



**NOAA
FISHERIES**

**National Saltwater Recreational
Fisheries Policy
Regional Fisheries Implementation
Plans Compendium
2016-2017**

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National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Regional Implementation Plans

2016-2017

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service**



**NOAA
FISHERIES**



A Note From the Assistant Administrator:

I am pleased to share with you NOAA Fisheries' Regional Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy Implementation Plans.

We sought to capture the unique nature of marine recreational fishing across the U.S. and our regional staff developed six individual plans representing each of NOAA Fisheries' five regions as well as the Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Management Division.

We worked in consultation with our State and Federal Fishery Management Council partners and the recreational fishing community to identify shared priorities and specific actions tailored to local needs. Doing so ensures we focus our attention where it will have the most impact – where you live and fish.

The work included in these plans supports the core tenets of NOAA Fisheries' mission and our national saltwater recreational fisheries policy. These plans represent an important milestone in our continuing commitment to be responsive, transparent, and accountable to our nation's saltwater recreational fishermen.

Sincerely,



Eileen Sobeck



National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy

Pacific Islands

Regional Implementation Plan

2016-2017

Foreward

We are pleased to share with you the Pacific Islands Regional Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Implementation Plan for 2016-2017. The Plan is a collaborative and ongoing effort between NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands Regional Office (PIRO), the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC), recreational and non-commercial fishing advisory bodies, and key stakeholders from our recreational and non-commercial Pacific Islands fishing communities to apply the guiding principles of the National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy.

In August 2012, government and private sector representatives with diverse fishery backgrounds from American Samoa, the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), Guam, and Hawai'i participated in a summit held in Honolulu to discuss regional recreational and non-commercial saltwater fishery issues. The 2012 summit was followed by additional regional advisory body meetings, workshops, public forums and summits held in 2013 and 2014, each focused on maintaining saltwater recreational and non-commercial fishing as a cultural cornerstone and an important economic driver of Pacific Islands fishing communities. The information gathered and outcomes produced by these efforts are incorporated in the 2016-2017 Implementation Plan.

The enclosed Pacific Islands Regional Implementation Plan encompasses recreational and other non-commercial fisheries in American Samoa, CNMI, Guam, and Hawai'i. The 2016-2017 Plan carries over some projects in the previous Agenda, and includes updates on the status of partially and fully implemented projects.

We hope you find the Plan useful and that it continues to foster a stronger partnership between NMFS and the recreational non-commercial fishing communities.

We look forward, once again, to working with you to fulfill the objectives and fully implement the commitments highlighted in the Plan.

Michael Tosatto	Michael Seki
Pacific Islands Regional	Pacific Islands Fisheries
Administrator	Science Center Director

PACIFIC ISLANDS REGIONAL OVERVIEW

The Pacific Islands Region encompasses the largest geographical management area in the federal fishery management system, including all or part of three Pacific archipelagos (Hawai'i, Mariana Islands, and Samoa) and seven widely spaced remote islands and atolls. All are home to diverse ecosystems and cultures where fishing forms an integral part of everyday life.

The Pacific Islands Regional Office and the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center are based in Honolulu, Hawai'i. The Regional Office engages in the management and conservation of marine resources through input from the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council and its membership from American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), Guam, Hawai'i, the Western and Central Pacific Fishery Commission, and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission. Fishery management plans are developed by the Council for 46 fish stocks, or stock complexes, with some of these stock complexes (i.e., coral reef fish) potentially containing hundreds of species. The Regional Office maintains field offices and support staff in American Samoa, the CNMI, and Guam.

The Science Center is responsible for research and monitoring in the region with laboratories in Honolulu and data collection staff in each of the territories. The Center conducts a wide range of activities, including research on coral reef systems, fisheries oceanography, fisheries biology, stock assessment, protected species, fisheries monitoring, and socioeconomics.

Recreational and non-commercial fishing in the Pacific Islands region encompasses a wide range of motivations that include subsistence and traditional fisheries where marine resources are harvested for non-profit distribution within fishing communities (customary exchange), or to defray expenses to allow the continuation of fishing activities. The region also has well-established and developing for-hire fishing opportunities (e.g., deep-sea charter boats, guided reef fishing, and eco-tourism).

