

Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council  
October 6 and 7, 2015  
Bozeman Fish Technology Center  
Bozeman, Montana  
Meeting Minutes

October 6, 2015

Council members in attendance: Scott Kovarovics, Betty Huskins, John Adey, John Arway, Janine Belleque, Thom Dammrich, Chris Edmonston, Gene Gilliland, Fred Harris, Mac McKeever, Mike Nussman, Ron Regan,

Other attendees: Ben Bulis, Russell Dunn, Dave Erdahl, Brett Fitzgerald, Steve Guertin, Joanne Grady, John Frampton, Barb Gigar, David Hoskins, Bob Muth, Bruce Rich, Kourtney Siess, Christy Vigfusson

Designated Federal Officer: Brian Bohnsack

October 6, 2016

The meeting was called to order at approximately 7:30 am. A quorum of Council members was in attendance so the meeting was officially opened.

Dr. Bob Muth, Director, Bozeman Fish Technology and Health Complex, gave a welcoming presentation on the facility, its staff, and the role of the facility within the Fish and Aquatic Conservation program. Dr. Muth's stated there are 7 fish technology centers and the Alaska Conservation Genetics Laboratory in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Fish and Aquatic Conservation Program. The Bozeman is a multi-faceted facility that includes also the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Trout Grain Research project, the ADAAP program, and a Montessori school. The focus of the facility includes: 1) conservation physiology and ecology, 2) nutrition and diet development, 3) fish passage and screening. Although the tech center is a research facility, it hosts over 70,000 visitors annually including general tours, visiting scientists and an annual fall celebration hosted by the school that is located on the grounds.

David Hoskins, Assistant Director of the Fish and Aquatic Conservation program gave the Council an update the status of the FAC program. Mr. Hoskins presentation included highlights on the status of the program's budget, the status of implementing the strategic plan, the status of the Aquatic Invasive Species efforts (including the Service's response to the threat of Bsal with imported salamanders), the status of the FAC and FWS' efforts with the Sikes Act and natural resource management on military bases and other topics. Mr. Hoskins indicated that the National Fish Habitat Plan money had been sent out to the regions. Gene Gilliland inquired about the status of the National Fish Habitat Plans being administered by the FAC headquarters office and recommended that the funds be distributed out to the regions for their processing. Ron Regan inquired about the status of FAC staff and whether the program needs additional staff or has unmet staffing needs in light of the budget. Mr. Hoskins responded that the program needs to get a full analysis of staff needs. John Away inquired further about the status of the FAC program's strategic plan and how the program is implementing it.

Specifically Mr. Arway requested about the status of the development of annual work plans and inquired if the Council or other partners will be involved in the development of annual work plans. Mr. Hoskins responded that the FAC program is in the process of providing additional guidance to the regions and throughout the program on the annual work plans. The FAC program will rely on the regions to develop work plans using processes that each region considers appropriate. Mr. Arway indicated that the Council and others would like to remain involved in the development of annual work plans. Mike Nussman questioned Mr. Hoskins about how the annual work plans will affect the FAC's budget, budget development process and presentation. Mr. Hoskins responded that the budget development process is controlled largely by guidelines passed on to the FAC program by OMB and the Department of Interior's budget office, as well as the Fish and Wildlife Service's budget guidelines. In particular, in response to Mr. Hoskins comments about additional \$600,000+ funding for the Aquatic Invasive Species efforts, Mr. Nussman offered assistance with supporting this proposed funding and asked for assistance with tracking these funds through the budget process by Congress.

Fred Harris inquired with Mr. Hoskins about the status of the proposed aquatic resources summit that was under consideration with the American Fisheries Society. Mr. Hoskins responded that discussions were on-going but that the fate of the summit was unclear at the time.

Ron Regan asked Mr. Hoskins about the status of project leaders and if there were vacant project leader positions. Mr. Hoskins responded that the FAC program had some vacant project leader positions but was filling them as the budget and other factors allowed.

Thom Dammrich asked about the various organizational layers within the FAC program and whether there is a cultural change occurring within the program. Mr. Hoskins responded that the program is undergoing a cultural change as a result of retirements and other factors. Mr. Hoskins believes that the program will evolve significantly over the next 5 years. The development of the strategic plan and annual work plans will help the program: 1) be stronger and more cohesive and 2) the new processes and strategic plan will help the FAC program develop more effective work plans to focus our work efforts, and 3) will result in substantive programmatic achievements that are more effectively shared with partners.

John Arway inquired about which species if any the FAC program considers as priority species in light of the development of Landscape Conservation Cooperatives. Mr. Arway recommended that the State Wildlife Action Plans be used or considered by the Fish and Wildlife Service as an excellent source to guide or identify priority species. Mr. Arway further recommended that state fish chiefs support or discuss the State Wildlife Action Plans and their potential uses for the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Service's management efforts during the quarterly conference calls the FAC leadership is having with state fish chiefs. Mr. Nussman commented that the Service must not forget the importance of recreational species in funding state and national conservation efforts. Mr. Nussman further commented that recreational species seemed to be overlooked by some FWS programs in favor of native non-recreational fish species.

John Arway and Bruce Rich encouraged the FAC program to continue to make the quarterly conference calls with state fish chiefs a high priority. Thom Dammrich expressed continued interest in having either a Council representative or boating organization representative added to the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force.

Mike Nussman gave an update on the status of the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation. Information for the update was provided by staff from the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation, who were unable to attend the meeting due to other commitments. Mr. Nussman shared RBFF's progress with working with state fish and wildlife agencies to improve the license purchase process. One item of particular concern is the federal requirement for states to collect Social Security numbers from individuals purchasing licenses. Mr. Nussman and others in attendance indicated this is a Federal requirement from agencies other than the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. John Adey expressed concern about this requirement and how it can be perceived as a barrier to individuals that do not want to provide this information.

Betty Huskins and Scott Kovarovics gave an update on the status of the Council's assessment of the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation for fiscal years 2013-2015 and also the development of performance metrics. Both efforts are on-going. The Council's Assessment Team is making good progress with the current assessment and hopes to have it completed in time for the Council's spring meeting. The performance metrics effort has been slowed due to the inability to find a facilitator for the effort. Council members expressed some concern about the inability of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to find and provide a facilitator for the process. Members of the Service's Fish and Aquatic Conservation staff had requested assistance from several facilitators within the Service but none were able to commit to assist in the effort. The Council plans to get the performance metrics effort back on track and get them completed in time for the spring meeting.

Council chair Kovarovics introduced speakers participating in a panel discussion on angling, boating and hunter recruitment efforts. Barb Gigar, president of the Aquatic Resources Education Association, gave a presentation regarding the status of aquatic education efforts by state fish and wildlife agencies. Ms. Gigar presented summary information on the status of state agencies aquatic education programs. She compared budgets from 1991, 1999, and 2015. Several states have experienced significant increases in funding, however many agencies' budgets are at similar levels for these years, which effectively results in decreased due to increased costs of operations. Few states are taking maximum advantage of the funds potentially available from the Sport Fish Restoration program, although states may simply use their own funds rather than the available federal funds for this purpose. Ms. Gigar's presentation also included an analysis of the types of activities states are completing, which includes Fishing in Schools, fishing camps, fishing education courses, fisheries marketing, and other activities. AREA is in the process of completing a literature review to assess the status of angler recruitment, retention and reactivation programs with funding provided by the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation. This effort is patterned after a similar research that was done by the Wildlife Management Institute. The literature review will be completed later in 2016 and will be used to guide the development and refinement of programs nationwide. National training on the R3 model for fishing is planned for AREA's national meeting scheduled for October 2016 at that National Conservation Training Center.

John Frampton, president of the Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports (CAHSS) provided the Council with an update on hunter recruitment efforts being undertaken by CAHSS in conjunction with the Wildlife Management Institute and other partners. Specifically, Mr. Frampton spoke about the R3 (Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation) National Action Plan. Mr. Frampton's presentation highlighted the economic importance of hunting and shooting. He also highlighted the increasing age of hunters and other demographic factors affecting hunting and shooting participation. The R3 effort completed an analysis of existing programs and found that more than 400 different programs exist for hunting and shooting participation and training. Many of these are one day events and have little to no coordination or evaluation, including dozens of NGO youth programs. The R3 National Action Plan is being implemented by the CAHSS and WMI. Pilot projects will be completed in 2016 and refinements of existing efforts will also continue in 2016. The R3 National Action Plan has identified a Hunter Adoption Model and seeks to identify strategies to address barriers to participation and other programmatic issues. Mr. Frampton stressed that the R3 National Action Plan is a "living document" that will continue to be refined and improved over time. Mr. Frampton stressed that the Plan must continue to be evaluated for its success and that one of the proposed measures of success was to attempt to track hunting license purchasers over time. The Council and WMI are seeking to increase and enhance partnerships with various stakeholders to increase the likelihood of success for this effort. CAHSS plans to partner with the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation to complete a conservation awareness study that will also be critical to future efforts. Mr. Frampton closed his presentation by accepting questions from the Council.

