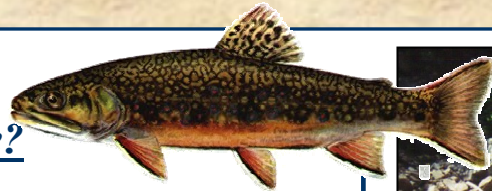




# National Fish Habitat Initiative

## What is the National Fish Habitat Initiative?

*The National Fish Habitat Initiative (NFHI) harnesses the energies, expertise, and existing partnerships of state and federal agencies and conservation organizations. The mission of the NFHI is to work with partners to focus attention and resources to protect, restore, and enhance aquatic habitat and reverse declines in fish and other aquatic species for the people of the United States.*



## Why a National Fish Habitat Initiative?

The need to protect, restore, and enhance aquatic habitats has never been greater. Since 1900, 123 aquatic freshwater species have become extinct in North America. Our Nation's temperate freshwater ecosystems may be declining as quickly as tropical forest ecosystems. Of the 822 native freshwater fish species in the U.S., 39% are at risk of extinction. Forty-three percent of federally-listed threatened and endangered species rely to some extent on wetland habitats. The NFHI will work to protect and enhance the benefits that aquatic habitats provide to the American people.

The concept of the NFHI is built upon the "joint venture" approach, centered on the establishment of partnerships and the implementation of restoration efforts at multiple geographic scales. Ultimately, the NFHI will lead to the development of a nationwide fisheries habitat restoration plan similar to the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

Regional Partnerships currently operating under the NFHI "Aquatic Habitat Partnerships" model include-

- Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture*
- Matanuska-Susitna Basin Salmon Conservation Partners*
- Midwest Driftless Area Restoration Effort*
- Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership*
- Western Native Trout Initiative*

## NFHI Concept Model Structure

**Scale**

**National**

**Regional**  
(1 to 100 thousand square miles)

**Local**  
(less than 1,000 square miles)

### **Resource Issues**

Fish are depleted, listed, or lost due to habitat conditions.

Need to know: How many? Status & trends?

Habitat degradation and loss are common issues at regional scale (coastal, Great Lakes, large river systems)

Habitat conditions largely result from local scale resource issues (artificial barriers, poor land use practices)

### **Information Systems**

Need linkage and increased use of large-scale systems (National Biological Information Infrastructure-Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Node, GAP Analysis, Fish Passage Decision Support System, Fisheries Information System Populations Module)

Many data sources (Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program, StreamNet, state resource agency databases)

Assessment of habitats and populations.

Need to know: What info is needed to answer relevant questions?)

### **Organizational Structure**

**National Fish Habitat Initiative**

Mississippi Interstate Cooperative Resource Association, Great Lakes Fishery Commission, Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, etc.

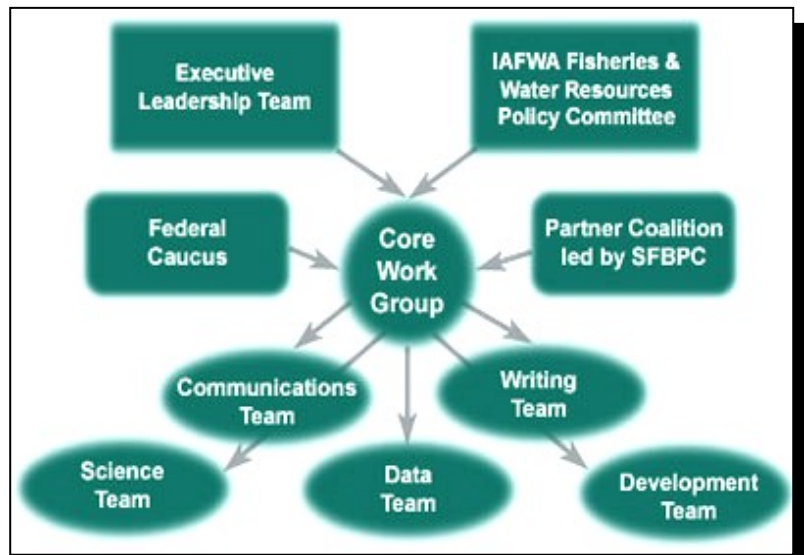
**Regional Partnerships**

Local resources managers, watershed groups, Trout Unlimited chapters, etc.

**On-the-ground habitat projects**

## NFHI Organization

A 19 member Core Working Group (CWG) composed of leading fisheries and aquatic resources professionals, is the driving force behind the NFHI, and has been appointed by IAFWA to produce a *National Fish Habitat Action Plan*. The CWG will collaborate with the Executive Leadership Team, Federal Caucus, and Partners Coalition while continuing to receive input from the IAFWA Fisheries and Water Resources Policy Committee. The CWG will delegate tasks to the NFHI Subteams, consisting of: Communications Team, Science Team, Data Team, Development Team, and Writing Team



## Recent/Future NFHI Activities

The most recent activities include 1) developing NFHI's 2005-2007 budget and details related to funding, and 2) setting an 18-month schedule for development of the *National Fish Habitat Plan*. Schedule highlights include:

- July 2005-Core Work Group develops initial framework and concept for action
- September 2005-Second national AFS science workshop to determine NFHI habitat criteria; draft Action Strategies completed
- September 2005 - Initial draft of National Fish Habitat Plan submitted to IAFWA Fisheries & Water Resources Policy Committee
- September 2005-Draft Plan released for review and public comment period
- March 2006 - Final draft of Plan completed for IAFWA approval
- April 2006 – Public roll-out and news media events
- FY 2007 – Successful implementation of National Fish Habitat Plan

## NFHI Funding

NFHI was identified as a “National Conservation Need” under the IAFWA Multistate Conservation Grants program. Three projects were funded in 2005, totaling \$1.4 million, and an additional five projects were approved for funding in 2006, totaling an additional \$1.4 million.

In addition:

- The FWS Fisheries Program received \$160K in Congressional support in FY 2005, and an additional \$1 million in FY 2006. The Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council donated more than \$200K in staff and resources.
- USGS provided over \$100K to develop a national database of fish habitat projects.
- The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation provided \$70K through a Bring Back the Natives grant, matched by \$60K in partner contributions. NFWF has launched its “More Fish” development campaign to raise up to \$100 million over five years to support NFHI projects.



**For more information on how you can become involved in the *National Fish Habitat Initiative*, visit [www.fishhabitat.org](http://www.fishhabitat.org) or contact:**

Doug Austen, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, [dausten@state.pa.us](mailto:dausten@state.pa.us), 717-705-7801

Eric Schwaab, International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, [eschwaab@iafwa.org](mailto:eschwaab@iafwa.org), 202-624-7890

Christopher Estes, Alaska Dept. of Fish & Game, [christopher\\_estes@fishgame.state.ak.us](mailto:christopher_estes@fishgame.state.ak.us), 907-267-2142

Tom Busiahn, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, [tom\\_busiahn@fws.gov](mailto:tom_busiahn@fws.gov), 703-358-2056

Doug Hobbs, Coordinator, Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council, [doug\\_hobbs@fws.gov](mailto:doug_hobbs@fws.gov), 703-358-2336