The following is a brief description of the Pacific Islands Region:

- **Habitat** – Marine habitats include coastal mangrove and fringing reefs, coral atolls, seamounts, isolated reefs, and coastal and deep-slope habitats. The region is generally comprised of high volcanic islands and shallow atolls with no continental shelf. Fringing reefs drop off to abyssal depths close to shore, providing fishing access to a variety of pelagic species.
- **Species and fisheries** – Troll, handline, and pole fisheries target tuna, billfish, mahimahi, and wahoo, or concentrate on coastal pelagic species like big-eyed and mackerel scads, or on the shallow-water snapper/grouper/emperor complexes, particularly in the tropical Pacific areas. Non-commercial and subsistence harvest of a wide variety of coral reef fish and crustaceans employs a variety of gear types and methods. Spearfishing, reef gleaning, and deepwater bottomfishing for a variety of snapper species are also important activities.

- **Data collection** – Non-commercial fishery data collection is accomplished through sub-regional efforts with infrastructure and personnel support provided by the American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources, CNMI Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, Guam Division of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources, and Hawai'i Division of Aquatic Resources, with support from the Science Center and the NOAA Fisheries Office of Science and Technology, specifically through the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) and the Western Pacific Fisheries Information Network (WPacFIN). Data collection in American Samoa, CNMI, and Guam is a combination of boat- and shore-based roving and access point surveys of commercial and non-commercial fishermen. The Hawai'i Marine Recreational Fishing Survey, administered by MRIP, targets non-commercial fishermen. Episodic socioeconomic surveys of the non-commercial fishing community allow for a better understanding of the economic significance and social and cultural values associated with non-commercial fishing in the Pacific Islands Region.



SETTING THE STAGE

Recreational and non-commercial fishery interests in the Pacific Islands Region are represented through working groups organized by the Regional Office and the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council. The initial Saltwater Recreational Fishing Action Agenda (2011) was developed by the Regional Office and the Science Center with input from the recreational and non-commercial fishing communities. Two important objectives listed in the Action Agenda were accomplished early on: completion of a regional recreational fishing summit meeting, and the hiring a full-time recreational fisheries specialist for the region.

The Pacific Islands Recreational (Non-Commercial) Fishing Summit was held in August 2012 in Honolulu. This meeting gathered 28 participants with diverse fishery backgrounds from American Samoa, the CNMI, Guam, and the main islands of Hawai'i to deliberate on recreational fisheries issues. A list of project proposals and suggestions for improving recreational and non-commercial fisheries was developed for NOAA Fisheries for further consideration.

The Recreational and Non-Commercial Fisheries Roundtable meeting held in early 2013 focused on issues of concern in the region and provided recommendations and priorities that were merged with the issues and recommendations reported by the Region's Recreational Fishing Working Group (RFGW) in 2014 to inform the development of the 2016-2017 Saltwater Recreational Fishing Implementation Plan. Stakeholders shared many of the same issues across the region despite the diversity of cultures and fisheries represented. They included:

- **Loss of fishing access** – Fishing opportunities have been lost due to the establishment or expansion of federal sanctuaries, marine national monuments, and marine protected areas (MPAs), as well as reduced shoreline access due to private ownership, coastal development, and military use.
- **Protected species issues** – Fishermen expressed interest over depredation of catch by marine mammals and sharks and potential restrictive management to curtail protected species interactions despite low observation rates.
- **Infrastructure** – Inadequate, damaged, or poorly maintained harbors, boat ramps, restrooms, parking, etc. were noted as a concern to fishery development and human safety in all areas.
- **Conflicts with newly arrived or immigrant fishing communities** – All four island areas noted increasing conflicts between local or long-established fishing communities and non-indigenous fishermen who may not be familiar with local fishing traditions, culture, or regulations.

