

**President's Plan of Work
Brian R. Murphy
September 2020-August 2021**

**For Approval by the AFS Governing Board
11 September 2020**

Preamble

An effective presidential Plan of Work should be one that implements critical actions and new directions to advance the Society, while protecting the core functions that have made AFS what it is today. To this end, a Plan of Work should be in concordance with the Mission and Vision of the Society:

- **Mission of AFS:** *“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.”*
- **Vision of AFS:** *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.*

A team of dedicated AFS members has just completed an updated Strategic Plan (Bowker et al. 2019) to guide the Society forward over the next 5 years, which includes these specific objectives:

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

Objective 2. *Develop fisheries professionals.*

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

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

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

Plan of Work

I have identified four high-priority areas of focus for my term as president of AFS:

1. To increase public visibility and trust in the work of our profession and of our Society.
2. To redouble our efforts to increase diversity and improve equity and inclusion within our profession and our Society.
3. To help AFS members further their careers by: a) developing or enhancing critical professional skills; and b) enhancing the benefits of professional certification.
4. To move forward from research to planning and action related to rebranding needs for AFS as we celebrate our 150th anniversary.

Strong ties between these objectives make it impossible to completely separate them relative to actions needed. Actions executed in this plan will support the theme of the 151st Annual Meeting of AFS in Baltimore, Maryland: ***Investing in People, Habitats, and Science***.

Plan Details

1. To increase public visibility and trust in the work of our profession and of our Society.

The unassailable truth is that public trust in scientists and their work has been severely eroded in recent years. This is in part due to a rise of populism, wherein “the people” are pitted against “the elite” (who are commonly described as the political, economic, cultural, or educational establishment, “who put their own interests above those of the people”). Distrust of “educated elites” (including scientists) is often the result of propaganda campaigns against facts that do not serve the personal interests of those in power. Thus we are now said to live in a “post-truth world” where fact and expert opinion are given less weight than emotion. Fisheries science is not exempt from these phenomena, particularly as we take a larger role in disseminating “unpopular facts” such as the impacts of climate change on aquatic resources.

Actions:

- Expand AFS efforts to distribute engaging, factual fisheries information to policymakers and the public, including continuation of significant outreach efforts regarding the impacts of the rollback of environmental regulations and the effects of climate change on aquatic resources.
- Continue/expand collaboration with other aquatic societies to strengthen and expand our public messaging regarding critical issues in aquatic conservation.
- Expand, as possible, AFS staff in the area of outreach communications.
- Train AFS members to improve communications with lay audiences across a variety of media outlets.
- Expand the quantity of important materials from AFS publications (similar to the current Featured Papers program) that are publicly accessible outside of the Society, and aggressively advertise and distribute these.
- Engage the creators of the “The Fisheries Blog” to discuss how their approach and efforts might be integrated with AFS efforts to accomplish this objective.

Strategic Objective(s) addressed: 1, 2, 3.

Units to engage: Committees (Climate Change, Communications, Continuing Education, Resource Policy); Sections; Staff.

2. To redouble our efforts to increase diversity and to improve equity and inclusion within our profession and our Society.

Several recent AFS presidents have made increasing the diversity of our profession and of AFS membership important objectives during their administrations, and AFS has made some advances in these areas. But still, neither our profession nor our membership are yet close to being representative of the public that we serve. Overall, membership in AFS is still 74% male and 92% Caucasian. We must continue the diversity initiatives that we now have in place and expand them where possible, and we need to look for new ways to welcome underrepresented groups into our profession and AFS. One almost untapped potential pool is high-school students. If we can recruit high-school students into AFS to give them a chance to see what our profession does, this should help increase the flow of students into fisheries higher-education programs and eventually our profession. And carefully targeted high-school recruitment efforts also should help increase the proportions of underrepresented groups in AFS, higher education, and our profession as a whole.

