

# Charting the Course for the American Fisheries Society

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## AFS STRATEGIC PLAN REVISION COMMITTEE

The Strategic Plan Revision Committee developed the 2020–2024 draft AFS Strategic Plan with the goal of making it a more useful document for AFS Unit leadership when developing their annual plans of work and helping committees and members focus their activities as they relate to the Society's mission and goals. The emphasis of the draft Plan is to outline Goals and Strategies to help AFS move forward over the next 5 years. The Committee reviewed the last three Strategic Plans to ensure that we were capturing major salient points from previous plans. The Committee has also tried to capture the key topical areas of current officers' plans-of-work and findings from the Potomac Communications Group's recent assessment of the Society's brand and communication strategies. As with the 2015–2019 Plan, this draft Plan is shorter than its predecessors and focuses on metrics to report for each of the plan's Goals and Strategies. Additionally, the draft Plan describes the AFS and Unit Missions, the Society's Vision, challenges fisheries professionals will face in the future, and areas where AFS operations and business models must adapt to changes in technology and communication. The draft Plan also dovetails with the new AFS Governing Board Reporting Tool, which will allow AFS leadership to quantitatively assess Society productivity. Ultimately, the 2020–2024 Strategic Plan will be for a variety of audiences, both within and outside of AFS, and is meant, in part, to reach out beyond our membership and the fisheries world to other organizations, decision makers, and the public.

The draft Plan has been reviewed by the Governing Board, which voted unanimously to distribute the document to the membership for review. The document is available for review in this issue of *Fisheries* (see below) and on the AFS website. If you have comments about the draft Plan, please submit them at [fisheries.org/strategicplancomments](http://fisheries.org/strategicplancomments) by July 1, 2019. After the comment period, the Plan will be updated as appropriate and presented to the Governing Board for its final approval. If approved by the Governing Board, the Plan will be presented for approval by the full membership at the Annual AFS Business Meeting in Reno on October 2, 2019. Acceptance of this Plan requires at least 50 active members voting (to achieve a quorum) and the vote will be determined by simple majority. If approved by the membership, this Strategic Plan will guide Society operations through 2024.

## AFS DRAFT 5-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN, 2020–2024

For 150 years, the American Fisheries Society has served fisheries professionals, advanced fisheries science, and promoted wise use and stewardship of fisheries and other aquatic resources. One and a half centuries of international leadership in fisheries science, policy, and management does not simply happen: it is the result of carefully crafted plans of

action carried out by the Society's membership. Like previous strategic plans, this document is intended to guide the Society, its Units, leaders, and staff in fulfilling our mission to improve the conservation and sustainability of fishery resources and aquatic ecosystems by advancing fisheries and aquatic science and promoting the development of fisheries professionals. This document is also intended to help us gauge our collective progress in the coming years. Quantitative analysis is ingrained in all fisheries professionals, but we have not always measured our accomplishments and effectiveness as an organization with the same rigor we apply to other aspects of our professional lives. The 2020–2024 Strategic Plan was written to inspire our members, facilitate benchmarking, and foster meaningful introspection regarding the Society's productivity in the coming years. The 2020–2024 Strategic Plan speaks to internal and external audiences and articulates who we are and what we do. It is meant to help us reach out beyond our membership and discipline to other organizations, decision makers, and the public. The challenges facing aquatic resources are complex, and we must work across traditional boundaries to identify and implement solutions. We look forward to achieving the goals set forth in this strategic plan and fulfilling our shared mission for the next 5 years and the next 150 years to come.

## OVERVIEW

The American Fisheries Society, established in 1870, is the world's oldest and one of the largest professional fisheries organizations representing approximately 7,500 members worldwide.

The Society's actions during the next 5 years will be guided by the Strategic Plan for 2020–2024. Our mission and vision will be achieved if each of the objectives and strategies listed below are met through the collective efforts of AFS and its members. We acknowledge that Units serve specific functions in this effort and, as such, are not expected to address all strategies.

