Recreational Saltwater Fishing Summit
Alexandria, VA
April 16, 2010

The Honorable Dr. Jane Lubchenco,
Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere

OPENING REMARKS
(As Delivered)

- Thank you, Eric. It's great to see all of you here today. Thanks for joining us and thanks for the positive, engaged discussions you are having.

- This morning I attended the White House Conference on America's Great Outdoors. President Obama recognizes—as do you and I — how important it is for current and future generations to enjoy America's Great Outdoors. Recreational fishing is an absolutely key part of that vision, and so it is appropriate that we are together today, working to hammer out a strong future for fishing in our marine waters. The President was pleased to hear about the work

we are doing here, and sends his encouragement to all of us to work together to find common ground.

- The excellent turnout at this summit tells me that you want to be heard. And I am here to tell you that NOAA is not only listening, but *we are also ready to roll up our sleeves and get to work with you*.

- I want to start by making one thing very clear:

  NOAA is committed to working with the recreational fishing community.

- NOAA's commitment --my commitment-- to saltwater anglers is not a hollow one. We do not intend to make empty promises. And toward that end, I have put in place a NOAA leadership team charged with making sure that we follow through on commitments.

- ***I think I can safely say that all of you*** are here because of your passion and commitment to the great American pastime of recreational fishing

- You are avid fishermen. Many of you are also in the business of making it possible for millions of others to indulge in or be introduced to the joys of fishing. Whether for life's pleasure or life's work, we can all agree on one thing: ***Recreational fishing is good for the Nation's soul and good for the Nation's economy***.

- We are not alone in our enjoyment of this sport.

- Roughly 15 million Americans participate in recreational saltwater fishing. And that fishing drives jobs and economic vitality for businesses and communities.

- From halibut fishing in Alaska to striper fishing in the Chesapeake, recreational saltwater fishing brings revenue into communities on our coasts. I have heard that a few of you are going to take advantage of tomorrow's opening of Maryland's trophy striper season while you are in town. Please send us pictures of what you catch!

- Your passion, my passion and NOAA's work have one thing in common: the ocean and its fisheries. I expect that we will spend most of today and tomorrow talking about fisheries management, and I understand the need to do that. But I hope we will all keep in mind the potential for a powerful partnership here. The issues that matter to all of us are bigger, and go beyond just fisheries management. Look out 20 years from now in your state. Chances are there are pressures on the coastal habitat that is vital for healthy fisheries. I am sure there are pollution problems that could get

bigger as your state grows and changes. Climate change and changes in freshwater availability are already driving profound changes in fisheries. By the time the next generation is fishing many species may be dozens of miles from where they are today—and others will be imperiled. I hope that we can begin to work on these issues together to ensure that more recreational fishermen can enjoy this sport.

- My definition of success in the relationship between NOAA and the recreational communities is this:
    - We work together on the most important issues facing the fishing community.
    - We help each other understand what's happening on the water.
    - Fisheries regulations work to provide growing access to fishing while increasing the productivity of fisheries.

- This success can only be achieved if **NOAA is committed to working with the recreational fishing community and vice versa.** But we are not just saying that we're committed, we're delivering on our promises. Let me summarize what we've done to demonstrate this commitment.

- Six months ago, I spoke with many of you in San Diego at the American Sportfishing Association's Annual Meeting. There, I made four promises on behalf of NOAA.

- *First*, I promised you ***this*** **summit**. And here we are.

- I know there are some who are skeptical of how much we will accomplish here. How far we go, in many respects, will be determined by how well we communicate - our openness and our candor, our willingness to ask questions rather than make

assumptions, and our abilities to reflect and respond thoughtfully. We will meet you half way, but you must meet us half way.

- *Second,* I promised you a **NOAA team** that would work with you and for you.

- For the past six months, Gordon Colvin *[Gordon – will you please stand?]* has served you well as Acting Senior Policy Advisor. Forbes Darby has worked closely with Gordon as part of the team. And Andy Winer, NOAA's head of External Affairs, has met with members of this community at least 35 times in nearly every region of the country – yes, you heard me correctly: 35 times! He's also been at meetings with you and the Council on Environmental Quality's Ocean Policy Task Force and with NOAA leadership, including Monica Medina.

