

Southeast Alaska Fish Habitat Partnership Operational Strategy and Business Plan 2017-2021.

INTRODUCTION

Background

In the past decade as we have come to better understand the impacts of human development on fish and aquatic habitats, conservation and habitat restoration practices have evolved substantially. In Southeast Alaska, state and federal agencies have increased efforts in assessment, planning, and habitat restoration project implementation and non-governmental and community organizations have strengthened their ability to work cooperatively together. To aid these incipient partnerships, a diverse group of restoration and conservation practitioners from Southeast Alaska began meeting informally in 2009 to explore opportunities for improving communications, ways to enhance the effectiveness of collaborative efforts, and bolster on-the-ground results in the region.

This working group determined that the model shared under the National Fish Habitat Partnership Action Plan (NFHAP; www.fishhabitat.org) provided a sound template for meeting those challenges. NFHAP was developed to protect, restore, and enhance the nation's fish and aquatic communities through a network of regional partnerships that foster fish habitat conservation for the benefit of the public. Through this lens, the **Southeast Alaska Fish Habitat Partnership (SEAKFHP)** was formally initiated in 2010 to bring together local communities, non-profit organizations, tribes, state and federal agencies, and residents to conserve fish habitat across Southeast Alaska using coordinated strategies and local partnership actions. The SEAKFHP was recognized by the National Fish Habitat Partnership Board as a candidate Fish Habitat Partnership in the fall of 2011, and was fully recognized in the spring of 2014 as the 19th Fish Habitat Partnership in the nation.

SEAKFHP partners share in the mission *“to support cooperative fish habitat conservation work”* with stated goals to protect fish habitat in freshwater systems and coastal interface areas in Southeast Alaska, maintain water quality and quantity in those areas, and restore and enhance fragmented and degraded fish habitats in impacted areas. To achieve these goals the partnership maintains four core functions:

1. Build organizational diversity and capacity of the partnership
2. Develop organizational strength and perseverance of the partnership
3. Provide services to SEAKFHP Partners and Southeast Alaska communities
4. Develop regionally relevant fish habitat conservation strategies

These core functions were developed and outlined in the partnership's founding Strategic Action Plan (see [SEAKFHP Strategic Action Plan 2014 – 2016](#)) and are updated in [SEAKFHP's Fish Habitat Conservation Action Plan for 2017-2021](#). These documents provide an archive of the historical development of the partnership as well as important information for planning future partnership activities to help the partnership be successful.

SEAKFHP Structure and Accomplishments

From an initial group of 9 organizations, the SEAKFHP is now a network of 34 partner groups with a 12-member steering committee that meets 6 times per year and operates under established by-laws. Governance documents and an annual work plan are available on the Partnership's website at: www.seakfhp.org. The work of the Partnership is guided by a Partnership Coordinator who has been under contract with SEAKFHP since 2012. Highlights of Partnership work thus far include:

- Hosting annual webinar/meetings detailing grant opportunities in the region, which connected potential applicants with other potential collaborators and grant program administrators.
- Sponsoring and conducting topical workshops such as the 2014 Fish Passage in Alaska training and the 2015 Interagency Fish Passage workshop which brought together various government agency personnel in the region to discuss common goals, challenges, and priorities.
- Assisting with the planning and implementation of the American Fisheries Society/American Water Resources Association Alaska Chapters Joint Annual Meeting (Fall of 2014/Juneau) including convening two, first-of-their-kind, Fish Film Festivals.
- Establishing a standing Science and Data Committee, which reviews regional habitat conservation proposals and provides feedback and endorsement to proponents.
- Compiling and maintaining an extensive online library of regionally relevant fish habitat conservation studies, literature, and symposia presentations on the SEAKFHP website.
- Facilitating regional input to national initiatives such as the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Watershed Condition Framework used to prioritize watersheds on the Tongass National Forest and the National Fish Habitat Assessment used to characterize the status of fish habitats across the US.

What's at Stake?