Actions:

- Elevate the Special Committee on Diversity & Inclusion to become the Standing Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Charge the committee to: review the *Nine Proposed Action Areas to Enhance Diversity and Inclusion in the American Fisheries Society* (Penaluna et al. 2017); report on AFS successes and shortcomings in these areas; make recommendations for meaningful benchmarks against which we can measure progress; and make current recommendations to accomplish meaningful progress in these areas.
- Engage a broader spectrum of AFS subunits and members in efforts to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in our Society and our profession.
- Appoint a Special Committee for Student Outreach Planning to develop a strategic plan for how to best disseminate information regarding the new AFS High School Membership category, and to recruit new High School members to AFS. This plan should include recommendations for the use of social media, a special landing page for these students at the AFS website, ideas on developing appropriate AFS materials for these members, ideas on linking new High School members to AFS mentors, and specific strategies to target underrepresented groups.
- Encourage student subunits and state chapters to reach out to local high schools, particularly those serving underrepresented groups, regarding AFS and career opportunities in fisheries science, and to invite high school students to their events.
- Create a “Sponsor a Student” program whereby AFS members could sponsor the membership of a high-school student as part of their annual AFS renewal.
- Continue and expand as possible the Hutton Scholars Program, and consider strategies to increase its reach and impact beyond the summer internship.
- Create collaboration between the Hutton Program and university fisheries programs (possibly through the Education Section and NAUFWP) to provide information to all

Hutton applicants regarding university fisheries programs and careers in fisheries science.

- Explore expansion of AFS's role in the Diversity Joint Venture.
- Engage the Equal Opportunity Section, and other subunits and members, as advisors on these outreach efforts.

Strategic Objective(s) addressed: 1, 2, 4.

Units to engage: Standing Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Sections (Equal Opportunity; Native Peoples Fisheries; Education; Student & Early Career Professionals; others); Chapters and Student Subunits; Members; Staff.

3. To help AFS members further their careers by: a) developing or enhancing critical professional skills; and b) enhancing the benefits of professional certification.

The world is not static, and we all know that professionals must be lifelong learners. AFS is committed through its Mission Statement to help members stay current in our field, and to learn new skills to operate in a world that is changing both physically and politically. AFS should be instrumental in offering professional development opportunities for members at all levels. Professional certification by AFS should be tied closely to professional development opportunities, and members should see tangible benefits to becoming certified.

Actions:

- Survey members to determine specific skill gaps that they perceive as impediments to their professional advancement. Survey all AFS subunits, and professional organizations, to identify types of training they offer that have been most beneficial to their members.
- Further increase onsite and online offerings of courses identified as highly valuable by members; partner with Divisions and Chapters as appropriate to increase geographic spread of offerings.
- Train AFS members how to communicate better with lay audiences across a variety of media outlets and live interactions.
- Explore a tiered system of certification credit toward AFS certification for CE offerings, based on complexity and timeliness of the topic.
- Initiate discussions with agency administrators and other employers regarding creation of tangible benefits for AFS-certified employees.
- Recognize certified members with a unique ribbon at AFS meetings, and/or a professional pin for general use in their professional work.
- Expand online recognition of certified members (e.g., AFS Website, directory, Newsletter, etc.).
- Consider offering certification to non-members, at a much-increased rate.

Strategic Objective(s) addressed: 1, 2, 3, 5.

Units to engage: Continuing Education Committee; Education Section; Board of Professional Certification; Student and Early Career Professionals Subsection; Staff.

4. To commence the rebranding of AFS as we celebrate our 150th anniversary.

AFS contracted the firm Potomac Communications Group (PCG) in 2018 to help evaluate our brand, including our name, logo, perception among key stakeholder groups and the “value proposition” that it communicates to internal and external audiences. The results showed that AFS members and stakeholders feel that the mission and values of AFS are not always clearly identified, particularly to outside groups. The Communications Committee has been discussing the results of the study, and is formulating plans to “rebrand” AFS in ways that make it more visible and relevant to parties both inside and outside the Society. Rebranding actions should consider ways to fully recognize and display the commitment and efforts of our Canadian and Latin American members.

Actions:

- Empower the Communications Committee to move forward to create recommendations regarding an array of Society rebranding actions.
- Assist wherever possible the emerging effort to create a geographically broad Latin American Chapter of AFS.

Strategic Objective(s) addressed: 1, 2, 3, 4.

Units to engage: Communications Committee; Governing Board; AFS subunits; Members; Staff.

References

- Bowker, J., T. Bigford, S. Bonar, J. Defilippi-Simpson, R. Essig, J. Jackson, S. Midway, and M. Murphy. Charting the course for the American Fisheries Society: Strategic Plan for 2020-2024. *Fisheries* 44(3):119-122.
- Penaluna, B. E., I. Arismendi, C. M. Moffitt, and Z. L. Penney. 2017. Nine proposed action areas to enhance diversity and inclusion in the American Fisheries Society. *Fisheries* 42(8):399-402.