

Presidential Plan of Work

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Life is what happens when you are busy making plans. Anonymous

During my tenure as President of this Society, I plan to focus my efforts on five specific objectives that I hope will maintain and perhaps enhance the Society's effectiveness as a world leader in fisheries conservation. Those objectives include ongoing initiatives of previous presidents as well as a few new areas of emphasis I have identified as beneficial to the Society. These objectives are listed below:

- 1. Continue to advance and enhance Fisheries Science, including engagement with other aquatic societies.**
- 2. Evaluate how Society messaging is perceived by young professionals who are nonmembers and their potential employers and adjust messaging breadth, as appropriate.**
- 3. Prepare/update standard operation procedures for: recruiting an Executive Director under planned and unplanned scenarios and for preparation of strategic plans.**
- 4. Increase efficiency of communications about unit activities among AFS units at all levels and better convey the value of the Society to its members and their employers.**
- 5. Build on strong foundation of diversity initiatives within the Society as well as improve message to membership about the value of diversity of all kinds.**

These objectives are consistent with the Society's mission, goals, and objectives. My approach to achieving these objectives and my rationale for these approaches are outlined below.

I intend to work effectively with fellow officers, the Executive Director, and AFS staff to achieve the Society's mission, which is:

To improve the conservation and sustainability of fishery resources and aquatic ecosystems by advancing fisheries knowledge and promoting the development of fisheries professionals.

The Society pursues its mission by setting specific goals as outlined in its [Vision Statement](#) of being a global leader in fisheries conservation, training the next generation of fisheries professionals, and providing value-added services to its members. The Society's current (2020-2024) [strategic plan](#) outlines five specific objectives to achieve the its goals and by extension, its overall mission. Those specific objectives are to:

1. Advance fisheries disciplines, conservation, and management.
2. Develop fisheries professionals
3. Communicate the importance of both the science and the value of fisheries discipline.
4. Increase diversity among fisheries professionals and promote an inclusive environment in AFS.
5. Provide effective governance of AFS and high-quality service to AFS's members.

My draft plan of work addresses aspects of these objectives (as well as the Society's goals and mission) in the context of previous and ongoing efforts toward the same. My plan also complements the plans of previous presidents, as necessary, and develops a few new initiatives to address emerging challenges. The specifics of my plan are presented in *italics* below.

1. Continue/enhance advancement of fisheries science, including engagement with other aquatic science societies (CASS) - This focus area is foundational to our core mission and addresses Strategic Plan (2020-2024) Objective 1.

Advance fisheries science, conservation, and management - Annual conferences at the Society, regional, and local level provide great opportunities information exchange, collaboration, accessing and providing mentoring opportunities, and rekindling or creating new collegial relationships among fishery professionals.

In conjunction with the Pacific Islands chapter and the Western Division, plan the 2024 annual meeting, which will be held in Honolulu in September 2024. Meeting planning include identifying plenary themes and speakers to highlight the unique natural history, biological, and cultural history of the region.

Facilitate the rebuilding of a new Pacific Islands (formerly Hawai'i) Chapter to serve fishery professionals and increase the Society's presence and influence in the area after the 2024 annual meeting.

Represent the Society at the World Fisheries Congress to be held Seattle WA in the spring of 2024. Collaborate with and support the Executive Director in the hosting of the World Fisheries Congress, as appropriate.

Collaborate with and support the Executive Director and AFS staff on myriad Society activities and new initiatives as appropriate.

Engagement with other aquatic sciences societies – Fisheries professionals work in or collaborate with scientists in related disciplines who engage in the conservation and management of aquatic resources. Collectively, we face similar challenges and opportunities in pursuit of respective missions, and progress on both can be enhanced by working collectively where possible. The Consortium of Aquatic Scientific Societies (CASS) was formed to facilitate this collaboration.

Continue to engage with CASS on the future of the organization, including organizational structure, business model, and planning future joint meetings.

Explore the feasibility and willingness of smaller CASS societies joining AFS and becoming their own unit.

2. Evaluate Society messaging, especially among younger fisheries professionals who may come from nontraditional backgrounds or who have a limited view of what a “fisheries professional” does. This focus area is foundational to our core mission and addresses Strategic Plan (2020-2024) Objective 2.

Recruit and retain young fisheries professionals – Perception is reality, and how others perceive AFS may not be how we perceive ourselves. In an era with changing population demographics (age and career objectives), AFS should ensure that its messaging is appealing to young professionals whose career objectives are consistent with the Society’s mission but who may not be receiving the Society’s messaging as it was intended.

Ascertain how young professionals and their potential employers perceive AFS and its role in fisheries conservation and management and determine if that perception is consistent with what the Society intends.

Develop and market, as appropriate, a narrative of the Society’s mission that is appealing to young professionals and their potential employers. This messaging should include broadening the perception of what is considered “fisheries” work and who is a “fisheries” professional.

3. Prepare standard operating procedures for recruiting an Executive Director under planned and unplanned scenarios and for preparing strategic plans - This focus area addresses Strategic Plan (2020-2024) Objective 5.

Planned and unplanned transitions - Previous unplanned transitions were challenging for seamless governance of the Society. However, the pending retirement of the current Executive Director presents an opportunity to formalize the Society's procedures for transitions and eases potential disruptions to the Society's operations when they occur.