The geographic area covered by the SEAKFHP extends along the coast from the southern boundary of Alaska's Inside Passage north to Icy Bay in the Gulf of Alaska. Habitat modeling indicates this vast area encompasses over 18,000 linear miles of anadromous fish habitat, which supports sustainably managed salmon fisheries contributing roughly 30% of both the commercial and sport salmon harvest for the state of Alaska annually. Fisheries in Southeast Alaska generate over \$1 billion of economic activity annually and create more than 10% of all jobs in the region. Quite simply, these economic benefits cannot be realized without healthy fish populations and the instream and near-shore marine habitats they depend on.

The watersheds of Southeast Alaska sustain five species of Pacific salmon, steelhead/rainbow trout, Dolly Varden char, coastal cutthroat trout, and eulachon. The estuaries and near-shore waters associated with these watersheds support Pacific halibut, black cod, Pacific herring, Dungeness, tanner, and king crab, and a variety of other important fish species.

Some 80% of the land area in Southeast Alaska, roughly 17 million acres, is managed by the USFS (a SEAKFHP Partner organization) as the Tongass National Forest, the nation's largest national forest. Although many areas are largely pristine, about 65 Tongass watersheds have been identified as areas in

need of fish habitat restoration. There are also many privately-owned lands in the region that would benefit from habitat restoration. Additionally, increased interest in mining activities and associated development is occurring in the Canadian headwaters to major salmon producing transboundary rivers, raising concern for the long-term maintenance of water quality in the region.

SEAKFHP WORK NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

SEAKFHP has built upon previous regional efforts to increase benefits as partners come together to share resources, raise collective awareness, and work collaboratively to improve fish habitat conservation efforts in the region. Through the actions and services of the SEAKFHP, our partners use this framework for improved information sharing, funding coordination, and partner cooperation.

Benefits include:

- Improved partner and stakeholder coordination, including communication of priorities and management directions.
- Improved public awareness regarding the value of habitat protection, management, and restoration.
- Improved understanding of regulatory processes that affect fish and their habitat.
- Improved funding opportunities.
- Improved planning and implementation of on-the-ground projects that lead to maintaining and improving habitats.

In the Figure 1. below we have outlined how our work has changed over time and provide vision as to where our work will move into the future.

From 2010 through 2014, Partnership activities focused on developing the organizational structure, developing a set of shared conservation goals, and successfully meeting requirements for formal recognition by the National Fish Habitat Partnership Board. From 2014 – 2016, partnership activities focused on implementing its core functions: enhancing regional stakeholder communication, facilitating regional information resources, and hosting information-sharing events. Beginning in 2016, the partnership began to revise its conservation strategies to meet long-range project assessment and on-the-ground project needs. The partnership plans to more actively engage in assessment and on-the-ground project activities, such as advancing fish passage projects in the region. The chart below forecasts incremental changes in the work flow of the partnership from 2018 with an outlook to 2021, balancing regional coordination activities with service activities, and increasing assessment and on-the-ground project activities as project demand and associated funding support is made available in 2017 and beyond.