- **Data collection and involvement in scientific studies** – Fishermen support improving quality and timeliness of studies and want to provide their practical experience and knowledge in designing future studies.
- **Angler registry** – Although the difficulty in obtaining non-commercial catch, effort, and economic data due to the lack of recreational fishing licenses is recognized, general support for such a system is lacking. Better methods to obtain this information are needed.
- **Communication and outreach** – Fishermen seek additional transparency and open dialogue with NOAA Fisheries. Increased face-to-face interaction was recommended from all areas of the region.

Departure of the PIRO recreational fisheries specialist in late 2014 slowed progress on the 2014-2015 PIRO Action Agenda. PIRO anticipates bringing a new recreational fisheries specialist on board in 2016. Nevertheless, several important recreational and non-commercial outreach events were completed, and related Science Center projects were either initiated or already well underway. These activities were a part of NOAA's commitment to foster, support, and enhance a broadly accessible and diverse array of sustainable saltwater recreational and non-commercial fisheries for the benefit and enjoyment of the nation.

Significant recent milestones include publication of the results of the national *2013 Marine Recreational Bait and Tackle Economic Survey*, which helped NOAA better understand the economic contributions of this industry to the local and national economy; completion of the *Hawai'i Non-Commercial Fishing Attitudes and Preferences Survey* (in final review within the PIFSC) which was modeled on the National Recreational Saltwater Angler Attitudes and Preferences Survey and fielded during the summer of 2015; completion of *A Survey of Hawai'i's Registered Boaters* in July 2015 to help improve collection of non-commercial fishing; and presentation to the American Fisheries Society Meeting (2015) of preliminary results of pilot surveys testing new approaches to collecting fishing effort and catch from shoreline fishing in Oahu.

Mirroring the NOAA Fisheries National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Implementation Plan for 2015-2018, the Pacific Islands Regional Office (PIRO) and Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) will implement the National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy through focused actions using its six guiding principles as an organizational framework. The policy goals are supported by the guiding principles, and the specific actions identified in the 2016-2017 Pacific Islands Region Recreational and Non-Commercial Implementation Plan support and link to one or more of the principles. In short, this document also focuses on tangible actions to advance the six guiding principles. This format facilitates tracking and evaluating implementation progress. Successfully implementing the actions identified in this plan will move the agency incrementally and strategically closer to the policy's overall vision and goals. The six guiding principles are:

1. Support ecosystem conservation and enhancement.
2. Promote public access to quality recreational fishing opportunities.
3. Coordinate with state and federal management entities.
4. Advance innovative solutions to evolving science, management, and environmental challenges.

5. Provide scientifically sound and trusted social, cultural, economic, and ecological information.
6. Communicate and engage with the recreational fishing public.

Guided by input from fishermen, the general public, management partners, Regional Office and Science Center staff, the region's Recreational and Non-Commercial fishing Working Group, and the policy development process, this document identifies agency commitments over the next 2 years.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Provide scientifically sound and trusted social, cultural, economic, and ecological information.
2. Communicate and engage with the recreational fishing public.

Guided by input from fishermen, the general public, management partners, Regional Office and Science Center staff, the region's Recreational and Non-Commercial fishing Working Group, and the policy development process, this document identifies agency commitments over the next 2 years.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
<p><i>Employ a wide range of approaches to restore, maintain, and build diverse healthy marine ecosystems that are foundational to high-quality recreational and non-commercial fisheries.</i></p>	<p>Foster communications between fishermen and other federal, state, and territorial fisheries agencies to assist in the development of research and management priorities and solutions.</p>
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<p><i>Reduce impact of depredation on recreational and non-commercial fisheries by non-target species and minimize impacts to protected species.</i></p>	<p>Liaise with local fishing communities to develop best practices and cooperative research priorities to reduce interactions with, and/or depredation from, sharks, sea turtles, marine mammals, and other non-target species.</p> <p>Publish best practice fact sheets in first languages on how to reduce interactions and/or depredation with non-target and protected species.</p>
<p><i>Foster local abundance of recreational and non-commercial stocks through improvement of rearing and spawning habitats, and minimizing direct impact of fishing gear to coral reef habitat.</i></p>	<p>The Regional Office and the Science Center will promote healthy stocks through collaborative efforts with other NOAA offices, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and state and territory agencies through engagement in NOAA's Habitat Blueprint to foster productive fish habitat capable of producing greater quantities of sustainable marine resources for recreational and non-commercial fisheries.</p>