- We made a third promise for **new leadership**.

- On April 5th, Eric Schwaab's choice for NOAA's National Policy Advisor on Recreational Fisheries Russ Dunn, officially came on board. *[motion to Russ to stand]*. Eric introduced him to you this morning.

- Russ reports directly to Eric, the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, and will work with the recreational community to address joint interests in providing for the long-term health of fish stocks and ensuring a sustainable and vibrant recreational fishing community well into the future. Many of you already know Russ. If you don't, please take time during this meeting to get to him.

- And the linchpin of our NOAA team is our new Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries, Eric Schwaab. NOAA Fisheries will lead NOAA's work in recreational fisheries. I have complete

confidence in Eric and his team – Eric, Russ, Andy, Gordon, and Forbes – all of whom are accountable to me.

- Our recreational coordinators in the Southeast and Southwest Regions, Michael Bailey and Marty Golden, and coordinators from each of our headquarters offices will support this team and provide good rapport and strong working relationships to complement our new efforts and people.

- My fourth promise was to **identify coordinators** for recreational fishing within each of NOAA's regional offices and science centers. These coordinators are now in place and most are here at this summit.

- I made promises we could keep, and we kept them. But the last few months are only a start. Having Gordon, Andy, Russ and others on board has already improved my ability to hear your issues and begin to incorporate them into NOAA's work—including our policies, our

budgets and our priorities. First, I want to acknowledge that there is significant concern in this community about what Marine Spatial Planning really means. I know that some of you believe that this is a subterfuge to enforce a top-down national system of marine reserves that ignore the importance of sustainable uses of ocean resources. That is simply not true. Here is what Marine Spatial Planning really means: it means making stewardship of oceans a priority so that we can have and use healthy oceans and healthy coastal communities. It means when a wave energy facility is sited, sustainable fisheries need to be protected throughout the planning process. It means making sure that stakeholders like you have a place at the table when big decisions are being made.

- I will make this commitment to you: I will be your advocate for an approach that focuses first on a few pilot projects that will provide your community with an opportunity to fully participate in, and help improve the process. Let me be clear: there are no federal plans or

even discussions that would seek to achieve the benefits of marine reserves by attempting to put such a network in place by fiat.

- There are spatial protections that have worked, and have earned the support of the fishing community, for example Rockfish Conservation Areas in CA. You have supported them because you know that protecting some places can increase the health of the oceans and the abundance and size of fish. I want our marine spatial planning work to build on those successes, and to be adaptive to what we all learn from any pilot projects.

- Second, I understand that this community has concerns about the allocation of fish among sectors. In particular, as Councils adopt catch shares many of you have expressed a concern that the rising economics for the commercial sectors will be so strong that allocations will be fixed in place forever. You have pointed out that changes in demographics and economics should be fairly considered

in allocations, and that no one sector should be guaranteed a specific permanent allocation. I agree.

- The challenge is to address the issue of allocations and fairness while recognizing that re-allocation is most difficult when a fishery is over-fished and needs rebuilding. At that point everyone—recreational and commercial fishermen—is struggling just to make it. As a starting point, allocations need to comply with the Magunson Stevens Act. Within that framework I would like to see Councils phasing in mechanisms for inter-sector trading—especially at the five year re-evaluation point. I think trading can be a win-win, and can allow a more fluid (and less political) allocation process. Making trading work will require that Councils consider how to make sure that conservation gains are built in—no matter who ends up fishing. In the shorter term I will be looking at ideas like developing national criteria and timelines to make sure that allocation decisions aren't put off forever. I am interested in your constructive ideas on this—

ideas that help make sure that we are fair to commercial and recreational fishermen.

- I continue to believe that putting in place catch shares for commercial operations can benefit everyone. Just this year in the Gulf, the total allowable catch for red snapper is going up by 30%--in one year. That fishery put in place a catch share program just over 3 years ago. When the catch share program went in, commercial fishermen agreed to major cuts in TAC, and other rule changes that together have yielded terrific results. Now that the catch level is going up it means higher catch levels for every sector—even without a re-allocation.