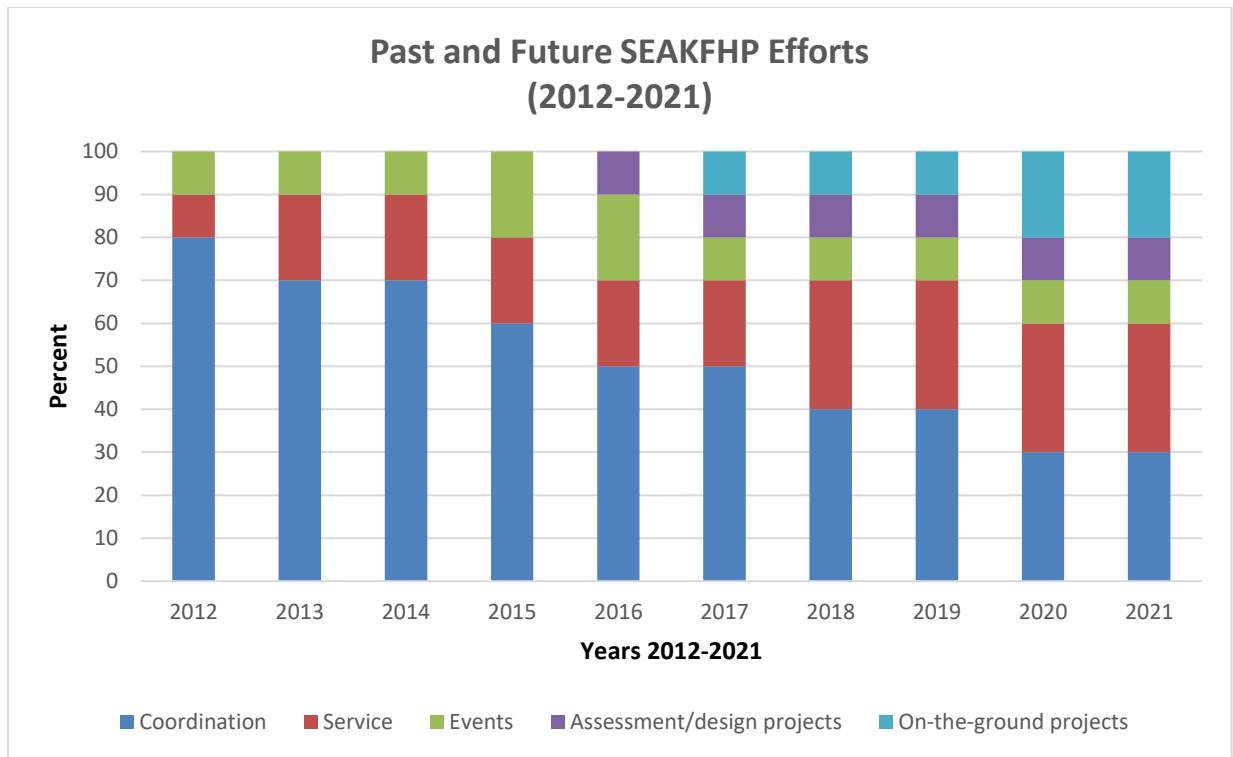


Figure 1 Past and future efforts for the partnership. Showing years 2012 through 2021.

PARTNERSHIP OPERATIONAL STRATEGIES

SEAKFHP’s Strategic Action Plan provides guidance for SEAKFHP partners and others to pursue organizational and service strategies, referenced as ‘Partnership Strategies’, which directly contribute to meeting the partnership’s mission and to reaching shared conservation goals in the region. Guidance identified in the strategic plan instills stakeholder and community ownership and encourages partners to focus on the highest priorities and conduct conservation activities with the best methods and protocols. Some strategies recommend coordination and interagency participation, but in no way bind affected agencies or partners to implement these strategies or relinquish any mandated or delegated authority. This document revises the initial organizational strategies, recognizing that the partnership has advanced over the last few years to now one that has secured a place within the region serving its partners. The strategies listed below are long term and serve to provide operational guidance as the partnership advances to the next stage in its development, one of persistence and focus on on-the-ground projects supporting protection and restoration of fish habitat across the region.

PARTNERSHIP GROWTH AND DIVERSITY STRATEGY

- Ensure SEAKFHP composition represents landowners and stakeholders of Southeast Alaska.
- Routinely assess stakeholder gaps in partnership participation and identify other collaborators working in Southeast Alaska to ensure the partnership does not duplicate services or actions.
- Regularly inform the public on the governance and activities of the SEAKFHP using both print and digital media.

- Routinely collect and share stories and accomplishments of SEAKFHP partners.
- Maintain actively involved SEAKFHP Steering Committee that represents the organizational diversity of SEAKFHP partner members.
- Annually maintain an organizational framework document that clearly articulates the operations for the partnership and outlines the composition of the SEAKFHP Steering Committee and any appointed sub-committees.