This 2020–2024 Strategic Plan refines previous plans by reorganizing the objectives and strategies, making the plan more usable as both a planning document and as a framework for reporting accomplishments. The Strategic Plan also serves as a stand-alone document appropriate for dissemination to our stakeholders. This Strategic Plan lists "Reportable Information" under each strategy that will help Unit officers develop their plan of work and determine how they address various strategies. The companion Governing Board Reporting Tool tracks how Units address specific strategies. As such, it is recommended that Unit officers look at not only the strategies in this document, but also at the Governing Board Reporting Tool for ideas on how to develop specific actions or work plans.

This Strategic Plan recognizes that the fisheries profession, like other scientific and technical disciplines, faces an ever-changing suite of new challenges, including:

- climate change,
- weakening of the Clean Water Act,
- insufficient funding,
- pressures from increased globalization and urbanization,
- lack of science-educated public that understands growing complex environmental issues,
- embracing landscape-scale management of fisheries and research projects that extend across geographic or programmatic borders, and
- an aging workforce that does not reflect the diversity of society and fisheries stakeholders.

To meet member needs and thrive, AFS operations and business models must adapt to changes in technology and communications, such as:

- Networking
- Publications
- Information exchange
- Governance
- Relevancy
- Annual Meetings and financial stability
- Membership recruitment and retention

## MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

### AFS and Unit Missions:

The AFS mission is “To improve the conservation and sustainability of fishery resources and aquatic ecosystems by advancing fisheries and aquatic science and promoting the development of fisheries professionals.” Individual activities and roles differ for each AFS unit:

**Chapters:** Coordinate information exchange, outreach, and aquatic stewardship within their geographic region. Priorities include member support and coordinating with local, provincial, state, and tribal governments, and nongovernment organizations.

**Divisions:** Complement Chapter activities related to information exchange, outreach, aquatic stewardship, member support, and governance at a regional level. Divisions also maintain liaison roles with regional resource stakeholders and represent Chapter needs to AFS leadership.

**Sections:** Coordinate member activities with similar disciplinary and topical interests by stimulating information exchange and outreach related to those interests. Sections also share expertise with AFS leadership, members, and other users.

**AFS Office:** Assist AFS Units and officers as requested while providing essential administrative services such as member support, annual meeting planning, journal and book publication, continuing education, communications, and policy development.

### AFS Vision:

To address our mission, AFS needs to advance fisheries knowledge and strive to be the home society for all fisheries disciplines. In that pursuit, AFS seeks to be recognized as the pre-eminent organization providing fisheries information to decision makers in all arenas. While fulfilling our vision, we will recruit and develop new fisheries professionals by offering learning and training opportunities crucial to maintaining a well-trained profession, support programs and efforts to increase diversity and inclusion, and enhance the value of AFS professional certification.

1. To be a global fisheries leader and provide appropriate leadership by:
  - Supporting fisheries conservation with science-based research and aquaculture practices and effective resource management,
  - Increasing science-based fisheries conservation through interactions with AFS members, fisheries professionals who are not members, government policymakers, non-governmental leaders, tribal groups, other professional societies, private industry, the general public, and others,
  - Promoting fisheries conservation through annual meetings, scientific publications, workshops, professional standards, science communication, networking, and outreach, and
  - Building partnerships with other natural resource professionals and scientific organizations to expand our voice to effectively achieve common goals.
2. To provide education and continuing education opportunities by:
  - Encouraging colleges and universities to maintain academic programs in fisheries sciences, resource management, and related disciplines to ensure recruitment of fisheries professionals that meet the needs of employers,
  - Ensuring that the fisheries professional certification program reflects the integration of many disciplines relevant to fisheries while ensuring its recognition as a mark of scientific excellence and expertise,
  - Providing a variety of continuing education opportunities using innovative methods to reach the widest possible audience of fisheries professionals, continue to offer training in skills that have been identified by potential employers as critical skills, and to provide additional opportunities to hone new skills, and
  - Providing resources and opportunities to use effective communication techniques and strategies to inform a wide range of audiences.
3. Provide value to members by:
  - Providing opportunities for networking, continuing education, and professional development,
  - Being responsive to the needs and opinions of AFS members,
  - Enhancing member participation at all levels of AFS to assure recruitment, retention, and leadership development into the future,
  - Promoting inclusion and diversity, and
  - Providing an integrated network of AFS Units that collaborate to fulfill the AFS mission.

