Conservation Policy Plan
Approved by Conservation Committee January 27, 2015.
Approved by the Executive Committee March 23, 2015

1. FFI Conservation Mission

The conservation mission of Fly Fishers International is to practice and advocate conservation activities that enhance and support the fly fishing experience for all anglers who fish with the artificial fly. Keystone to this mission is the recognition that biologically sound conservation of our wetland and fishery resources is fundamental to our present and future angling experiences as fly fishers.

2. Purpose and Goal

Conservation of fisheries and their habitats has been a core value of Fly Fishers International (FFI) since its founding in 1965. FFI pioneered the practice of “catch and release” in North America and since has been a leading organization in the advocacy and practice of conserving “All Fish in All Waters” and of excellence in education and enjoyment of the fly fishing experience. FFI strives to be the international voice of all fly fishers. We are dedicated to supporting fisheries research and restoration, improving water quality, protection and restoration of native aquatic habitats, the perpetuation of native wild fish stocks, and representing the voice of anglers in making biologically and socially sound decisions regarding the monitoring and management of fisheries and their habitats, including regulation of harvest.

The Conservation Committee (Committee) serves as the organizational structure of FFI on conservation matters and therefore has developed this Conservation Policy Plan (Policy Plan) as guidance to assist achievement of the Conservation Mission. The specific goal of the Committee is to further FFI as an informed and valued conservation voice for sound wetland and fishery management and to ensure that the enjoyment of fly fishing remains an opportunity for our membership and future generations of fly fishers.
3.0 Policy Plan Elements

This Policy Plan incorporates the following elements that describe areas of activity in which our members, clubs, councils and the Committee may participate to assist and/or support the conservation mission of FFI. Although, it is the primary responsibility of the Committee to represent FFI in conservation matters, every member has the opportunity to support the conservation efforts of FFI in their preferred way. A valuable conservation message could be incorporated in curriculums for fly tying and casting workshops or other classes by just mentioning the conservation activities and mission of FFI. Members may have the opportunity to represent FFI on committees or working groups with other organizations and government resource agencies. They also may take lead on a local club conservation project, or simply feel comfortable in supporting the conservation mission of FFI through their membership. Just being aware and mentioning to others that our organization actively participates in and advocates conservation of our natural resources on behalf of its membership is valuable support. The following elements are intended to inform and assist every member identify an activity in which they may choose to participate. It should be understood that while each of these elements address specific approaches towards achievement of the mission, they are interrelated, overlapping and will require coordination to assure consistency of approach and message. It is not the intent of this document to lay out specific procedures for implementation and conduct of these activities, as it is not intended as an operational plan. Rather, it is to be used as a policy framework within which activities may be designed and undertaken in ways that foster collaboration towards achievement of FFI conservation mission.

3.1 Conservation Outreach

It is very important that we apply the conservation values in our own internal activities and practice what we advocate. But, it is perhaps even more important that we share what we do in order to advocate to others that they do the same (especially the agencies with management authority and responsibility on our behalf), to solicit support (philosophical and financial) for what we do and to inform FFI members of what we do for them as fly fishers. Much of what the Committee undertakes is technical or scientific in nature; therefore, reporting of practices and results is very important, both to inform our members and to maintain scientific credibility, as well. Communication and visibility of what we do will be enhanced by preparing both technical and informative reports for posting on FFI website and Facebook; as well as writing articles suitable for publication in *Flyfisher* and other forums, including scientific journals.

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Outreach is very important to our marketing and membership goals; this is how we inform our investors, members and prospective members of what we do for natural resources and to preserve fly fishing opportunities for them and their future generations.