PARTNERSHIP STRENGTH AND PERSEVERANCE STRATEGY

- Ensure sufficient funding resources to meet SEAKFHP mission and strategic priorities.
- Foster standing cooperative agreements through federal/state agencies to support efforts of the partnership.
- Identify local and national corporate partners that are interested in providing financial support to the partnership.
- Leverage partner assets to ensure SEAKFHP Committee members and Coordinator have appropriate communication tools, technology and equipment, meeting space, and other available funding to support SEAKFHP mission and goals.
- Ensure partnership has sufficient management systems and structures in place to meet SEAKFHP mission and strategic priorities.
- Promote strong constituent relationships in Southeast Alaska, regionally, and nationally, for broad support of the partnership.
- Regularly communicate with municipal, regional, and legislative entities, adjacent FHPs, and others to share accomplishments of the partnership and elevate conservation needs in the region.
- Annually host broad public outreach events to share accomplishments of the partnership and identify fiscal needs of conservation efforts in the region.

PARTNER SERVICE STRATEGY

Early strategic planning efforts signaled the need for a regional entity that could facilitate coordination and communication among resource agencies and interested stakeholders across Southeast Alaska. As a result, a core function of the SEAKFHP is to provide direct and tangible services to SEAKFHP partners and regional stakeholders. The following actions outline long-term partner services of the SEAKFHP.

Communication and Coordination

- Facilitate communication and interagency coordination of fish habitat conservation activities among natural resource practitioners and stakeholders in Southeast Alaska.
- Annually coordinate regional meetings and events that increase the awareness and coordination of regional assessment, protection, and restoration methods, prioritizations, and activities.
- Annually host or co-host fish habitat conservation symposium and/or thematic workshops.
- Identify, aggregate, and archive regional assessments, prioritization methods, and other applicable information on the SEAKFHP website www.seakfhp.org.
- Facilitate fish passage interagency coordination meetings and associated trainings.

- Produce outreach materials to raise awareness of fish habitat conservation efforts occurring across Southeast Alaska, including the value restoration projects provide the region.
- Communicate funding opportunities for regional fish habitat conservation and coordinate proposal development; facilitate regional dialogs and webinars on applicable funding programs (e.g., Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Alaska Fund, NOAA Community Based Restoration Program, Nation Forest Foundation, Alaska Clean Water Actions Program).
- Maintain a SEAKFHP project endorsement process, including a timeline for facilitation of SEAKFHP reviews on project proposals

Regional Data/Resource Facilitator

- Serve as regional information/resource facilitator.
- Maintain an active website with robust archive of fish habitat conservation information for Southeast Alaska.
- Regularly coordinate with the NFHP Science and Data Committee on updates relevant to data and resources available for Southeast Alaska.

Project Funding Provider

- Develop a viable plan for the SEAKFHP to be able to fund regional fish habitat projects.
- Work with the National Fish Habitat Partnership framework to secure on-the-ground project funding consistent with the other NHPs in Alaska and nationally.
- Work with local, regional, and national SEAKFHP partners for securing on-the-ground project funding.
- Develop request for proposal and evaluation criteria processes and materials the SEAKFHP can use to distribute on-the-ground project funding to potential proposers.

BUSINESS PLAN

SEAKFHP Funding Background

At the ‘candidate’ partnership stage of development, SEAKFHP was initially funded by a contribution from Trout Unlimited, which was used to leverage additional funding from an Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund grant. These funds were largely devoted to recruiting the Partnership Coordinator and conducting plans, tasks, and services necessary to apply for and attain formal recognition from the National Fish Habitat Partnership Board.

Additional funding during the ensuing years has been provided through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s (USFWS) Coastal Program and successful application to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation’s (NFWF) Alaska Fish and Wildlife Fund, which has allowed the Partnership to expand the suite of services it provides to partners, covers contractor travel costs, and compensates sub-contractors for web design and other services. SEAKFHP has also received modest financial support from NOAA, and has leveraged significant in-kind support from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game-Sportfish Division, USFS, University of Alaska, Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition, The Nature Conservancy, and Trout Unlimited.

