

KENAI PENINSULA FISH HABITAT PARTNERSHIP

Executive Summary 2011 Strategic Plan

A Participating Partner of the



PURPOSE

The purpose of the Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership is to create and foster effective collaborations to maintain healthy fish, healthy people, healthy habitat, and healthy economies in the Kenai Peninsula Borough.

MISSION

To protect, maintain, restore and enhance fish habitat.

VISION

For future generations to have healthy, sustainable fish and aquatic ecosystems.



GEOGRAPHIC AREA SERVED

This executive summary contains the core elements of the Partnership's strategic plan. We have organized the plan into six Focal Areas, each of which contains a goal statement, purpose statement, and current condition as viewed by the original organizing committee. The strategic plan builds on the vision for each focal area by describing a desired future condition followed by one to three objectives to move toward the desired future condition.

We have identified action-oriented tasks for each objective which will be compiled in the Partnership's action plan. The action plan is expected to be more dynamic and updated on an annual basis as tasks are completed, thus objectives and tasks are not included herein.

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The Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership boundaries closely mimic those of the Kenai Peninsula Borough. Consideration of physical watershed delineations was given when finalizing the exact partnership boundary. We work closely with two recognized (as of 2010) adjacent partnerships, the Mat-Su Salmon Partnership and the Southwest Alaska Salmon Habitat Partnership.



INTRODUCTION

The Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership formed to foster and create effective collaborations to maintain healthy fish, healthy people, healthy habitat, and healthy economies within the Kenai Peninsula Borough. The geographic area covered by the Partnership is approximately 25,000 square miles, encompasses 14 major watersheds, and contains over 20,000 miles of stream habitat as well as more than 350,000 acres of wetland habitat. The Kenai Peninsula is one of Alaska's premier destinations for both residents and out-of-state visitors and is known for its world-class sport fishing and wildlife viewing opportunities. The peninsula's salmon stocks and resident fish species, like rainbow trout, Arctic grayling, and lake trout, support vital commercial, sport, and subsistence fisheries, are important sources of food for brown and black bears, bald eagles, marine mammals and a variety of other animals, and are a key source of nutrients for both terrestrial and aquatic environments. The national importance of these resources is particularly evident when compared to habitats and fish populations elsewhere in the nation, where many resources have been severely impacted by human expansion and development.

Threats to fish habitat on the Kenai Peninsula include increased population growth, unregulated development, habitat fragmentation, degraded water quality, loss of water quantity, and climate change. Partnership members and other stakeholders are challenged by these threats as they work towards maintaining healthy fish habitat that supports self-sustaining fish populations. The Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership will address habitat needs of freshwater and marine fish species residing in the waters of the Kenai Peninsula Borough at some point in their lifecycle.



The Partnership is taking a holistic approach to protecting healthy aquatic systems while working to restore degraded habitats by drafting a strategic plan. The Strategic Plan of the Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership is the collective thinking of a diverse group of interests that includes participation from non-governmental organizations, private industry, local government, state and federal resource agencies and representatives from Alaska Tribes. The Partnership has come together to focus on fish habitat within our region and developed this plan in a self-identified, self-organized and self-directed manner. From the outset of this planning exercise, the Partnership set geographic boundaries recognizing hydrological watersheds and adjacent fish habitat partnerships. In addressing the goals and objectives of its strategic plan, the Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership will be supporting the national goals and objectives of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan.

FOCAL AREAS: OVERVIEW

SUMMARY

We have divided up the work necessary to reach our desired future conditions for fish habitat into six focal areas:

Partnership: Ensure organizational capacity and effective operating systems are in place for the Partnership to make positive and lasting contributions to the protection and the restoration of fish and aquatic habitat.

Biological Complexity: Protect, restore and maintain the biological integrity of ecosystems that support healthy fish habitat.

Water Quality and Quantity: Ensure necessary water quality and quantity to support healthy fish communities and aquatic ecosystems. Science and Technology: Facilitate and increase the use and availability of scientific knowledge to guide Partnership priorities, policy development and management decision making.

Education: Increase the awareness and knowledge of the goals and objectives of the Partnership for everyone that lives, works, recreates, visits, regulates or otherwise has an influence on the strategic issues of the Partnership.