3.2 Conservation Action

FFI will monitor emerging conservation issues associated with management, policy and regulatory activities of organizations and agencies that may affect our mission and determine appropriate positions or actions for FFI. Monitoring should be through FFI members, clubs and councils; affiliations with other organizations or partners; and professional contacts. The Committee is comprised of the Conservation Vice Presidents of each Council; therefore, those members will play a major role in monitoring and action. The Committee also will be responsible for technical review and evaluation of conservation issues and for development of recommendations regarding sound actions that may be indicated. The action could be to advocate support for an activity, policy, new or revised rule or for consideration of a more appropriate alternative. The action could occur in forms of public statement, written statement and/or published article. The action must be consistent with our mission, other policies of FFI and FFI “Policy – Legislative Policy/Regulatory Actions” (Policy) to prevent conflict of position. Action must be timely, but only taken upon proper review of facts and best available scientific data to assure that any action or position taken by or on behalf of FFI is informed and biologically, economically and/or socially sound. All actions should be documented and brought to our member’s attention for their awareness, support and consistency of position throughout the membership. The above referenced Policy and written action and position statements provided by or on behalf of FFI may be reviewed on FFI Website under Conservation/Actions.

3.3 Conservation Programs

Conservation programs of FFI are intended to promote the sound management of fisheries and their habitats that are important to our members, Clubs and Councils. These are guided under an “all fish, all waters” philosophy that recognizes the value of native species and their habitats; as well as, the non-native fisheries that have been well established for decades and also provide recreational opportunities of high value to fly fishers around the world. The Committee also administers sub-committees that include Native Fish Conservation, Steelhead, Coldwater, Warmwater, Saltwater and Quality Fishing, that more directly are responsible for some of these

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programs. The following programs are examples of those that can be reviewed on FFI Website under Conservation.

3.3.1 **Adopt a Stream** – The Adopt a Stream program provides support for FFI Clubs who adopt a local water to “watch over.” This fosters a sense of ownership, pride and conservation ethic among members who schedule regular activities that may include clean-ups, habitat improvements and restoration, water quality sampling, fishery sampling, installation of informational signs and maintenance of monofilament receptacles at boat ramps.

3.3.2 **Aquatic Invasive Species** – The spread and establishment of invasive plant and animal species into aquatic systems where they otherwise do not naturally occur and when established present major threats to the health of those systems and their fisheries is of major concern to FFI. Communication to inform our members and other anglers regarding the nature of these problems and the steps every angler can take to minimize spread of invasive species under a “Clean Angling and Clean Boating Pledge” is very important.

3.3.3 **Catch and Release** – FFI has been a leading advocate of “catch and release” in the United States since 1965 when the organization began. We further have emphasized in written action comments to regulatory agencies that management for healthy and robust fish populations, rather than expanded take or harvest regulations, are most important to the quality of recreational opportunities for fly fishers.

3.3.4 **Cuttcatch and Basscatch** – The Cuttcatch and Basscatch programs are intended to broaden fly fishers’ knowledge and appreciation for native cutthroats and black bass, their specific habitats and distribution and conservation needs. These programs encourage members to learn more about these native species by visiting the waters they inhabit and fishing for them. They document their catches under specific criteria and then receive an acknowledgment for having done so. It is intended that participation in these programs provides another way to know more about and conserve these important native fishery resources.

3.3.5 **Endangered Fisheries Initiative** – FFI is concerned that health and population trends of many of our native fishes are in decline often resulting from alterations man has made of the wetlands and watersheds upon which these species depend for continuing existence. FFI identifies fisheries and habitats each year that meet these criteria and advocates to agencies and other organizations that these fishes and the many other wildlife species that depend upon these systems will be lost without timely conservation action.

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3.3.6 Native Fish Conservation Areas – This program advocates the designation and management of wetland habitats and their watersheds that support imperiled native fish populations. Many of these areas are on public lands requiring special designation to facilitate special management focus for indicated fish species. The “native Fish Refuges Policy” has been developed to provide “watersheds where management emphasizes conservation and restoration of native fishes, their habitats and other associated aquatic species for long-term persistence, while allowing compatible recreational and commercial uses.” Publications regarding FFI policies and activities for conservation of native species and their habitats may be reviewed on FFI Website under Conservation/Literature.

3.3.7 Whitlock-Vibert Box – The patented Whitlock-Vibert Box is a valuable fish restoration tool that is available only through FFI. It has been used by fishery biologists, other organizations and individuals for egg planting to restock and restore native trout and salmon species in the United States, Japan, Germany and Scandinavian Countries. They also are used for research purposes that include sediment studies and for conservation education in classroom presentations.