- And I see a marked contrast between where we are in the Gulf Red Snapper fishery and where we are in the South Atlantic. I know the closures and the state of that fishery is a major issue for many of us in this room. Honestly the state of that fishery has been of great

concern to me—I want us to rebuild the stocks there without destroying the recreational or the commercial fishery. Long term closures are a very painful way to rebuild fisheries, and I would like to implement better alternatives. I know some of you want to change the law to postpone the rebuilding timelines. I haven't given up on finding an Administrative answer that promotes conservation and increases future yields. It won't serve the fishery resource or fishermen to implement approaches that just postpone the problem to the next Council or the next Administrator. And so, I urge you to think creatively with me, with us, about how we could support the Council in getting to a constructive outcome that meets current Magnuson requirements.

- I believe that the progress we've made in keeping our promises over the past six months demonstrates that you have more than good

faith to operate on. But this is a two-way street. What are you bringing to the table?

- I hope we can use our time together to explore the issues that are most important and those that are most pressing. And I'm looking for commitments and signs of meeting us half way.

- I would now like to reinforce the importance of three things as you move forward with the summit:

- **Language** is important. We need to unpack the issues and be specific about the problems being discussed, so that we can develop the right solutions.

- We need to develop a **long-term vision** to consider the best near-term solutions.

- We need to act: The time for talk is over. **The time to act is now**.

- So let me close now with a **story**. The story is about something that works.

- How many of you know Ken Francke or Don Hansen? How about John Butler or Dave Deemer? [acknowledge many or not so many.] [If necessary: Well, let me tell you who John and Dave are. They're two NOAA scientists from the Southwest Fisheries Center.]

- At the end of February, I went aboard a commercial fishing vessel in San Diego at Ken Francke's invitation. It was a spectacular day to be out on the water, but the time on board was particularly inspiring because of the obvious good rapport between anglers and NOAA scientists. Ken and Don were honoring the two NOAA scientists I mentioned.

- Inspiring not because two of NOAA's people were receiving awards, but because they were being recognized by the recreational fishing community for a joint project they had all worked on. Members of this community worked hand-in-hand with these two NOAA scientists to collect rockfish data. This community helped NOAA scientists identify where to find the rockfish, even modifying their boats to help get the job done. Sonar and remotely-operated vehicles were used to locate fish and verify sightings.

- This team of recreational fishing professionals and scientists - working together - were doing something important – moving us a step closer to the kind of accuracy and credibility we're aiming for. It's a win for science, a win for technological innovation, and a win for what I like to think of as progressive partnering.

- The **moral of this story**, of course, is that **partnerships between NOAA and the recreational fishing community *can* work and can bring strong benefits**.
- Ken will be telling us this story in more detail later this afternoon and you will also be hearing about another partnership involving habitat restoration.

- Habitat restoration is especially significant this week for two reasons: Thursday is Earth Day, and NOAA will be recognizing Restoration Projects funded by us with Recovery Act funds. NOAA is investing $167 million in Recovery Act funds in restoration projects that are creating blue-green jobs for as many as 1000 local people across 50 project sites in coastal and lakefront communities all over the country. Recreational fishing benefits from these projects because they restore shoreline habitats and, in some cases, remove abandoned fishing gear, opening up fish passage and creating viable spawning and nursery habitats.

For example:

- In the Puget Sound, our partners are removing 200 metric tons of derelict fishing gear and other marine debris – that's enough debris to cover 300 football fields – of abandoned gill nets.

- On the Rogue River in Oregon - a premier recreational fishing destination – we're opening up more than 333 miles to steelhead, Chinook and endangered Coho salmon, further increasing the value of this system to the recreational fishing industry.

- With these stories as examples of what ***can*** be, **let's build on the good work we've already begun**.

- In summary. We're delivering on our promises. We have every intention of continuing. We look to this summit to define solutions and ways to move ahead together. Time's a'wasting…Let's get to

work. Thank you.