Effective implementation of this Strategic Plan will require incorporating the plan throughout AFS operations. The Strategic Plan will also be reflected in the AFS President’s charges to standing and special committees, the Executive Director’s plan and work, and staff assignments.

### *Objective 1. Advance fisheries disciplines, conservation, and management*

**Strategy 1.1.** Organize and sponsor annual meetings, symposia, or other opportunities to present new findings and perspectives; create venues to provide opportunities for exchange, communication, and mentoring across fisheries fields.

*Examples of reportable information: (1) Number of Unit meetings, workshops, conferences, and symposia organized; (2)*

Registration fees and meeting attendance; (3) Revenue generated; (4) Support for members to attend; (5) Number of structured opportunities for exchange, communication, or mentoring.

**Strategy 1.2.** Hold events to encourage stewardship of fisheries resources; engage with various fisheries disciplines and educators to increase impact.

*Examples of reportable information: (1) Host events like fishing derbies, habitat restoration projects, river clean-up, community outreach gatherings, public information events such as impacts of climate change or pollution on aquatic resources; (2) Support outreach programs like “Fish in the Classroom” and “Stream of Dreams.”*

**Strategy 1.3.** Foster use of standards/best practices for fisheries conservation and management.

*Examples of reportable information: (1) Number of participants developing and providing information for AFS standard methods such as Standard Methods for Sampling North American Freshwater Fishes; FHS Blue Book; Guide to Using Drugs, Biologics and other Chemicals; Names of Fishes; Rotenone Applications; Monetary Values of Fish and Mussels; etc. (2) Workshops and information sessions demonstrating standards.*

### **Objective 2. Develop fisheries professionals**

**Strategy 2.1.** Provide continuing education by offering training and courses at an affordable price for AFS members; provide training on topics that enable attendees to do their job more effectively and efficiently.

*Examples of reportable information: (1) Course category, e.g., leadership, electrofishing, sonar/telemetry, standard methods, GIS, statistics/data, analysis/modeling, fish passage, graduate school/career preparation; (2) course duration; income generated: (a) course fee (b) number of attendees.*

**Strategy 2.2.** Promote a fisheries sciences professional certification program that is recognized as a distinguished mark of excellence and expertise within and outside the Society; if applicable, support broadening the certification criteria to include other disciplines integral to fisheries science such as management, policy, and/or education.

*Examples of reportable information: (1) How many people applied for certification? (2) For recertification? (3) How many applicants were certified; (4) Recertified; (5) How many people renewed; (6) describe support for broadening criteria.*

**Strategy 2.3.** Utilize novel techniques to encourage greater participation in annual and other meetings by students, young professionals, and first-time meeting attendees.

*Examples of reportable information: (1) Technique(s) used, (2) Relative increase in number of students, young professional, and first-time meeting attendees, (3) others?*

### **Objective 3. Communicate the importance of both the science and the value of fisheries discipline**

**Strategy 3.1.** Develop products and online resources to promote the value of fisheries sciences, aquatic habitat, and other fisheries disciplines.

*Examples of reportable information: (1) Type of communication (e.g., newsletter, fact sheet, promotional material disseminated via listserv/Facebook/Twitter/etc.); (2) Evaluate effectiveness of communication methods through analytics to measure numbers reached, audience types, category range, likes, shares, and comments.*

**Strategy 3.2.** Develop relationships, partnerships, and collaborations with other professional societies, conservation

organizations, educators, decision makers, and stakeholders to establish and promote the shared goals of fisheries disciplines.

*Examples of reportable information: (1) Relationship developed with whom (decision maker, NGO, professional organization?); (2) How does the partnership advance AFS priorities?*

**Strategy 3.3.** Publish high quality technical journals, books, and proceedings that present recent advances, reviews, and syntheses of fisheries topics.

*Examples of reportable information: (1) Type of publication (e.g., textbook, proceedings, special issue, or journal); (2) Brief description.*

**Strategy 3.4.** Develop and disseminate science-based communication materials that represent and reflect AFS’s mission to share its collective expertise with political leaders, decision makers, educators, stakeholders, and the public.