Promote public access to quality recreational non-commercial fishing opportunities

Inadequate, damaged, or poorly maintained harbors, boat ramps, restrooms, and parking, and concern for human safety are common issues across the Pacific Islands Region. The Regional Office will collaborate with state and territory agencies to coordinate information collection and compile a report on the status of infrastructure (harbors, boat ramps, aids to navigation, restrooms, parking, lighting, security, etc.), as a first step toward improving public access to quality recreational and non-commercial fishing opportunities. Improvement of fish aggregation device (FAD) efficiency, longevity, and cost-savings of regional FAD programs will also promote broad public access to healthy and sustainable fisheries resources.

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Continue support of projects promoting the fundamental importance of broad public access to healthy and sustainable fisheries resources by recreational and non-commercial fishermen.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Identify the condition, status, and needs of recreational and non-commercial fishing infrastructure and shoreline access in American Samoa, CNMI, Guam, and Hawai'i, with an emphasis on safety.
- Improve fish aggregation device (FAD) programs by promoting FAD efficiency, longevity, and cost savings.

Objectivs/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
<i>Continue support of projects promoting the fundamental importance of broad public access to healthy and sustainable fisheries resources by recreational and non-commercial fishermen.</i>	The Regional Office will collaborate with state and territory agencies to coordinate information collection and compile a report on the status of fishing access infrastructure such as harbors, boat ramps, aids to navigation, restrooms, parking, lighting, security, etc.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Identify the condition, status, and needs of recreational and non-commercial fishing infrastructure and shoreline access in American Samoa, CNMI, Guam, and Hawai'i with an emphasis on safety.</i>	Coordinate with existing GIS database sources in state and territorial offices, and within NOAA, to document issues of public safety, habitat condition, and changes in access over time. Produce summary, map, or web-based resource material of recreational and non-commercial fishing infrastructure and shoreline access that describes their current conditions in each of the island areas.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
<i>Improve fish aggregation device (FAD) programs by promoting FAD efficiency, longevity, and cost savings.</i>	Continue collaboration with the Council, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, and territory fishery offices to share information and convene regional FAD workshops on an annual or biennial schedule to review progress and new technologies. Produce a document or web-based resource that describes current FAD conditions in each of the island areas.

Coordinate with state and federal management entities

Fishing access by communities in American Samoa, Guam, CNMI, and Hawai'i is impacted by the combined results of federal, state, and territory designation of sanctuaries, marine national monuments, MPAs, and restricted access through military and private lands. NOAA Fisheries recognizes the social and economic impacts of these closures on fishing communities and will develop and support strategies to work with our federal, state, and territory partners to mitigate impacts when planning future actions. Also of concern are the poorly documented conflicts between the indigenous or long-established fishing communities of American Samoa, CNMI, Guam, and Hawai'i, and non-indigenous or "newcomer" groups. NOAA Fisheries will coordinate with federal and local management entities to promote equitable fishery participation and minimize friction between non-commercial fishing groups and communities of the Pacific Islands region.

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Continue to improve fisheries management practices through collaboration and partnership with federal, state, and territory resource management entities.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Improve understanding of community concerns, attitudes, and socio-economic impacts regarding the loss of fishing access and opportunities.
- Reduce conflict and enhance communication among recreational and non-commercial fishing groups.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
<i>Continue to improve fisheries management practices through collaboration and partnership with federal, state, and territory resource management entities.</i>	Provide research support and enhance communication and collaboration efforts between Council, government agencies, NGOs, and recreational and non-commercial fishing groups.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Improve understanding of community concerns, attitudes, and socio-economic impacts regarding the loss of fishing access and opportunities.</i>	PIRO/PIFSC will support and collaborate with the Council to document the impact of the loss of fishing opportunities on fishing communities of the Pacific Islands region.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
<i>Reduce conflict and enhance communication among recreational and non-commercial fishing communities and groups.</i>	<p>Interview local boating cultures and affected fishing communities to better understand traditions and customs.</p> <p>Develop guidelines that highlight local regulations and disseminate outreach materials in appropriate languages to increase awareness and open lines of communication to mitigate conflicts between fishing groups.</p> <p>PIFSC has submitted Preserve America Proposal to document traditions and culture for the Hawai'i bottomfish fishery</p>

