

National Fish Habitat Partnership Board Endorsement of the Creation of an Integrated Interdisciplinary National Training, Research, & Development Center to support Ecologically Sustainable Water Conservation & Management

Established in 2006 and authorized by Congress in 2020 through the America's Conservation Enhancement Act¹ (ACE), the **National Fish Habitat Partnership** (NFHP) mission is to protect, restore, and enhance the nation's fish and aquatic communities through partnerships that foster voluntary fish habitat conservation and improve the quality of life for the American people. As specified in the ACE Act, NFHP is guided by a series of key purposes, but select among them are several that inextricably link fish habitat with instream flow and water level conservation. These include the purposes to:

1. Achieve measurable habitat conservation results through strategic actions of Fish Habitat Partnerships that lead to better fish habitat conditions and increased fishing opportunities by:
 - a. improving ecological conditions;
 - b. restoring natural processes;
 - c. preventing the decline of intact and healthy systems;
2. Establish a consensus set of national conservation strategies as a framework to guide future actions and investment by Fish Habitat Partnerships;
3. To fill gaps in the National Fish Habitat Assessment and the associated database of the National Fish Habitat Assessment to:
 - a. Empower strategic conservation actions supported by broadly available scientific information;
 - b. Integrate socioeconomic data in the analysis to improve the lives of humans in a manner consistent with fish habitat conservation goals.

To fully meet these purposes, it is clear that NFHP and its Fish Habitat Partnerships are among the water stakeholders requiring the training and support services that will be provided by the proposed [*National Center for Ecologically Sustainable Water Conservation and Management*](#) (Center) to empower them to effectively conserve adequate amounts of clean water required to sustain fish habitat and productivity in our nation's freshwater and estuarine habitats.

¹ Public Law 116-188, Title II

Therefore, the NFHP Board fully endorses the [IFC and AFS 2023 Center Feasibility Needs Assessment](#) (Feasibility Assessment) and its proposed path forward to develop the Center.

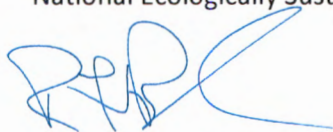
Background:

Between 1974 and 2000 the U.S. Department of the Interior’s Cooperative Instream Flow Service Group served as a clearinghouse and provided leadership, training, scientific and technical support services to agency professionals and a variety of other interested water use stakeholders involved in instream flow and water level conservation. Unfortunately, there has been no equivalent replacement established to provide these training and support services to fish and wildlife agency staff, water managers, and other water use stakeholders².

In 2020 the [Instream Flow Council](#) (IFC) and the [American Fisheries Society](#) (AFS) established a Steering Committee (SC) of experts who completed a [Feasibility Assessment](#) in 2023 that firmly established the need and pathway to provide a new interdisciplinary training, research, and development center (Center)³. This Center will provide these critical instream flow and water level conservation services based on the integration of eight interdisciplinary elements: hydrology, geomorphology, connectivity, water quality, biology, legal, institutional, and public involvement. The Feasibility Assessment proposed a training center design based upon a centralized, distributed network with a core staff housed at a central location, and perhaps several trainers operating on a regional basis. This approach would best serve the various needs of fish and wildlife agencies and other water use stakeholder interests. The proposed Center will support the integration of the conservation of adequate amounts of instream flows and water levels into all water management practices and uses. The Council and AFS are presently taking steps to establish a center in this format.

NFHP Endorsement:

The National Fish Habitat Board at their meeting on November 6, 2024, unanimously endorsed the efforts of the Instream Flow Council, the American Fisheries Society, and other partners to establish the National Ecologically Sustainable Water Level Conservation and Management Center.



Robert H. Boyles, Jr.
Chair, National Fish Habitat Partnership Board

² Water stakeholders include entities and individuals participating in or impacted by the interdisciplinary scientific, legal, institutional, and public involvement elements and processes that govern water allocation and use decisions and outcomes. Overarching socio-economic elements are also integrated.

³ [Instream Flow and Water Level Conservation \(IFWLC\) Training, Research and Development Center Multistate Conservation Grant \(MSCG\) Project – INSTREAM FLOW COUNCIL](#)