SEAKFHP was formalized shortly after a moratorium ([see copy here](#)) on the funding of new fish habitat partnerships was enacted by the Director of the USFWS; consequently, unlike previously recognized partnerships, SEAKFHP does not receive financial support from the NFHP (which receives its funding largely from USFWS). We have been informed that this funding moratorium will be lifted at such time that the U.S. Congress provides additional funding to the NFHP. The founding SEAKFHP partners were cognizant of this moratorium prior to submitting our request for partnership status.

Although successful in self-funding the Partnership to date, the SEAKFHP in essence competes with our own partners for grant awards and consumes substantial coordinator time pursuing these funds—both to the detriment of providing additional services to partners and facilitating collaborations which result in conservation gains on the ground. It is the long-term goal of the partnership to develop a fiscal plan that provides for successful coordination of partnership services as well as improve fiscal investments to better support opportunities for on-the-ground projects that support the conservation needs of the region.

Funding Going Forward

Moving forward, SEAKFHP partners have laid out four funding strategies to support the partnership into the future:

- Funding Strategy 1: Combination of USFWS Coastal Program and NFWF Alaska Fish and Wildlife Fund
- Funding Strategy 2: Shared SEAKFHP Federal Partner Sponsorship
- Funding Strategy 3: Targeted Non-federal Funding Campaign
- Funding Strategy 4: NFHP Secured Funding

These strategies are articulated in the narrative below and in the accompanying figures, which break out the funding plans separately for coordination support of the partnership (Figure 2) and funding needed to pursue assessment and on-the-ground project activities (Figure 3).

A rough estimate of funding needs for the partnership are shared here for perspective:

- Coordination support (annual coordinator service contract, website maintenance and upgrades, limited travel and supplies budget) - \$75,000/yr
- Service support (annual workshop/conference costs, publication and other technical service costs) - \$10,000/yr
- On-the-ground project budget \$150,000 funding amounts for on-the-grounds projects are subject to the types of projects supported by the partnership in the future

Strategy 1

This strategy, will be a main focus for the near-term, supports SEAKFHP basic operations and the contractual partnership coordinator by soliciting the USFWS Coastal Program and the NFWF Alaska Fish and Wildlife Fund. In addition, on alternate years the partnership will solicit on-the-ground project requests through the NFWF Alaska Fish and Wildlife Fund with the support of matching funds shared from in-kind partner support. As part of this strategy, SEAKFHP will also begin a funding campaign to raise matching funds to help meet the matching fund requirement for the NFWF grant.

Strategy 2

This strategy addresses a mid-term funding plan for coordination support for the partnership through fiscal contribution shared among the federal partners. To date, coordination support is secured through USFWS funding; this approach could be augmented if other agencies share in the burden. Over the course of the next few years (2017-2020), the other federal partners (USFS and NOAA) will be approached to help support SEAKFHP coordination sponsorship on an equal, fractional basis. To support this strategy, SEAKFHP will rely on the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by the

