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## **2009 10 “Waters to Watch” List Celebrates Acceleration in Aquatic Conservation**

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) – The National Fish Habitat Action Plan has unveiled the **2009 10 “Waters to Watch”** list, a collection of rivers, streams, lakes, watershed systems and shores that will benefit from strategic conservation efforts to protect, restore or enhance their current condition.

These waters represent a snapshot of current conservation efforts that the Action Plan is undertaking to provide cleaner and healthier habitats for the many fish and wildlife species and people who call these areas home.

Thanks to the combined actions of concerned community groups, non-profit organizations, local watershed groups, Native American tribes and state and federal agencies, these waters are being improved by planting stream-side vegetation, removing structures blocking fish from habitat and protecting bodies of water from the effects of industrial processes, agriculture and livestock.

The 10 “Waters to Watch” are representative of freshwater to marine waters across the country including lakes and reservoirs that are improving through the conservation efforts of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan—a bold initiative to reverse persistent declines in aquatic habitat.

The Action Plan’s 10 “Waters to Watch” Initiative was first unveiled in 2007 through its Fish Habitat Partnerships. Since 2006, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has provided \$5.8 million to support 136 on-the-ground projects in 35 states, leveraging \$15.1 million in partner match, to address the priorities of the Fish Habitat Partnerships, along with funding from several other State and Federal Agencies and NGO’s.

“Our approach—teaming federal, state and local partners—is helping to bring these waters back to life in most cases...in a faster more strategic way,” said Kelly Hepler, Chairman of the National Fish Habitat Board. “By watching these 10 models of our nation’s aquatic conservation efforts, we can see real progress in treating the causes of fish habitat decline, not just the symptoms. These specific projects display on the ground work that can be held high as a vision of what quality habitat should be, which affects all people throughout the United States.”

**The 10 Waters to Watch in 2009 include:**

- **Agulowak River, Alaska** - The Agulowak River is one of the salmon rich jewels of Southwest Alaska. The river provides a robust fishery for sport anglers, subsistence and commercial users. The Conservation Fund and the Nushagak-Mulchatna / Wood-Tikchik Land Trust working together have secured a conservation easement with the major Native corporation landowner on its land within the Wood-Tikchik State Park, including both banks of the Agulowak River and approximately 39 miles of shoreline along Lakes Aleknagik and Nerka—a total of about 20,850 acres of land with high fish and wildlife values.
- **Jockey’s Ridge State Park, North Carolina** - Restoring coastal marsh habitat and protecting shorelines from erosion are the goals of this project in the Outer Banks, one of the nation’s most famous coastal habitats. Oyster reef creation and native cordgrass plantings are already underway.
- **Lake Houston, Texas** – Restoring native aquatic vegetation and reducing sedimentation will improve fish habitat for the entire watershed both upstream and downstream of Lake Houston, as well as within the reservoir, which is an important lifeline both economically and recreationally to the people of Houston.
- **Lower Flint River, Georgia** – Cool water flowing from springs in the Flint River provides critical thermal refuge habitat for Gulf Striped Bass during the warm summer months. Sediment and debris clogs the springs, reducing flow and reducing fish habitat. This project will clean out the springs and enhance flows to provide more habitat for more fish.
- **Maggie Creek, Nevada** – Improvement in Agricultural and mining practices is helping to restore habitat in this Humboldt River tributary, helping Lahontan Cutthroat Trout, a federally listed threatened species.
- **Meramec Watershed Basin, Missouri** – This unique project teams agricultural landowners, state and federal agencies, and NGOs to identify shared goals that balance fish habitat with farming needs in the watershed by instilling stream friendly farming practices which ultimately improve fish habitat.
- **Pine Creek, Wisconsin** - Restoring stream banks which reduce sedimentation deposits will ultimately benefit this mid-Western fishery, enhancing a declining population of Eastern Brook Trout.
- **South Fork Little Conemaugh River, Pennsylvania** – Historic acid mine drainage will be mitigated through limestone beds and limestone dosing to resurrect this four mile stretch of Pennsylvania brook trout waters, increasing population in this critical tributary.
- **Teton Creek, Idaho** – Restoring stream channels and eroding stream banks will help reduce sedimentation throughout this Western tributary, the largest of the Teton River, to provide pristine habitat to Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout.

- **Whitethorn Creek, West Virginia** – Riparian restoration and natural stream channel will decrease temperatures and provide cover and holding habitat in this critical wild brook trout system located in the headwaters of the South Branch of the Potomac.

“Whether you measure the effect of these 10 success stories in feet or miles of fish and wildlife habitat conserved, these kinds of concerted actions are what it is going to take to get our nation’s waters back into shape,” said Hepler. “We believe the Waters recognized today will be the impetus for thousands of projects accomplished in the future.”

The National Fish Habitat Action Plan is built on a framework of National Fish Habitat Partnerships. These regional-scale efforts include the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership, Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture, the Western Native Trout Initiative, the Driftless Area Restoration Effort, the Matanuska-Susitna Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership, the Southwest Alaska Salmon Habitat Partnership, the Midwest Glacial Lakes Partnership, the Desert Fish Habitat Partnership and the Hawaii Fish Habitat Partnership. There are also 11 “Candidate” Fish Habitat Partnerships that have stated their intent to apply for full NFHAP Board recognition. The Action Plan calls for the creation of at least 12 Fish Habitat Partnerships by 2010 to help identify the causes of habitat declines and implement corrective initiatives for aquatic conservation and restoration.

Since its launch three years ago, the Action Plan has received wide public support. To date nearly 1,600 partners have pledged their support including a range of organizations interested in the health of the nation’s fisheries such as fishing clubs, international conservation organizations, federal agencies, angling industries and academia. Complete information on the scope of the plan is available at [www.fishhabitat.org](http://www.fishhabitat.org).

The Action Plan is complemented by the “More Fish” campaign administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, which is taking the lead in raising funds for these and other projects under the Action Plan. Information about the campaign can be found at [www.morefish.org](http://www.morefish.org).

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### **About the National Fish Habitat Action Plan**

The National Fish Habitat Action Plan is the most comprehensive effort ever attempted to treat the causes of aquatic habitat decline and fix the nation’s most pressing fisheries problems. The Action Plan is a science-based investment strategy to conserve waterways and make conservation dollars stretch farther by combining federal and privately raised funds to build regional partnerships. For more information, visit [www.fishhabitat.org](http://www.fishhabitat.org).

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