3.4 Conservation Grants and Funding

FFI allocates a portion of its budget each year and seeks funding from other sources to support conservation projects generally through partnerships with FFI Clubs and Councils, universities, other organizations, agencies and individuals. The funds are used to implement “on the ground” conservation activities that contribute to resource conservation and demonstrate commitment of FFI to its conservation mission. Projects may include stream restoration; biological sampling; fish or habitat research; construction of boat ramps, installation of monofilament dispensers or instructional signs; or workshops to teach conservation principles and ethics to our young fly fishers.

The Conservation Grants Program is the primary mechanism for providing important funding for projects. Key to funding under this program is the requirement for partnering with and through FFI Clubs and Councils to foster collaboration and matching with FFI grant to achieve a greater conservation gain than would be possible with only the funds provided by FFI. FFI funding may complete a budget necessary for implementation of a project in some cases, while funds may also be provided as “seed money” necessary to assist broader fund raising and matching to complete necessary budgets. Funding through the Conservation Small Grants Program is available twice per year and administered by the Committee, but applications must

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be approved and supported by the respective Council prior to consideration for funding. The first priority for allocation of the Conservation Small Grants Program funds is to provide funding for at least one conservation project within each FFI Council. However, any funds that remain unencumbered for any reason shall be made available for multiple projects within Councils that request funding for more than one conservation project. All relevant information regarding the program may be accessed at FFI Website under Conservation/Programs/Small Grants.

Support and involvement of Councils should continue beyond the initial award of funds through the Conservation Small Grants Program. The funded projects both demonstrate FFI commitment to resource conservation and tell FFI “conservation story” in an ongoing way. Therefore, it is very important that Councils publicize the funding and implementation of each project that is funded within their respective regions through press releases and articles written for Council newsletters, websites and other publications of FFI. It also is important that each Council monitors and documents progress and completion of these conservation activities.

3.5 Strategic Conservation Partners

We recognize that achievement of our mission can be enhanced by reaching outside our organizational structure and membership to develop valued relationships and partnerships with other organizations, agencies and individuals as forums for better informing FFI on emerging conservation issues and for influencing sound conservation activities within a broader conservation community. Developing strategic partners generally provides a way for us to collaborate with others of common resource values and interests to accomplish more than we could achieve alone or as one voice. Just as we must always be rigorous in our role as a science based conservation voice, we must require a similar discipline in the partners with whom we seek to collaborate. It also will be important that we reserve options to act independently when appropriate as a condition of any partner commitment. Partnering is another important mechanism for accomplishing our outreach, action goals and Conservation Mission.

Participation in partnerships can occur at one or more political and regional levels from entirely within any given state to regionally or broader. Typically, one FFI member, whether a member of the Committee or otherwise, may represent the organization on steering committees, working groups, advisory groups and/or partnerships with individuals from many disciplines, organizations and agencies. Therefore, it will be essential that such individuals representing FFI in partnerships keep the Committee informed of activities within the partnerships, especially where participation may require presenting FFI position on legislative policy or regulatory actions. The individual must be aware of related positions of FFI on conservation matters and
remain consistent with FFI “Policy – Legislative Policy/Regulatory Actions” to prevent conflict of position. Written positions of FFI may be reviewed on FFI Website under Conservation/Actions.

3.6 Conservation Education

We must not assume that every member understands the biological implications of conservation or even considers how sound resource management may affect their continuing opportunities to fly fish or perhaps even more importantly the opportunities that will exist for future generations. There will always be a need to share sufficient information with our members regarding the importance of conservation, why FFI maintains an organizational structure dedicated to conservation of natural resources and what we do on their behalf to advocate and influence sound conservation, specifically restoration and management of native fishes and their habitats. Those of us who are in various teaching roles (fly tying workshops, casting clinics, presentations to clubs, etc.) are encouraged to take advantage of every opportunity to discuss the importance of conservation with our members and students, not with the intent of turning every member into a scientist, but to encourage their understanding and support for the conservation work we do on their behalf. Every opportunity to speak with a member or club on any subject of fly fishing can be a teaching opportunity for conservation.

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