Advance innovative solutions to evolving science, management, and environmental challenges

Recreational and non-commercial fishing in the Pacific Islands region encompasses a wide range of motivations involving numerous unique fishing communities, habitat, and fishing practices, spread over a vast area. Promoting best practice techniques for tagging and handling of non-commercial catch to maximize post-release survival, obtaining critical life history data, increasing the spawning stock and number of fish available in the future, and improving catch and effort data collection will contribute to the effective and long-term stewardship of the region's marine resources.

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Continue to lead and facilitate development of innovative approaches and solutions to evolving stewardship challenges in rapidly changing fishery environments.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Coordinate and promote recreational and non-commercial tagging programs.
- Assist billfish tag and release efforts.
- Promote methods to reduce barotrauma impacts to released bottomfish.
- Encourage anglers to use barbless circle hooks to minimize hooking injury and ease release of unwanted or tagged fish and protected marine species (sea turtles, Hawai'iian monk seals, seabirds, etc.).

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
<i>Continue to lead and facilitate development of innovative approaches and solutions to evolving stewardship challenges in rapidly changing fisheries environments.</i>	Promote best practice techniques for tagging and/or handling of non-commercial catch to maximize post-release survival, obtain critical life history data, and increase the spawning stock and number of fish available in the future.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Coordinate and promote recreational and non-commercial tagging programs.</i>	Several sport fish tagging programs currently exist in the region (i.e., for bonefish, jacks, Pacific threadfin, barracuda), which can confuse fishermen due to variation in reporting procedures, rewards, etc. NOAA Fisheries will assist in a coordinated outreach program to promote best practices in the capture, handling, tagging, data processing, and analyses of recreationally released fish to improve survival, reporting rates, data quality, contribution to science, and information dissemination.
<i>Assist billfish tag and release efforts.</i>	NOAA Fisheries will compile and distribute best available science and best practices on billfish capture, tagging, recovery, and release that emphasizes condition factor to those engaged in volunteer billfish tagging efforts. Coordinate with billfish taggers in the region, facilitate supply of tagging equipment, and provide training, information, and feedback to promote high-quality condition releases.
<i>Promote methods to reduce barotrauma impacts to released bottomfish.</i>	NOAA Fisheries will promote survival of released bottomfish with the use of descending devices and other techniques to minimize barotrauma and injury of released bottomfish species through education and outreach via presentations and the distribution of appropriate material.
<i>Encourage anglers to use barbless circle hooks to minimize hooking injury and ease release of unwanted or tagged fish and protected marine species (sea turtles, Hawai’ian monk seals, seabirds, etc.).</i>	Continue Science Center program to provide barbless circle hooks and educational materials at fishing tournaments, fishing festivals, fishing clubs, and associations in Hawai’i.

Provide scientifically sound and trusted social, cultural, economic, and ecological information

Fishermen support improving the quality and timeliness of studies and want to provide their practical experience and knowledge in designing future studies. The difficulties in obtaining non-commercial catch, effort, and economic data due to the lack of recreational fishing licenses is widely recognized, but general support for such a licensing system is lacking. Better methods to obtain this information are needed. Augmenting and strengthening primary and secondary research projects to update and provide a broader information base on fisheries with strong cultural and non-commercial motivations will also provide a better understanding of the Pacific Islands fishing community attitudes and preferences.