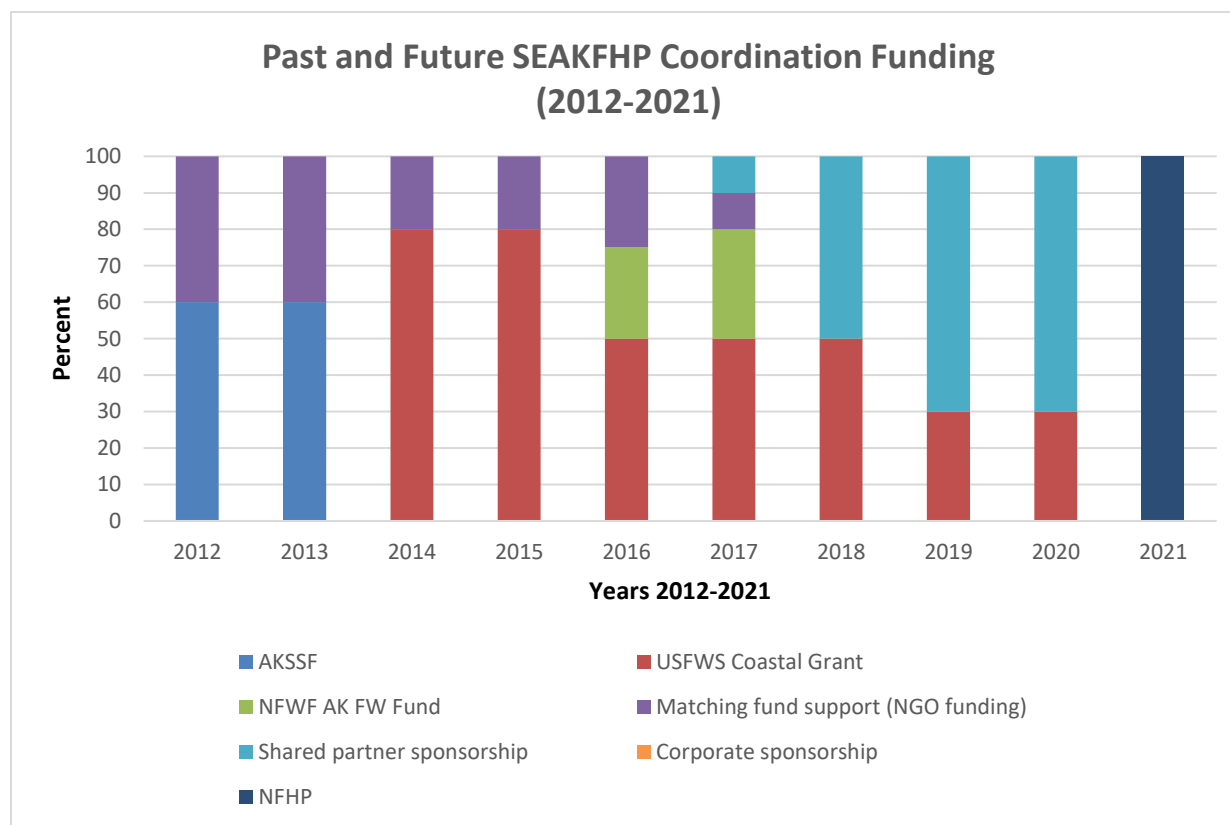


Figure 2. Past and future funding for coordination services of the partnership. Showing years 2012-2021.

Departments of Interior, Agriculture, and Commerce, which provided expressed interagency support for NFHP. [A copy of this MOU is archived here.](#)

Strategy 3:

This strategy is a targeted funding campaign for the partnership. For this strategy, the SEAKFHP will engage with the newly formed NFHP non-profit entity Beyond the Pond, <http://beyondthepondusa.com/>. The NFHP has recently attained 501c3 status and as a recognized partner, this status is now extended to the SEAKFHP. It is the intent of the Partnership to solicit donations from corporate entities wishing to support conservation work in the region while realizing tax benefits in return. These funds will provide SEAKFHP with an invaluable opportunity to leverage federal grant funds, and as such will be targeted towards the assessment and on-the-grounds project activities for the partnership. Under this strategy, the partnership will also investigate opportunities to aggregate

non-federal funding into an endowment pool that could then be used annually (pending investment returns) to support non-federal match funding needs. Donations from private entities can generally be counted upon to leverage between 1 to 3 times the donated amount and can be dedicated to a particular project, specific service, or other area of SEAKFHP focus.

Strategy 4:

As a forth strategy, and for longer term fiscal planning, SEAKFHP will continue to pursue NFHP-based coordination and on-the-ground project funds as new Congressional funding becomes available, or changes to the USFWS moratorium occur. In addition, SEAKFHP will continue to actively engage with our state and federal partners to encourage the NFHP National Board to explore new funding options for our high performing partnership.

