



## Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership Steering Committee October Meeting - Notes

October 26, 2023, 1:00pm to 3:00pm

In-person: Donald E. Gilam River Center, Soldotna

Zoom Link: <https://zoom.us/j/92064166870>

### **Attendance:**

Steering Committee Members: Ben Meyer, Peter Miccichi, Kyle Graham, Katherine Schake, Adam Cross, Jess Johnson, Coowe Walker, Alexa Millward, Samantha Lopez

Partners: Mary Inovejas, Kaitlynn Cafferty, Lynn Whitmore

### **Agenda:**

#### 1. Introductions

#### 2. FY25 RFP update

Melissa gave an update on this year's RFP process. Ben, Trent and I will meet next week to review the new RFP, application and scoring criteria. After revisions have been made the package will be sent back out to the full steering committee for review and approval. Significant updates to application and scoring criteria were required this year to better align it with the NFHP project database. This database is ultimately the form that the NFHP Board will use to review projects. Should we adjust the RFP process this year by requesting a letter of interest from applicants initially, then a full proposal at a later time? This may reduce the barrier of applying and attract more applicants. The amount of money we will likely have to fund projects is \$115,000. We could fund 2-3 projects with that amount most likely.

Ben – Can you tell us more about this letter of interest?

Melissa - The letter of interest could be one page including primary project outcomes and a budget estimate.

Ben – Are there examples we can use as a template? It makes sense for applicants not to invest a lot of time in filling out an application for funding that they have a low probability of getting.

Melissa – I would have to do further researching to find a template. The advantage of the new application I drafted this year is it gives applicants longer character limits to describe their projects. I've gotten feedback and observed that applicants do not have

an adequate amount of space in the application we've used in the past few years. Applicants will also be able to list project metrics themselves from a provided spreadsheet.

Ben - Possible schedule: distribute request for letter of interest by mid-November. Applicants will be invited to fill out a full proposal by mid-December.

Melissa – Final Applications need to be submitted by late Feb 2024.

Jess – ADFG admin now requires any funding applications to be submitted for internal review for 30 days prior to submission. Longer proposal periods work better for ADFG employees.

Kyle – The RFP process should be as simple and straightforward as possible for applicants. An RFP is not required for project solicitation. We may be able to select projects outlined from the conservation action plans and Strategic Plan, which are based on partner prioritization. There may be a couple of projects we can provide seed money to with the intent that they will find additional funding later on.

Melissa – Agreed. This is how the CAP is intended to be used.

Coowe – In my experience, a letter of intent is useful to make sure the applicant is thinking through the project. It is unlikely that a proposal will be rejected at the letter of intent phase, because they will have reviewed and met the project criteria already. The letter of intent is more valuable to the review team to know how many reviewers and what type of experts they will need.

Kyle – If we choose the project we want to fund we will reverse the solicitation process by deciding the desired project deliverables to move the strategic plan forward, then finding the organization that would be best suited for that project.

Melissa – I need to follow up with NFHP staff to ensure there wouldn't be any negative implications from this change.

### 3. Science and Data Subcommittee discussion

Melissa- To my knowledge KFPHP had never established a science and data subcommittee. However, this is a component of a fully functional fish habitat partnership. The existence of a Science and Data Subcommittee is directed by KFPHP's Strategic Plan, which states that the role of the subcommittee is "to ensure that the Partnerships strategic planning, project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation are scientifically sound." These are functions that have not been regularly provided by our Partnership, which greatly impacts the partnership's ability to complete the work of the Strategic Plan.

The addition of a science and data subcommittee would also bring us in line with other fish habitat partnerships, the nation board, and our Strategic Plan. This is more important than ever as we prepare to apply for congressional recognition in the coming year, as this will make our application more competitive. This would also allow us to actively direct the projects that we fund and promote in order to best address partnership priorities and fill information gaps.

This is in contrast to our current process of passively soliciting proposals through our annual request for proposals. The purpose of this subcommittee is not for members to conduct projects, rather it is to review and make recommendations. An example of this type of work would be to identify a fish habitat assessment project that fills data gaps on the Peninsula, identify relevant partners, and promote its funding through KPFHP's RFP or other funding sources. Duties include:

- Making recommendations on future research needs.
- Reassessing KPFHP priorities annually.
- Review proposals and make recommendations about what projects should receive funding.
- Identifying information gaps in fish habitat data regionally.
- Assisting member groups in designing defensible project monitoring and evaluation procedures.

Steering committee members and other partners will establish which disciplines are desired for this role and recruit experts from that field. Members may include current steering committee members and other representatives of partner groups. Meetings occur as needed, preferably a minimum of once in the fall and once in the spring.

Jess – We've done something similar in the past.

Kyle – We had an ad hoc committee at one time to review project proposals. That is different from a standing subcommittee.

Ben – Looking at the composition of the Mat-Su FHP's Science and Data subcommittee, none of the members are also steering committee members.

