



PACIFIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

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August 21, 2009

Mr. Kelly Hepler
Chair, National Fish Habitat Board
C/o Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
444 N. Capitol Street, NW, Suite 725
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Mr. Hepler:

The “Pacific Marine and Estuarine Fish Habitat Partnership” (PMEP) requests recognition as a “candidate partnership” under the National Fish Habitat Action Plan (Action Plan). Since the implementation of the Action Plan is underway, we are requesting recognition now to create a relationship that explores becoming an approved Partnership in the Action Plan at some future time.

The Action Plan identified the importance and value of fish habitats to recreational and commercial fisheries, but also to the well being of our society. One method to protect and restore habitats is the creation of Fish Habitat Partnerships (FHP). Formation of a Pacific Marine and Estuarine Fish Habitat Partnership will increase the capacity of the partners and their collaborators to engage in coordinated multistate efforts to conserve marine habitat, and increase opportunities to prioritize and fund habitat conservation actions.

The formation of this partnership has been ongoing since 2008, when the states of Washington, California and Oregon collaborated to request funding from the Multi-State Conservation Grant Program for a Pacific Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership. Although that grant request was not approved, the partnership has continued to grow, with the addition of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration National Marine Fisheries Service, the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, The Nature Conservancy, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service as interested partners. We have also held discussions with the states of Alaska and Idaho regarding their participation, as well as with tribal governments and non-governmental collaborators. The Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC) will manage and coordinate this effort until a Partnership Coordinator can be hired, which we anticipate will occur during the fall of 2009.

Goals of the Partnership:

- 1) To achieve formal recognition as a National Fish Habitat Partnership that is focused on the conservation of marine and estuarine habitats along the West Coast.
- 2) To conserve important marine and estuarine habitats along the Pacific coast.

These partnership goals are consistent with the National Fish Habitat Action Plan Goals:

- Protect and maintain healthy aquatic systems;
- Prevent further declines of fish habitat;
- Reverse declines in the quality and quantity of marine habitats; and
- Increase the quantity and quality of marine habitats.

Next steps identified for development of this candidate partnership include:

1. Convening of key partners to identify the best strategy to accomplish the identified goals. This will include a workshop to begin developing a strategic plan, identify data gaps/needs, establish steering committee, and identify next steps.
2. Coordinating with the NOAA Fisheries Northwest Fisheries Science Center to identify what support, if any, is needed from the FHP to assist the Science Center in completing their assessment of the coastal fish habitats of the Pacific for the National Fish Habitat Action Plan national assessment. This effort will result in an assessment of the coastal fish habitats of the Pacific coast from southeast Alaska to southern California.
3. Compiling and synthesizing relevant information from existing strategic plans and/or priorities identified by state, federal, tribal, or other appropriate entities for fish habitat in the Pacific estuarine and marine environments. This effort will result in a draft strategic plan based on existing strategic plans and priorities for the area of the FHP. The habitat assessment (above), due to be completed in 2010, will assist in developing the final strategic plan.
4. Pursuing funding for pilot habitat conservation actions, consistent with NFHAP mission. The primary objective of this additional effort is for the PSMFC to work with NOAA Fisheries and other partners to explore the potential to form the PMEP consistent with the Action Plan. This will include conducting follow-up tasks of finalizing a Memorandum of Understanding on PMEP membership, establishing a steering committee, formalizing PMEP goals and objectives, identifying next steps/tasks, and producing documents and data to be used as a basis for potential nomination as a full partnership.

In summary, the formation of a marine/estuarine Fish Habitat Partnership for the Pacific coast of the United States is a key step in 1) integrating existing marine/estuarine habitat

information, 2) identifying data gaps, and 3) prioritizing habitat conservation actions. This project is the first phase of the partnership during which the fish management agencies of five Pacific states (Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California, Idaho), tribes and other organizations, would develop a strategy for operations of the partnership and conservation of marine and estuarine habitats.

As required by the “Guidance for establishing Fish Habitat Partnerships under the National Fish Habitat Action Plan” we have addressed how the PMEP is working to meet the criteria in the Guidance. We hope you will consider the PMEP as a “candidate partner” and we look forward to working with the Board and members of the Action Plan.

Sincerely,



Randy Fisher
Executive Director
Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission