



Trout Unlimited Alaska

June 26, 2011

Mr. Kelly Hepler
Chair, National Fish Habitat Board
Alaska Department of Fish and Game
333 Raspberry Road
Anchorage, AK 99518-1599

Dear Mr. Hepler:

The Southeast Alaska Fish Habitat Partnership (SEAKFHP) requests recognition as a candidate partnership under the National Fish Habitat Action Plan (NFHAP). Our goal is to develop and implement a comprehensive conservation and restoration strategy for freshwater and near-shore marine ecosystems of Southeast Alaska that will conserve and sustain the region's fish habitat, fisheries-based economy, and culture. As part of this effort, the SEAKFHP will facilitate regionally-relevant actions to support fish habitat conservation and management through inter-jurisdictional partnerships in Southeast Alaska.

Trout Unlimited (TU), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) met several times in 2010 to discuss the efficacy of forming a FHP for Southeast Alaska. During our initial meeting in February, state agencies, federal agencies and NGO's (TU, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition (SAWC)) agreed to the strong need for a SEAKFHP. Following a Session on "Fish Habitat Partnerships in Alaska" at the Alaska Chapter American Fisheries Society meeting in Juneau in November, about 40 people representing a variety of NGO and agency interests gathered for a luncheon to discuss fish habitat issues. There was consensus among those attending that the existing piecemeal approach to habitat management, restoration, and protection was not as effective as it could be. The attendees voiced broad support for a Southeast Alaska FHP to coordinate fish habitat conservation efforts in the region and they recommended that a letter be submitted requesting status as a Candidate FHP. Potential partners in the SEAKFHP are identified in Attachment A.

SEAKFHP would follow the overall NFHAP goals of protecting, restoring, and enhancing habitats. SEAKFHP would focus on populations of resident and anadromous salmonids in freshwater watersheds as well as anadromous and marine species in near-shore habitats in order to sustain Southeast Alaska's fish habitat, fisheries, and traditional way of life.

The SEAKFHP will achieve this goal by coordinating with multiple stakeholders and jurisdictions including state, federal, NGO, Alaska Native Organizations, other FHPs, and private interests to:

- Create a special forum for coordination and collaboration on fish habitat management, protection, and restoration activities in Southeast Alaska;
- Identify new funding sources and increase collaboration on existing funding programs (e.g. Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund, and NOAA Community Based Restoration Program);
- Identify freshwater watershed and near-shore marine habitat protection and restoration needs and develop priorities;
- Facilitate region-wide estuarine classification and mapping;
- Recommend best management practices and protocols for achieving effective habitat assessment, watershed planning, project prioritization, and restoration;
- Improve the capacity of the region to address habitat threats more effectively;
- Develop multi-year inter-agency plans and prioritization for Anadromous Waters Cataloging, in-stream flow reservation, and fish passage inventories;
- Host an annual conference to review emerging needs and accomplishments of the partnership.

Within Southeast Alaska, an area greater than 60,000 square miles, there are over 18,000 miles of marine shoreline, over 3,000 estuaries, and more than 6,000 cataloged anadromous streams (about 41,000 miles) that account for the region's productivity. The entire population of Southeast Alaska lives within salmon-bearing watersheds or near coastal waters. The relatively steep and rocky topography of this region and abundant streams often create conflict with development because some of the most productive habitats are often preferred sites for housing, businesses, and transportation infrastructure. Thus, Southeast's coastal communities must balance their economic dependence on healthy watersheds and marine ecosystems with their need for coastal development. This offers an unprecedented opportunity for the SEAKFHP to work closely with communities to protect, restore, and enhance freshwater and near-shore habitats. A partnership amongst agencies, NGOs, Alaska Native organizations, and communities will help instill a much needed conservation ethic, and provide education on the value of habitat and the consequences of habitat loss.

We recognize that that North American Salmon Stronghold (NASSP) candidate Partnership and one recognized partnership (Western Native Trout Initiative (WNTI)) include Southeast Alaska as part of their geographic area of interest. We have approached NASSP to discuss overlap between their objectives and interests and those of the SEAKFHP. NASSP's current focus is on large salmon watersheds, conservation of genetically distinct wild stocks, and salmon harvest management.

Although salmon is a ubiquitous and important species in Southeast Alaska, the region does not appear to be a focal area for NASSP at this time. WNTI's focus is limited to trout species, specifically excluding salmon. Thus, while there are overlaps between WNTI's areas of salmonid conservation interest and those of the SEAKFHP, WNTI's scope is much more limited than the multi-species, watershed-to-estuary approach SEAKFHP envisions pursuing.

The Pacific Marine and Estuarine Candidate Partnership (PMEP) is currently being formed and PMEP has expressed a strong interest in focusing on near-shore and marine habitats with little, if, any, extension further inland into adjacent freshwater watersheds. PMEP also has explicitly formed its geographic scope to exclude working in Southeast Alaska in order to maintain consistency in focal issues relevant to coastal Washington, Oregon and California. Thus, the focus areas, species limitations and geographic scope of other active FHP efforts in and adjacent to Southeast Alaska have prompted the formation of the SEAKFHP as a necessary new partnership to help conserve fish habitat in this region.

Following the *Policies and Guidance for Fish Habitat Partnerships* (2008) as established by the National Fish Habitat Board, the next steps for SEAKFHP include, but are not limited to:

1. Establishing a steering committee that represents the range of conservation interests in the region.
2. Developing a mission statement, operating procedures, specific geographic scope, and formalize goals and objectives.
3. Pursuing funding for facilitation and coordination of near-term SEAKFHP organizational development.
4. Conducting resource assessments using existing information to evaluate habitat condition, known threats, and opportunities; initiate planning process to identify strategic priorities in consultation with state and federal agencies, NGO's, and other partners.
5. Applying to NFHAP board for formal recognition.

Thank you for your consideration, we look forward to working with the National Fish Habitat Board, staff, partner agencies, and interested stakeholders with the further development of the Southeast Alaska Fish Habitat Partnership.

Sincerely,



Mark Kaelke
Southeast Alaska Project Director

cc: Tom Busiahn, USFWS, National Fish Habitat Action Plan Coordinator

Attachment A.

Potential partners of SEAKFHP to date:

Non-Governmental Organizations

Trout Unlimited, Alaska Program
The Nature Conservancy, Southeast Alaska Field Office
Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition
Juneau Watershed Partnership
Yakutat Salmon Board
Takshanuk Watershed Council
Taiya Inlet Watershed Council
Southeast Alaska Land Trust

Alaska Native Organizations

Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska

Federal Agencies

NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service, Habitat Conservation Division
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Forest Service, Alaska Region
U.S.F.S Alaska Forestry Sciences Laboratory
U.S.D.A Natural Resources Conservation Service
Environmental Protection Agency
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska District

State of Alaska Agencies

Department of Fish and Game
Department of Natural Resources
Department of Environmental Conservation
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

Municipalities

City and Borough of Juneau
City and Borough of Yakutat
Southeast Conference

Native Corporations

Sealaska Regional Corporation
Alaska Native Village Corporations