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National Fish Habitat Coordinating Committee

In November 2006, the Canadian Environmental Network selected four environmental non-government organizations (ENGOs), including AWA, to participate in the ENGO-DFO National Fish Habitat Coordinating Committee along with representatives from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). The committee grew out of an October 2006 ENGO-DFO workshop in Ottawa on habitat protection. Cliff Wallis, who took over as committee co-chair from Martha Kostuch, represents AWA and speaks for inland water issues.

The purpose of the committee is to coordinate cooperative activities between ENGOs and DFO to improve fish habitat management in Canada. The priorities for 2007-08 were to share information and provide recommendations to improve implementation of DFO's Habitat Management Program. The group will be meeting with the DFO deputy minister in October 2008 to discuss recommendations that emerged from last year's work. These recommendations are meant to improve the collaborative relationship between DFO and ENGOs, and to achieve better protection of fish and fish habitat. The NGOs on the committee have also been reviewing proposed changes to the *Fisheries Act* and making recommendations for improvements.

The committee is now organizing regional workshops, which are intended to identify priorities for fish habitat management and to work toward addressing broader issues that affect fish habitat, issues that extend beyond the mandate of the Habitat Branch of DFO. The workshop being planned for Alberta this fall/winter will aim to improve federal involvement in a number of projects. Issues to be addressed include environmental reviews and the permitting system.

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