

PROSPECTUS
**Overcoming Policy and Permitting Challenges to Implementing Natural
Infrastructure Solutions**
A Natural Floodplain Functions Alliance Workshop
Washington D.C., November 29, 2016

GOAL: The overall goal of this meeting is to identify permitting processes and policies that impede the ecological restoration of the natural and beneficial functions of floodplains and to assist participants in identifying implementable solutions.

DATE: November 29, 2016

LOCATION: Pew Charitable Trusts, Pew Building, Washington D.C.

HOST: The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Natural Floodplain Functions Alliance (NFFA)

COOPERATING PARTIES: The Association of State Floodplain Managers (ASFPM); the Association of State Wetland Managers (ASWM); the American Planning Association (APA)

WORKSHOP COORDINATORS: Jeanne Christie, ASWM; Marla Stelk, ASWM; Larry Larson, ASFPM; Chad Berginnis, ASFPM; Dave Fowler, ASFPM; David Rouse, APA; Jim Schwab, APA; Jennifer Henaghan, APA; Diane Hoskins, Pew Charitable Trusts

BACKGROUND FOR WORKSHOP:

NFFA proposes to bring together Federal agency staff and state and local partners to explore opportunities to identify problems and propose improved processes to carry out natural floodplain restoration. Case studies will be presented that demonstrate potential obstacles, and the agencies and partners will discuss possible remedies. This will be a small workshop. Participation will be by invitation only.

This past summer, President Obama said that “no challenge poses a greater threat to our future and future generation than a change in climate.” He went on to warn us that ours is “the first generation to feel the impact of climate change and the last generation that can do something about it.” Innovation is the key to solving many of our problems, and it will be critical in order to address the impacts from climate change. Traditional wetland and floodplain protection and restoration programs as well as hybrid systems using green and traditional infrastructure will both be needed to support overall watershed health. To efficiently develop these projects, however, the various programs that manage wetlands, water quality, flood protection and habitat need to find innovative ways to integrate their efforts. The benefits of integrating these programs will provide strategic opportunities to maximize multiple benefits and program efficiencies.

Historically, state and federal wetland management, habitat, flood and emergency management, and water quality programs have worked in isolation from each other. Often, the permits required by the various divisions and agencies may conflict with and/or cause critical delays that can kill restoration efforts and/or inefficiencies for efforts to restore and protect the natural and beneficial functions of wetlands, floodplains and the watersheds where they reside. Better coordination among these programs will result in more efficient projects that provide multiple benefits. Given the new federal interest in considering the value of ecosystem services, mitigation and in finding more natural alternatives to hardened infrastructure (e.g., Presidential Memorandum on Incorporating Ecosystem Services into Federal Decision Making; Presidential Memorandum on Mitigating Impacts on Natural Resources from Development and Encouraging Related Private Investment; Guidelines for Implementing Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management, and Executive Order 13690) , permitting conflicts will need to be addressed.

Conflicting goals for restoration, protection, enhancement and creation will also need to be addressed. It has been shown that, if wetland restoration is done for one particular goal without consideration of the larger watershed context, it may have negative impacts in other areas downstream (i.e., wetland restoration can impact downstream stream function and vice versa; wetland creation for stormwater attenuation can conflict with wildlife habitat; etc.). To restore watershed health, it is necessary to restore the natural hydrologic system that supports it. Wetlands, floodplains, streams and other waterbodies are all part of the hydrologic system and have to be addressed as a unit – not as separate entities. Because these functions reside in different federal and state agencies, integration can be very difficult. Therefore projects need to consider the larger hydrological and habitat system that could potentially be impacted. This will require greater inter-program coordination to find ways to successfully reach multiple goals (and to minimize unintentional negative impacts).

PROPOSED OUTCOMES: The Natural Floodplain Functions Alliance will develop, design and deliver a one-day meeting covering existing policies and guidance that affect permitting ecological restoration projects in floodplains and encouraging thoughtful discussions to identify ways of improving the permitting process. The conference will take place at the Pew Charitable Trust Building in Washington, D.C., on November 29, 2016. To deliver the meeting, the Natural Floodplain Functions Alliance will complete the following activities.

1. Share information about existing permitting barriers
2. Propose actions to improve permitting for the ecological restoration of floodplains
3. Encourage collaboration and integration of federal and state agencies including FEMA, EPA, Army Corps of Engineers, NOAA
4. Promote the adoption of innovative improvements to existing permitting processes
5. Identify next steps to be taken to improve permitting for restoration of the natural and beneficial functions of floodplains
6. Record and disburse the discussions, findings and recommendations from the workshop
7. Set up mechanisms for continued dialogue and implementation of workshop findings among participants