

The National Fish Habitat Initiative



Fisheries & Habitat Conservation

Aquatic resources in the United States are in decline, and loss and alteration of habitat is the principal culprit. Habitat alteration is the cause of 75 percent of all fish extinctions over the past 75 years, and the cause of 91 percent of fish listings under the Endangered Species Act.

The National Fish Habitat Initiative will make the Service and the Fisheries Program catalysts among States, Tribes and other stakeholders, and lead to the development of a nationwide fisheries habitat restoration plan similar to the highly successful North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

The concept for the National Fish Habitat Initiative (NFHI) was the brainchild of Gary Myers, Director of the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, and was set forward in recommendations from the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council, an organization chartered to advise the Secretary of Interior in consultation with the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service. 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.

National Fish Habitat Initiative Goals

- Foster geographically-focused cooperative efforts to protect, restore, and enhance aquatic habitats and reverse declines in fish and aquatic species.
- Utilize and develop information systems to track progress in protecting, restoring, and enhancing aquatic habitats.

During 2004, the Service, in partnership with the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA) and others, worked toward development of the NFHI. The outcome of these efforts will be a nationwide strategy that harnesses the energies, expertise and existing partnerships of state and Federal agencies and conservation organizations, with a goal of focusing national attention and resources on common priorities to improve aquatic habitat health. The NFHI will involve close collaboration between partners to increase the quantity and improve the quality of aquatic and riparian habitat as well as evaluate fish habitat use and preferences. In Fiscal Year 2004, the Service performed such assessments covering 39,000 miles of instream and riparian habitat.

Examples of cooperative initiatives already operating on the “joint venture” model of the NFHI include:

- Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture
- Southeastern Aquatic Resource Partnership
- Western Inland Native Trout Initiative

During 2005, the Service is supporting development of a national NFHI Plan, as well as regional plans, development of scientifically valid measures of habitat health, and development of information systems to guide priorities in cooperation with IAFWA, U.S. Geological Survey, and others.

The National Fish Habitat Initiative is closely aligned with Interior Secretary Gale Norton’s 4 C’s — Communication, Consultation and Cooperation, all in the service of Conservation, a philosophy that strongly supports regional and local coalitions in developing conservation plans.

For more information about the National Fish Habitat Initiative, contact U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Fisheries and Habitat Conservation at 202/208-6394 or visit us on the Internet at <http://fisheries.fws.gov/>.

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
800/344-WILD
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