. RFHP has developed a 3-year business plan outlining fundraising strategies.

RFHP completed a Multistate Conservation Grant (MSCG) in 2013 aimed at supporting operations. State agency "in-kind" contributions totaled more than \$220,000 over the 2-year grant period. RFHP currently is in the second year of a 2-year MSCG aimed at expanding outreach efforts and compiling reservoir habitat restoration BMPs and providing a searchable, web-based catalogue of BMPs.

Partnership project: Bourbeuse/Meramec Watershed Project in Missouri is a managed grazing project which shades streams, improves floodplain habitat and reduces climate change effects.

In 2013 Fishers and Farmers was able to secure a \$50,000 Multistate Conservation Grant from the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to train conservation employees to engage landowners more effectively. Four workshops were held in MN, WI, IA, and MO. Fishers and Farmers also helped fund a cover crop/managed grazing demonstration project in a new priority watershed in Peno Creek, MO.

This past February, Fishers and Farmers held a Ravine Stabilization Workshop in Mankato, MN and had 150 people attend, most of which were local farmers. To see presentations given visit: mnravines.org. In March, Fishers and Farmers helped sponsor a Field Day in the Peno Creek Watershed in NE Missouri. Twenty landowners learned about watershed dynamics, benefits of cover crops, impacts of crop management practices on run-off and infiltration, and cost-share opportunities.

Great Lakes Basin Fish Habitat Partnership

In 2013, the Great Lakes Basin Fish Habitat Partnership, through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, approved and funded 8 projects totaling nearly \$400,000 in grants aimed at supporting on-the ground fish habitat work in the Great Lakes region. Funding for the Great Lakes Basin Fish Habitat Partnership in 2013 included both U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service base funds, as well as funding through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. In addition to funding on-the-ground fish habitat restoration, the Great Lakes Basin Fish Habitat Partnership completed habitat condition assessments of the tributaries to the Great Lakes, and began development of an assessment of the condition of coastal habitat that supports the fish communities of the Great Lakes. In 2014, the Great Lakes Basin Fish Habitat Partnership plans to continue the development of the coastal condition assessment, develop web-based accessibility of tributary habitat condition assessments, as well as fund additional on-the-ground habitat restoration projects. Since inception in 2009, the Great Lakes Basin Fish Habitat Partnership has awarded over \$2.3 million of funding, leveraged against an additional \$15 million of partner match, to benefit the restoration, protection, and enhancement of fish habitat throughout the Great Lakes Basin.

Ohio River Basin Fish Habitat Partnership

The ORBFHP and SARP collaborated on a rigorous basin-wide stream habitat assessment that was completed in 2012. This assessment along with our mission, guiding principles, and core strategic actions was used to identify priority areas and finalize our Strategic Plan in 2013. With priority areas for conservation action identified and the Strategic Plan completed, a rapid transition occurred from a "shotgun approach" to a science based approach to conservation/restoration actions in the Ohio River Basin. The Partnership established work groups to actively develop projects and funding sources in these priority areas. The 2013 effort resulted in a more than 3 fold increase in the number of projects and matching funds brought forward in 2014.

In 2014, the ORBFHP was the only partnership to achieve Tier 3 status in the recently established NFHP performance based allocation strategy. This gave the ORBFHP the opportunity to help fund a diverse field of quality projects in 2014 that were developed with partners the previous year by the ORBFHP

Appendix 1: Major activities and accomplishments of Midwest Fish Habitat Partnerships

Driftless Area Restoration Effort

The Driftless Area Restoration Effort (DARE) has been involved in a number of activities over the past year. The 7th annual Driftless Area Symposium took place at the Radisson Hotel in La Crosse, WI, February 4-5, 2014 with over 190 attending the 1 ½-day event. The annual symposium continues to be a multi-state effort to share restoration practices, lessons learned, current research and monitoring, new tools and technology, and a forum to discuss hot topic environmental issues in the Driftless Area.

Incorporation of non-game habitat into stream restoration projects has been a signature practice for the DARE. Trout Unlimited (TU) organized another workshop in 2013 that included field demonstrations of various habitat practices intended to benefit non-game fish, frogs, snake, turtles, and birds. The growing enthusiasm to carry out these practices stems from the Driftless Area Riparian Nongame habitat guide developed by the DARE "Wild and Rare" team. The second edition of the riparian guide was completed in 2013 with illustrations and NRCS standard technical designs for nongame species associated with riparian corridors.

Trout Unlimited also continues to build capacity of conservation groups to implement habitat projects in the Driftless by organizing annual workshops. This year's 2-day workshop was held in Westby, Wisconsin for TU chapters, local conservation groups, and individuals interested in stream restoration. Sessions included project management, grant writing, fundraising, understanding the new farm bill, communicating with private landowners, and increasing awareness of invasive terrestrial and aquatic species in the Driftless Area.

Fishers and Farmers Partnership for the Upper Mississippi River Basin

Fishers and Farmers Partnership is currently working on using our Fish Habitat Assessment and climate model to select more focal watersheds to deliver conservation. Current and future projects are working on addressing climate strategies, increasing targeted fish and mussel species, biological and social monitoring for results, and increasing water quality through reducing sedimentation or nutrients. Our projects address local water quality which may have the potential to impact Gulf hypoxia, especially our oxbow restoration projects in the Boone Watershed, IA.

Fishers and Farmers Partnership will be working with the Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and Big River Landscape Conservation Cooperative to help them develop a coordinated framework for determining how and where resources are allocated to create a corridor for fish and wildlife designed to provide wildlife and water quality benefits. Fishers and Farmers plans to show how they have worked on this landscape effort and brought it down to the local (county/landowner) level.

In 2013 Fishers and Farmers Partnership funded oxbow restoration in the Boone Watershed, IA. Oxbow habitat provides important Topeka Shiner (state/federal endangered fish species) spawning and nursery habitat and is valuable in trapping sediments and sequestering nutrients from the end of tile lines. Fishers and Farmers Partnership also funded a ravine stabilization (sediment/nutrient reduction) project in Seven Mile Creek, which is part of the Middle Minnesota watershed. A third National Fish Habitat