Kyle – We may lack the capacity on the Kenai to have a standing committee like the Mat-Su does.

Sam – It would be worthwhile to attempt to recruit members for this subcommittee knowing that we may not be successful.

Ben – agreed.

Katherine – agreed with prior comments.

Kyle – Recruitment for this subcommittee could be tied into a future science symposium.

#### 4. Change to ADFG instream flow reservation projects

Melissa - ADFG employees are no longer able to file applications for ISF reservations. Can continue with hydrology work. This mandate impacts one currently funded project (Quartz creek watershed ISF reservations). ADFG has completed the fieldwork for this project and worked with USFWS to amend the deliverables for that project agreement. This project also included significant AWC nominations. This also impact our highest ranked project for FY24 (Soldotna Creek watershed: conserving hydrologic conditions for fish). If funded fieldwork would begin next summer. Will also include opportunistic fish sampling for nominations to AWC. FHPs and other partners statewide are

attempting to setup a meeting on this topic.

Jess- If they keep collecting data, the leadership may change in the future and allow them to file the applications.

Kyle – We aren't going to take money back that we've already committed to that project. However, since the deliverables have changed for the FY24 proposal, the steering committee should be given the opportunity to review and rerank the proposals.

Melissa – The FY24 proposals have been reviewed by the DOI and returned to the NFHP Board. I would have to get advice from NFHP staff on options to modify and re rank proposals.

Ben – The only change in deliverable would be submitting the paperwork for ISF nomination. The rest of the project would stay the same.

Melissa – I will try to have Leah attend our next meeting so we can discuss this with her. How much of the funding is needed for filing the application?

Coowe – the hydrologic data and the AWC nominations are really valuable. It may be possible to find someone else to file the nominations. It's a really good project and we need to find a way to keep it going.

Melissa – The agency that receives the reservations needs to be prepared to legally defend it in the future. Not every organization could do that.

#### 5. BIL/fish passage prioritization

Melissa – Discussed the value of hosting a conversation with partners to rank fish passage projects.

Kyle – There are a lot of other factors. The BIL funding has targeted underserved communities.

Ben – I'm in favor of our region having a formal prioritized list. This could strengthen proposals. The Copper River Watershed Project had an established protocol:

<https://copperriver.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/CRWPCulvertPrioritization.pdf>

Coowe – Agreed

Peter – It would be helpful to share schedules for road construction, so we can complete fish passage projects simultaneously.

Kaitlyn – construction timelines are generally soft. Calendars are not shared.

Ben – The first step is to have a rough ranking of projects then compare that with the construction timeline. The copper river project just used biological rankings, like physical condition of the culvert, benefit of replacing it, presence of downstream barriers, etc. Kenaitze Indian Tribe submitted a proposal in 2021 for a similar project that did not get funding. It used existing data from ADFG and USFWS to produce a priority matrix. The project also involved field assessments.

Jess – ADFG and USFWS have been working on fish passage assessments on the Kenai for a long time.

Kyle – Due to funding we use a much simpler rapid assessment now. The Soil and Water District in in Palmer created a GIS program for culvert assessment, which they have shared with the Kenai region.

Jess – Michael is finishing a large assessment for the Mat-Su. It takes grant funds and has logistical challenges, but it has been very successful for the Mat-Su to complete

projects.

Peter – Having a priority list would be helpful on my end for budgeting purposes. As we complete deferred maintenance projects we want to ensure we are addressing fish habitat needs as well.

6. Partner updates (funding opportunities, project updates, job openings, etc)

Alexa – Discussed the Centennial Park Revegetation Project happening spring/summer 2024. Funded by the NOAA re grant. Is interested in partnering with anyone who would like to be involved with the project. This project will revegetate approx 100 ft section of bare riverbank just downstream and adjacent to the parking lot. Still need to harvest trees.

Jess – This may be one of our sites for a stream bank workshop this summer. Would like to find a tribe that would let us harvest transplants on their property.

Peter – look at properties that are going to be cleared for construction anyway. The city of Soldotna used to own a piece of equipment that can grab larger trees out of the ground. It's better to retree with larger trees.

Adam – recommends having a plan in place to keep people off the newly revegetated area.

Ben – Attended the Cook Inlet Water Quality Summit last week in Anchorage. Diverse audience. Productive discussion. Presentations will be made available through the Alaska Wildlife Alliance website.

Lynn – Thanked the group for responding quickly to his inquiry about the Ruby Creek culverts.

Kyle – Discussed a major fish habitat project that was funded near salmon creek in seaward. Also, visited some fish passage projects over the weekend with politicians.

**Steering Committee Members:**

NOAA - Erika Amman

USFWS - Kyle Graham

ADFG - Jess Johnson

KPB River Center – Samantha Lopez

USFS – Adam Cross

KWF – Benjamin Meyer

KBNERR – Katherine Schake

**Advisors:**

Kenai Peninsula Borough – Peter Micciche

USFWS - Mike Daigneault

**Next Meeting:**

TBD, November 2023

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