Work with current Executive Director, who is retiring within 3 years, to identify primary and secondary duties associated with the position as well as evaluate opportunities to restructuring job duties as appropriate.

Develop a practical position description that can be used effectively to solicit potential candidates for the vacant position.

Develop an advertisement strategy, including hiring an executive search firm, to identify potential candidates for the vacant position as well as establishing a timeline for recruiting, evaluating, and hiring the next Executive Director.

Create a search committee to evaluate candidates as well as an assessment rubric for consistency in comparing and scoring the dossiers of the potential candidates.

Establish procedures for records and data management to ensure accessibility of appropriate personnel and financial files to the leadership team (Executive Director, Deputy Director, and others as appropriate, to ensure a seamless transition between Executive Directors. These procedures should include periodic audits with corrective actions as needed.

Strategic planning, visioning, and positioning – The Society's current strategic plan expires at the end of 2024, and a new strategic plan will be needed for the next 5 years. Strategic plans, though useful for long-term planning, can be inadequate to effectively address spontaneous or emerging challenges (e.g., COVID pandemic) and may limit an organization response options. Strategic visioning/ positioning is method for increasing organizational flexibility to respond to emerging challenges and still achieve goals foundational to the overall strategic plan.

Work with the current Strategic Visioning Committee (Marlis Douglas, Joe Conroy: Co-chairs) to evaluate our current strategic planning process. Do we need one? Are the goals identified therein adequate? Can strategic positioning be a more effective approach to achieving the Society's mission?

Work with Strategic Visioning Committee to ascertain who we were, who we are, who we want to be, and how we get there.

Work with Executive Director and Strategic Visioning Committee and others to create a new strategic plan/strategic positioning strategy, as appropriate, for 2025-2029.

4. Increase communication efficiency – This focus area addresses Strategic Plan (2020-2024) Objective 3. It continues previous efforts to improve communication efficiency between staff and units and among units as well as starts a new initiative on improving communication efficiency to outside partners and stakeholders.

Internal unit communications - The Society has many units (divisions, chapters, and sections) working towards fulfilling the Society's overall mission and goals. In some instances, these efforts are redundant among some units because of inefficient communication about or lack of coordination among units engaged in similar projects. I intend to continue previous efforts to:

Evaluate results of membership surveys or inquiries to Units and AFS staff aimed at identifying gaps in internal communication efforts.

Evaluate efficacy of communication strategy proposed or implemented by previous presidents to ensure that it is relevant, flexible, and continues to promote forward-thinking approaches to sharing information with and among Society units.

Continue to support and promote AFS Policy efforts through targeted Unit engagement.

External communications with partners and stakeholders – Society membership numbers have been flat or declining for some time. Agency organizational culture is an important factor in whether employees join AFS (Lauber et al. 2011), and young current and former AFS members believe their employers value chapter membership more than Society membership (Hamel et al. 2018). Further, many of these young AFS members are unaware that chapter membership does not constitute Society-level membership. Clearly, not all agencies and young fisheries professionals seem to appreciate the Society's value to them in fulfilling their mission and career aspirations. I intend to:

Initial surveys of partner agencies (e.g., USGS, USFWS, state agencies) to determine how they view the services provided by AFS and identify opportunities to better serve both constituents.

Devise communication strategies to remediate any misconceptions about what AFS does and better inform partners about the value the Society provides to the agencies and their employees.

5. Build on strong foundation of diversity initiatives within the Society as well as improve message to membership about the value of diversity of all kinds. This focus area is foundational to our core mission and addresses Strategic Plan (2020-2024) Objective 4.

Provide equal access and a welcoming environment to all – AFS has long acknowledged that its membership diversity is not representative of the diversity of American society

and has been proactive trying to remedy this situation. Though targeted efforts by past AFS presidents and AFS staff, the Society has exhibited dramatic improvement in creating a welcoming and inclusive environment but achieved only moderate gains in the diversity of underrepresented groups among the Society's memberships. Undoubtedly, much work remains toward achieving membership diversity. I will continue to pursue ongoing initiatives of recent past presidents, evaluate the efficacy of various programs, and continue seeking opportunities and partners with whom to make this important objective a reality.

Communicate with membership on the links between DEIA and the benefits of reflecting societal diversity in the fisheries profession and the Society's management staff and programs.

Continue collaboration between the Hutton Program and university fisheries programs (e.g., through the Education Section and NAUFWP) to provide information to all Hutton applicants regarding university fisheries programs and careers in fisheries science.

Continue targeted outreach to students and faculty of minority serving institutions (e.g., Historically Black Colleges and University, Tribal Colleges and University, and Hispanic Serving Institutions) based on availability of underrepresented populations local to a meeting or other Society event site. Honolulu (2024) presents a great opportunity to realize this objective.

Promote and encourage this outreach among all Society units.

Organize a plenary session about Hawaiian Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TED) in the management of regional fisheries resources for the 2024 annual meeting in Honolulu.

Seek opportunities to partner with other organization (e.g., CASS partners) on DEIA initiatives.

Literature Cited

Lauber, T. B., E. J. Taylor, and B. A. Knuth. 2011. Factors influencing membership of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Geological Survey biologists in the American Fisheries Society. <https://doi.org/10.1577/1548-8446-34.1.9>

Hamel, M. J., M. T. Porath, and L. Pierce. 2018. Young professional survey results: member and non-member perspective on decision to join the American Fisheries Society. <https://doi.org/10.1002/fsh.10066>