*Examples of reportable information: (1) Type of communication (letter, briefing, public hearing, article); (2) Description of the material; (3) Target audience; (4) Distribution/number submitted/number attended.*

**Strategy 3.5.** Advance AFS’s promotion of scientific research and sustainable fisheries management by expanding the science communication knowledge and skills of AFS members to become better communicators outside of their professional area.

*Examples of reportable information: (1) Organizing networking events to share skills, (2) Organizing workshops for training effective messaging (e.g., writing, speaking, other methods for non-scientists), (3) Hosting webinars, (4) Developing communication platform manuals and guidelines, (5) Providing analytic training to help customize communication tactics, (6) Summary of materials produced, number of participants, participant evaluations, target audiences reached.*

### **Objective 4. Increase diversity among fisheries professionals and promote an inclusive environment in AFS**

**Strategy 4.1.** Develop/maintain processes and practices to promote diversity (e.g., gender, ethno-racial, sexual orientation, cultural, disability, socio-economic, generational, disciplinary) mainstreaming within the Society and the fisheries profession.

*Examples of reportable information: (1) Type of promotion, recognition, and number of recipients; (2) Number of Student Subunit members; (3) Amount contributed to Hutton Program or Skinner Foundation; (4) Diversity within key roles at annual meeting (e.g., plenary speaker(s), symposium organizers, or moderators); (5) Diversity re: Unit governance (appointed committee chairs, elected positions).*

*Other activities identified by the Diversity and Inclusion Committee that should be included in the Unit President’s Plan of Work and reported on at the end of the year include:*

- Publish at least one article in Fisheries or Unit newsletter to inform readers how to include diversity and inclusion in the workplace,
- Develop/revise the AFS or Unit Standards of Professional Conduct to include statements for providing a diverse, inclusive, and welcoming environment for relations with others,
- Develop and implement a confidential AFS member online tool for reporting behaviors contradicting the Standards of Professional Conduct, and
- Develop procedures to measure diversity within AFS or Unit.

**Strategy 4.2.** Enhance participation of students, young professionals, and regular members at all levels of the Society to ensure member recruitment, retention, reactivation, and leadership development into the future.

*Examples of reportable information: (1) Type of membership development (e.g., created new Subunit or technical committee, leadership training or mentoring); (2) Brief description of actions and, where appropriate, outcomes.*

**Objective 5. Provide effective governance of AFS and high-quality service to AFS's members**

**Strategy 5.1.** Practice transparent “good governance” by holding elections and convening regular meetings of elected officers to plan activities that advance the mission of AFS; provide sound financial management of assets, revenue, and expenses; and periodically review constitution, bylaws, and procedures manual; revise governing documents using appropriate procedures as necessary.

*Examples of reportable information: (1) Governance activity (e.g., business meeting, Executive Committee meeting, regularly scheduled Executive Committee calls, leadership retreat, election, financial audit, etc.); (2) Frequency of meeting or call; (3) Number of participants; (4) Focus of retreat; (5) Number of votes cast; (6) Outcome of audit (Pass Y or N); (7) Review/update constitution/bylaws/procedures.*

**Strategy 5.2.** Recognize achievements and contributions of members, partners, and Units through awards.

*Examples of reportable information: (1) Number and types of awards, whether awardee was a student or professional and whether a monetary award (amount of money given per award); (2) Number of awardees.*

**Strategy 5.3** Evaluate opportunities for ensuring financial stability.

*Examples of reportable information: (1) Annual Meeting sites and formats, (2) Unit meeting sites and formats; (3) Investment portfolios for the Society and separate Units; (4) others.*

**Strategy 5.4** Use best available techniques such as surveys, focus groups, social media, and other means to determine and respond to the needs, interests, and opinions of AFS members.

*Examples of reportable information: (1) Technique used; (2) Focus of initiative; (3) Number of participants/respondents; (4) Outcome or change in Unit activity/specific action taken, e.g., reach a broader audience, refocus efforts, redistribute funding/awards, etc. [AFS](#)*