Christy Vigfusson, Branch Chief, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program, gave a presentation to the Council on the status of the use of Sport Fish Restoration Program funds for aquatic education programs and regulations affecting how state fish and wildlife agencies can use these funds and other issues of concern of the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program. Ms. Vigfusson's presentation summarized the use of Sport Fish Restoration Program funds by states and she noted that about 50% of the state fish and wildlife agencies obligate less than 5% of the annual program apportionments on aquatic education. Ms. Vigfusson stated that about 5% of the grant funds are obligated or expended for aquatic education, even though state fish and wildlife agencies can use a greater percentage for this purpose. Examples of successful state projects include ones from Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, California, Georgia, and Texas. Ms. Vigfusson's presentation also included updates and highlights about the early notice on rule making for the Clean Vessel Act program.

Steve Guertin, Deputy Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, gave an overview of the Fish and Wildlife Services priority focuses with youth programs and how the Service's focus pertains to traditional stakeholders. The Service's youth programs include engaging the rapidly developing minority populations. Mr Guertin also stated that some of the Service's efforts are being hampered due to budget reductions. The Service currently is experiencing a reduction of 700-800 staff throughout the organization, so this does limit the Service's overall efforts to focus on youth programs in addition to our other natural resource programs. The Service is continuing with its efforts to bolster the urban refuge partnership program. Mr. Guertin commented that the Service is actively reaching out to youth through some of the traditional avenues such as Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.

The Council adjourned for lunch.

After lunch, the meeting was called back to order. Dr. Bob Muth, Facility Director at the Bozeman Fish Technology Center gave the Council a tour of the facility and its operations. During the tour, Dr. Muth and Dave Erdahl, director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's ADAAP program discussed the role of the technology center within both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as well as its role with providing services to state fish and wildlife agencies.

Bruce Rich, Chief, Division of Fisheries, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, discussed the status of recreational fishing and boating issues in Montana. Mr. Rich's presentation highlighted that Montana supports a robust recreational fisheries program and is a popular destination for both resident and non-resident anglers. The Montana agency's focus is in 4 programmatic areas including: 1) habitat, 2) wild fish management, 3) ensuring recreational access and opportunities, and 4) native/non-native fish management in altered habitats. The agency's overall fisheries management activities are guided by its strategic plan for 2013-2018. Mr. Rich pointed out that the agency is faced with 4 main challenges with managing its fisheries. These include: 1) illegal introductions of non-native species, 2) climate change, 3) angler fractioning with competing species preferences, and 4) funding.

Scott Gudes, American Sportfishing Association, gave an update on the status of the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund reauthorization process. Members of the Angling and Boating Alliance (ABA) continue to meet and discuss reauthorization positions. The status of reauthorization remains unclear and Congress continues to pass continuing resolutions of the Highway Bill. The ABA alliance remains in contact with Congress and will take appropriate actions to ensure that the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund is included in any legislation associated with the Highway Bill.

Council member John Adey gave a brief update on the status of the American Boat & Yacht Council's efforts with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other government partners to evaluate potential ways that boats and boating equipment can be designed to lessen the risk of spreading aquatic invasive species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Fish and Aquatic Conservation Program has provided ABYC some funding to assist in the development of a technical report that will be provided to boat manufacturers for this purpose.

