**AFS Policy - Advocacy Update 4/2015**

AFS is involved in many activities related to policy and advocacy, some at the national level, some regional, many with other partners. In all instances, we seek to represent our interests in science, management, policy, and education.

One activity that has gained lots of visibility is our briefings on marine fisheries issues for congressional staff. This work is part of the AFS cooperative agreement with NMFS, where they asked us to organize a briefing for House and Senate staff working on fish issues. Our obligation to convene one briefing has expanded into three panels, each with four experts. We’ve convened two and are working on a fourth. The theme is marine fisheries – the challenges of stock assessment, the need to work at an ecosystem level, and the importance of data and knowledge. Our first two briefings were very successful, with 40-55 attendees. Let us know if you want details.

We’re also working on a congressional briefing focus on wetlands, intended to address some of the science questions related to the Waters of the US rule being finalized by the EPA Office of Water. This briefing will be May 21 on Capitol Hill, and will be part of the National Wetlands Month celebration that includes a separate awards ceremony. AFS is part of the Consortium of Aquatic Science Societies, the major group behind this event.

We’ve also embarked on a special effort to join with the Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation at the regional and national levels. AFS has a long but limited relationship with CERF. Now we’ve worked with the main society to secure a technical session in the next CERF conference (November 2015 in Portland, OR) on fish as integrators of coastal watershed health. Tom Bigford, our official liaison with CERF, is organizing that event. At the regional level, Tom is working with CERF regional affiliates (comparable to our divisions) to get AFS and CERF members together for technical meetings. So we’ll be at CERF in late 2015 and hope they’ll come to our meeting in August.

Tom is also pursuing several partnerships with The Coastal Society. Tom is our liaison to TCS. In fact, he’s the TCS President so this comes naturally. AFS Attended the joint Restore America’s Estuaries – The Coastal Society summit in November 2014 and is beginning to work with those two groups on the next summit in New Orleans in December 2016. That event could help to set the stage for our annual meeting in 2017 in Tampa, where the major fish work in the Gulf of Mexico is likely to be a major theme. One outcome of the 2014 summit is a special issue of Coastal Management, The Coastal Society’s official journal, on fish habitat conservation. Look for that this fall.

At our annual meeting this fall in Portland, look for a symposium on our collective efforts under the National Fish Habitat Partnership (NFHP) to improve habitat protection and restoration. Our thanks go to Tim Birdsong for serving as the primary organizer with Gary Whelan and John Sweka.

Those efforts focused on other societies and events are supplemented by our work with other media. In the past few days we’ve prepared a response to the New York Times regarding an op-ed several weeks back regarding hatcheries and trout stocking. We disagreed with many assertions and wanted to set the record straight. Look for a response in the NYT and a longer rebuttal in F*isheries* magazine. We also prepared an editorial for Wisconsin newspapers expressing our disagreement with some severe staff cuts proposed by the governor.

Finally, Tom continues to write a monthly column for Fisheries magazine. Please contact him if you have any ideas about column topics or wish to serve as a guest author for a column or two.