Policy: Identify, prioritize and communicate the importance of adequate regulations, polices and planning processes to support the protection of fish habitat which are necessary to support self-sustaining fish populations.



FOCAL AREA: PARTNERSHIP CAPACITY

Goal: Ensure organizational capacity and effective operating systems are in place for the Partnership to make positive and lasting contributions to the protection and the restoration of fish and aquatic habitat.

The purpose of this focal area is to create and maintain the infrastructure necessary to have a broad-based partnership. The focal area will provide provisions for the essential components of a highly functioning partnership including: members, coordinator, steering committee, science and data committee and ad-hoc committees.

CURRENT CONDITION

Many of the existing entities involved in convening this partnership have previously worked together on fisheries and fish habitat concerns. Efforts to date have been conducted on a case-by-case basis without formal structure, yet significant accomplishments have been made. No one effort has been comprehensive and focused solely on fish habitat. The National Fish Habitat Action Plan comes at an opportune time for the Kenai Peninsula, where a significant number of interested stakeholders are willing to come together and build on recent successes, under the Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership.

DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION

The Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership has a vibrant, active and diverse membership, a robust operating plan, including defensible project selection and evaluation procedures. The Partnership receives the necessary amount of annual unrestricted operating support and project funds in order to sustain its coordination responsibilities, meet the project support needs of member organizations, and achieve overall goals and objectives.





Before and after restoration Photo courtesy USFWS

FOCAL AREA: BIOLOGICAL COMPLEXITY

Goal: Protect, restore and maintain the biological integrity of ecosystems that support healthy fish habitat.



The purpose of this focal area is to promote sustainable watersheds through ecosystem management, which includes the long-term health of local communities and their economies. Ecosystem management is an integrated approach to management that considers the entire ecosystem, including humans and recognizes the impacts of climate change. The goal of ecosystem-based management is to maintain an ecosystem in a healthy, productive and resilient condition. Ecosystem-based management differs from current approaches which focus on a single species, sector, activity or concern; it considers the cumulative effects of different sectors.

CURRENT CONDITION

To the best of our collective knowledge, wild fish populations are healthy despite some known but yet un-quantified loss of natural habitat. To the best of our collective knowledge, wild fish populations have sufficient intact habitat to sustain historical population levels with some habitat loss. The lost habitat is assumed to have reduced the resiliency of fish populations to withstand future natural and anthropogenic disturbances.

We do not know what percentage of fish habitat has been reduced by fragmentation; however we do know 48% of assessed culverts do not support unrestricted movement of juvenile coho salmon. We lack sufficient assessments and working ecosystem-based habitat models to help guide strategic actions.

DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION

The Partnership will be able to identify and quantify key areas of fish habitat loss using watershed assessments and through protection, restoration and enhancement projects, regain lost resiliency. Fish and other aquatic organisms have unrestricted access to at least 95% of available habitat within each of the 14 major watersheds covered by our geographical focus.

All wild fish populations within our geographical focus will remain self-sustaining at recent historical levels. No fish populations or species with critical ties to fish within our geographical focus are listed under the Endangered Species Act.

FOCAL AREA: WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY

Goal: Ensure necessary water quality and quantity to support healthy fish communities and aquatic ecosystems.

The purpose of this focal area is to protect, maintain and restore a fundamental element of aquatic ecosystems, the water. Consistent with guidance from the National Fish Habitat Board, we will seek protections for water quantity and quality. Climate change is affecting the quantity and seasonal distribution of stream flow and lake levels in all aquatic systems. Changes from climatic impacts are more readily observed in glacial dominated systems; however, drying of low-lying wetlands has also been documented. Less clear is the connection between drying wetlands, changes in the seasonal distribution of flow and the impacts to fish habitat.

CURRENT CONDITION

Alaska has more water in the form of lakes, streams, rivers, coastline and wetlands than any other state in the union. In addition, three different state agencies are involved in assuring our waters are clean, healthy and available for various uses. Within the boundary of the Partnership, we are data poor with respect to water quality and water quantity when compared to similar-sized geographic regions of the nation.

DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION

Baseline water quality and quantity data will be available for a sub-set of all fish bearing water bodies that are representative of the range of variability within the Partnership boundaries. No fish bearing waters within the Partnership will have impaired waterbody status as defined under § 303(d) of the Clean Water Act.