Joanne Grady, Regional Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Denver, Colorado, gave a presentation regarding the status of aquatic invasive species efforts, particularly those focused on western states. Ms. Grady's presentation focused on the watercraft inspection and decontamination programs that are being completed by government agencies in the Western U.S. Ms. Grady explained some of the factors that resulted in the focused government and industry attention to invasive species on western waters. She further described the structure of the regional panels that are focused on invasive species. She stated there are 6 regional panels throughout the country. A highlight of the western efforts was the Building Consensus conference hosted in Phoenix in 2012. This conference has provided guiding principles for furthering invasive species through the development of an action plan. Ms. Grady explained the development of a guiding document that was prepared by the Mississippi Sea Grant Law Center that includes model legislation that states can consider enacting and

which will help coordinate management efforts more efficiently. Ms. Grady spoke about how agencies are using the approximate \$970,000 that is being received by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for invasive species management. Ms. Grady responded to several questions from Council members. In addition, Kourtney Seiss, a member of the public, provided insight to the Council on her position as a seasonal aquatic invasive species inspector for the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Department. Specifically Ms. Seiss provided information on the broad geographic distribution of boats that were checked by her and her colleagues at the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Department.

The meeting adjourned for the day.

October 7, 2015

Council members in attendance: Scott Kovarovics, Betty Huskins, John Adey, John Arway, Janine Belleque, Thom Dammrich, Chris Edmonston, Gene Gilliland, Fred Harris, Mac McKeever, Mike Nussman, Ron Regan,

Other attendees: Dave Erdahl, Brett Fitzgerald, Joanne Grady, John Frampton, David Hoskins, Bruce Rich

Designated Federal Officer: Brian Bohnsack

The meeting was called to order.

Council members John Sprague and Janine Belleque gave updates on the status of the Council's efforts to engage various Federal agencies involved with boat access permitting. Both Ms. Belleque and Mr. Sprague are leading efforts in their respective states or regions to coordinate with government agencies to improve the speed and efficiency of the Federal permit review processes. Ms. Belleque has provided training to Corps of Engineers staff on activities typically involved with boating access facility construction. Ms. Belleque's efforts have focused largely on training and familiarizing Federal staff with projects. Ms. Belleque's experiences have found that many Federal employees are not familiar with common construction practices associated with boating access. As a result of her efforts, staff's concerns are changing and their comfort level with projects is improving. Mr. Sprague continues to work closely with Corps of Engineers staff in Florida as well as with National Marine Fisheries Service staff. Mr. Sprague remains in frequent contact with staff from these agencies and reported that the staff from these agencies are taking proactive measures to reduce the processing and review time for permits. Mr. Sprague remains hopeful that the Council's focus on this topic will result in reduced permit review times.

Russell Dunn, National Policy Advisor for Recreational Fisheries, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, gave an update on the status of recreational fishing programs at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration/National Marine Fisheries Service.

Mike Nussman gave a brief introduction regarding the topic of barotrauma and its importance to fisheries management. Mr. Nussman introduced the speaker Beverly Sauls, Research Scientist, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Saint Petersburg, Florida. Ms. Sauls gave a presentation via a webinar regarding barotrauma. Her presentation provided background information on the cause and management implications of barotrauma. She explained how this is factored into recreational harvest regulations and catch limits. Research on new and improved fish release devices is proving promising and if adopted by a high number of anglers. Her presentation discussed some of the current philosophies regarding whether fish should be vented or simply released at depth in order to improve their survival. Current research is proving promising, particularly in the Southeast with some of the marine fisheries.

Council member John Arway gave an update on the efforts of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission to modify their fishing license fees and structure. The Pennsylvania agency is pursuing changes to their fee structure that will hopefully result in the sale of more fishing licenses. The Pennsylvania agency was granted the authority to change their licensing structure by the passage of Act 66 of 2012 by the Pennsylvania legislature. As a result, the Pennsylvania agency is offering multi-year licenses that research predicts will be cost beneficial to the agency. In addition, the agency has added some other incentives to their licenses with the hopes of attracting additional license sales. The economic assessment of this was completed by Southwick Associates in a 2015 study for the agency. Southwick's research included an analysis of factors affecting license purchase behavior and other factors.

Scott Kovarovics led a discussion on general Council business. Council members present recommended that the next meeting be held in the general area of the Gulf of Mexico at a location to be determined. Possible locations were discussed.

Public comments were sought and Brett Fitzgerald spoke about his desire for the Council to promote the eligibility of sport fish release devices that will reduce fish mortality due to barotrauma. Mr. Fitzgerald suggested that the Council advise the Secretary of the Interior about this issue. The Council discussed this and agreed that a letter was appropriate. The Council's Fisheries Committee will review and prepare a letter for the Council's consideration.

No other public comment was received and the meeting adjourned.