

June 22, 2009



News from the

NATIONAL FISH HABITAT ACTION PLAN

For and about employees of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Congressional hearing on fish habitat legislation

The *National Fish Habitat Conservation Act*, which would codify the National Fish Habitat Action Plan, has been introduced in the 111th Congress. The House version [H.R. 2565](#) was introduced by Rep. Ron Kind (WI) on May 21, and the Senate version [S. 1214](#) was introduced by Sen. Joe Lieberman (CT) on June 9 with [9 co-sponsors](#).

The bill would establish the National Fish Habitat Board and a process for designating Fish Habitat Partnerships. It would authorize \$75 million to the Secretary of the Interior for fish habitat conservation projects that address priorities of Partnerships and the Board. The Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service would be charged with establishing the Fish Habitat Conservation Partnership Office within the Service, and working with other Federal agencies, States, and Tribes to staff the office. The bill would also require a national report on the status and trends of fish habitat in 2010 and every 5 years thereafter.

The House Natural Resources Committee, Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife, held a [hearing](#) on H.R. 2565 on June 16. The hearing also covered [H.R. 2055](#), the Pacific Salmon Stronghold Conservation Act.

H.R. 2055 and its companion bill in the Senate [S. 817](#) focus on conserving the healthiest remaining Pacific salmon habitats and populations, using a partnership-driven, science-based approach similar to the Action Plan. More information on salmon strongholds is available from the [Wild Salmon Center](#).

Gary Frazer, Assistant Director for Fisheries & Habitat Conservation, testified on behalf of the Department of the Interior. Other witnesses included:

- Rep. Mike Thompson (CA), the lead sponsor of H.R. 2055, testifying on that bill
- James Balsiger, Acting Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- Sara LaBorde, Special Assistant to the Director, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Eric Schwaab, Deputy Secretary, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, testifying on behalf of his Department and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
- Jack Williams, Senior Scientist, Trout Unlimited
- Thomas Weseloh, North Coast Manager, California Trout

The Department of the Interior supports H.R. 2565 with technical amendments, which will be submitted to the subcommittee in the near future. The [Department's testimony](#) called H.R. 2565 “an historic opportunity to reverse the declines in aquatic habitat and species across the nation.” In [NOAA's testimony](#), James Balsiger expressed his agency's support for the Action Plan and the approach outlined in H.R. 2565. The other agency and NGO witnesses also expressed support for H.R. 2565.

The Department of the Interior testimony also expressed support for the strategy of H.R. 2055, i.e. focusing “additional conservation efforts toward salmon populations and freshwater habitats that remain relatively healthy and intact.” The testimony also stated that “the Department believes that both H.R. 2055 and H.R. 2565 are compatible and implementable in their current form (with technical comments as noted). The goal of protecting salmon strongholds as outlined by H.R. 2055 is consistent with the National Fish Habitat Action Plan's goal to “protect and maintain intact and healthy aquatic systems.”

The technical amendments to H.R. 2565 sought by the Administration will clarify ambiguities in the bill on acquiring land and water rights, make wording changes to preserve the discretion of the Secretary of the Interior to administer the Act, and make several other changes that do not affect the fundamental elements of the bill.

For more information on the legislation, contact Angela Gustavson in the Service's Division of Congressional and Legislative Affairs by email at Angela_Gustavson@fws.gov.

Upcoming Events

NFHAP One-Year-Out Workshop, June 23-25, 2009, National Conference Center, Leesburg, VA. Tom Busiahn, Tom_Busiahn@fws.gov, 703-358-2056.

Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, July 9-15, Newport Beach, California. <http://www.wafwa.org/html/summer09.shtml>

For more information

www.fishhabitat.org

The place to go on the web for general information on the National Fish Habitat Action Plan

<http://www.fws.gov/fisheries/fwco/nfhap/>

A web site about the Action Plan with information tailored for FWS employees

Gary Frazer, Assistant Director – Fisheries and Habitat Conservation

Gary_Frazer@fws.gov

202-208-6394

Tom Busiahn, FWS NFHAP Coordinator

Tom_Busiahn@fws.gov

703-358-2056