FOCAL AREA: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Goal: Facilitate and increase the use and availability of scientific knowledge to guide Partnership priorities, policy development and management decision making.

The purpose of this focal area is to consolidate, synthesize and summarize existing scientific knowledge of fish habitat as it relates to the Partnership's purpose and geographic area. The scientific and decision-making community periodically needs a forum on aquatic ecosystems to share information about on-going research and restoration efforts. This information needs to be shared in the appropriate format among non-technical partners and with overlapping goals. In existing plans and literature, there are identified information and monitoring data gaps. The short-term objectives of this goal are to prioritize and begin to fill the known information and data gaps through research and monitoring with the anticipation that successful endeavors of the Biocomplexity and Water Quality/Quantity focal area goals may provide better direction for monitoring programs in three to five years.

CURRENT CONDITION

The current state of scientific knowledge related to fish habitat is both inaccessible and insufficient. Relevant data, analyses and reports are not readily available to researchers or policy makers in any one location or in electronic formats. Our fish habitat knowledge is limited by numerous data gaps and a lack of final project review that might lead to improved future project design and development.



DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION

Our desired future state of scientific knowledge is that fish habitat information is accessible to researchers and policy makers in one location, electronically. Our fish habitat knowledge is comprehensive and the Partnership provides periodic opportunities to share on-going research. Continuous monitoring and thorough project evaluation allows us an efficient feedback mechanism to improve project design and development.

FOCAL AREA: EDUCATION

Goal: Increase the awareness and knowledge of fish habitat for everyone that lives, works, recreates, visits, regulates or otherwise has an influence on the strategic issues of the Partnership.

The purpose of this focal area is to provide learning opportunities for policy makers, landowners, resource managers, resource users, interest groups and the public; including, but not limited to K-12 programs. Educational efforts should recognize fish as part of an entire ecosystem, including humans. This focal area should support educational and outreach programs that facilitate a better understanding of the complex needs and systems of fish and aquatic life, the priority issues from our other focal areas should also be integrated in annual educational themes or planning efforts.

CURRENT CONDITION

Several well-established K-12 fish habitat-related programs exist on the Kenai Peninsula; however, coordination among the sponsoring entities is sporadic and not organized. There is little focus on adult learning opportunities specifically for policy makers. From time-totime "hot-topics" will present opportunities to address fish habitat, but most often these learning opportunities are overshadowed by emotion and reaction to the topic at hand.



Photo courtesy of USFWS

DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION

As science and technology advances, information will be clearly transferred to governing bodies that set policy that affect fish habitat. There is significant knowledge already in existence that presents immediate opportunities to begin regular interaction with policy makers in a learning environment. These opportunities are going unmet due to a lack of deliverability capacity. K-12 classroom efforts would be enhanced with increased coordination and planning to ensure that consistent messages are delivered and to help identify if any segment of the K-12 population is underserved.

FOCAL AREA: POLICY

Goal: Identify, prioritize and ensure adequate regulations, polices and planning processes are in place to support the protection of fish habitat.

The purpose of the Policy focal area is to gather and make available relevant data, tools and protocols that can enable appropriate government bodies to enact, change or more effectively enforce legislation and policy that will protect fish habitat. The Partnership **does not lobby** for change and will coordinate and share information about existing laws and policies, including identifying gaps so that appropriate government bodies can enable aquatic habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement to meet the Partnership's goals and objectives.

CURRENT CONDITION

Although laws and policy to protect fish and aquatic habitats in the Kenai Peninsula Borough exist on federal, state and local levels, they are neither universally compatible nor universally applied. Some are enforced throughout the region; others are enforced only in certain areas or under certain conditions. These differences reduce the effectiveness of landscape-level habitat conservation and restoration throughout a watershed or the region.

DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION

Policies that are designed to protect fish habitat will receive regular review to help ensure they keep pace with change. Change comes in many forms, for example: new scientific knowledge about the essential needs of fish habitat; a growing population that requires new land conversion practices; changes in other regulatory policy that has an indirect effect on fish habitat. The Partnership desires a condition where local, state, federal and tribal policy makers better understand and appreciate the need to address policy issues prior to new listings of impaired waters, threatened and endangered species.





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