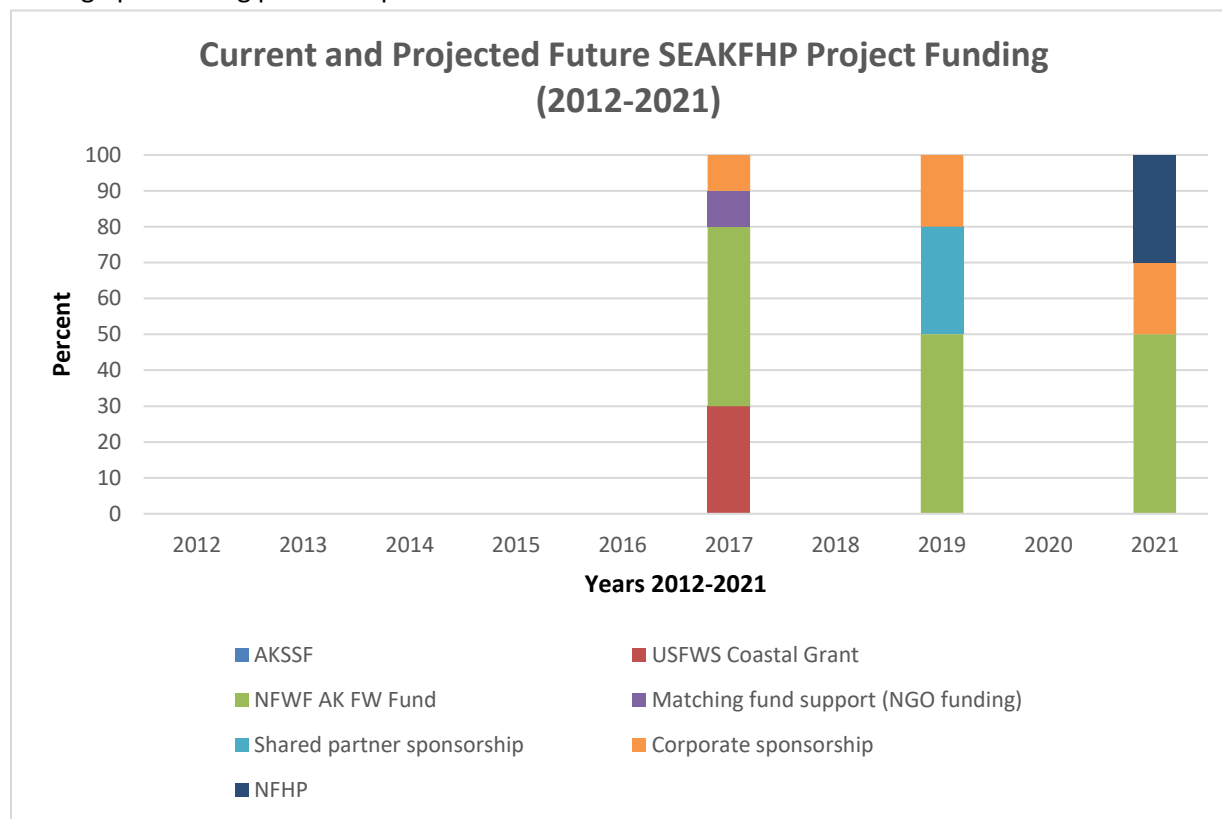


Figure 3. Current and projected future funding for projects supported by the partnership. Showing years 2012 through 2021.

Why Invest In SEAKFHP?

As SEAKFHP embraces a more formal business plan, it is important to communicate why it is important to continue to invest in the partnership. This is the message we share:

Fisheries drive our regional economy directly and they also benefit a host of businesses, charities, and municipalities indirectly. The more than 5,000 streams, rivers, and lakes that support salmon and trout in the region function as a large and diverse portfolio of investments: in years when one system produces fewer fish, another produces more, helping to ensure consistent returns and yield over time.

Intact, functioning habitat sustains strong fisheries that in turn sustain strong communities here in Southeast Alaska. Supporting SEAKFHP protects this invaluable habitat by improving communications between organizations involved in habitat conservation and restoration and coordinating on-the-ground restoration projects.

To invest your time and resources into SEAKFHP, please contact our SEAKFHP Partnership Coordinator at coordinator@sealaksafishhabitat.org.