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Continue Regional Office and Science Center roles in providing best-available science to facilitate informed decision-making and effective stewardship of the Pacific Region’s marine resources.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Design/modify methodology for Hawai'i Marine Recreational Fishing Survey (HMRFS).
- Support Council effort to develop and adopt an MRIP Regional Implementation Plan consistent with, and in fulfillment of, the overarching National Strategic Plan. Identify the universe of recreational and non-commercial boat-based effort in Hawai'i.
- Incorporate local ecological knowledge of recreational/non-commercial fishermen into the management process.
- Obtain current information on the non-commercial fisheries of the Pacific Islands Region.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
<p><i>Continue Regional Office and Science Center roles in providing best-available science to facilitate informed decision-making and effective stewardship of the Pacific Region's marine resources.</i></p>	<p>Improve catch and effort data from Hawai'i recreational and non-commercial fisheries.</p> <p>Obtain current information on the non-commercial fisheries of the Pacific Islands Region.</p> <p>Improve understanding of community concerns, attitudes, and socio-economic impacts regarding the loss of fishing access and opportunities.</p>
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<p><i>Design/modify methodology for Hawai'i Marine Recreational Fishing Survey.</i></p>	<p>The Science Center will work with MRIP statistical consultants, NOAA Fisheries Office of Science and Technology, Hawai'i Division of Aquatic Resources, and the Regional Office to develop a data collection design for estimating shore-based effort that is consistent with recommendations resulting from an MRIP review process of the Hawai'i Marine Recreational Fishing Survey.</p>
<p><i>Support Council effort to develop and adopt an MRIP Regional Implementation Plan consistent with, and in fulfillment of, the overarching National Strategic Plan.</i></p>	<p>PIRO, PIFSC, and state and territory partners will collaborate with recreational and non-commercial fisheries stakeholders, and participate in a proposed Council workshop to continue development of an MRIP Regional Implementation Plan.</p>
<p><i>Identify the universe of recreational and non-commercial boat-based effort in Hawai'i.</i></p>	<p>NOAA Fisheries will work with the State of Hawai'i to develop modifications to the state Vessel Registration System (paper and web-based) to identify vessels used for recreational and non-commercial fishing activities. This project will facilitate an annually updated framework for fielding boat-based fishing surveys and outreach.</p>
<p><i>Incorporate local ecological knowledge of recreational and non-commercial fishermen into the management process.</i></p>	<p>The Science Center will incorporate the knowledge and experience of fishermen into the management process and refinement of annual catch limits for data-poor species (particularly for coral reef species complexes where some catch history exists but stock assessments are lacking) through discussions with stock assessment scientists and traditional fishermen.</p>

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
<p><i>Obtain current information on the non-commercial fisheries of the Pacific Islands Region.</i></p>	<p>Continue PIFSC episodic updates of community profiles.</p> <p>Complete update of fishing community profiles for CNMI and Guam. The Science Center will augment and strengthen understanding of the fishing communities of all island areas using primary and secondary research methods to update and provide a broader information base on fisheries with strong cultural and non-commercial motivations.</p>

Communicate and engage with the recreational fishing public

Fishermen across the Pacific Islands Region seek additional transparency and open dialogue with NOAA Fisheries. The agency can demonstrate its commitment to improve the condition, stewardship, and management of recreational and non-commercial fisheries of the Pacific Islands Region with increased face-to-face interactions at public fishery-related events, and regular contributions through various social media. The agency should also promote recognition of outstanding commitment to improving recreational and non-commercial fishing in the Pacific Islands Region to encourage more public participation in the fishery management process.

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Communicate NOAA's commitment to improve the condition, stewardship, and management of the recreational and non-commercial fisheries of the Pacific Islands Region, and engage the region's fishing communities as an integral part of the regional strategy.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Develop a recreational and non-commercial regional communications plan.
- Foster two-way dialogue and contact between the recreational and non-commercial fishing communities and NOAA Fisheries.
- Demonstrate agency commitment to improve the condition, stewardship, and management of recreational and non-commercial fisheries of the Pacific Islands Region and enhance program planning.
- Recognize outstanding commitment to improving recreational and non-commercial fishing in the Pacific Islands Region.

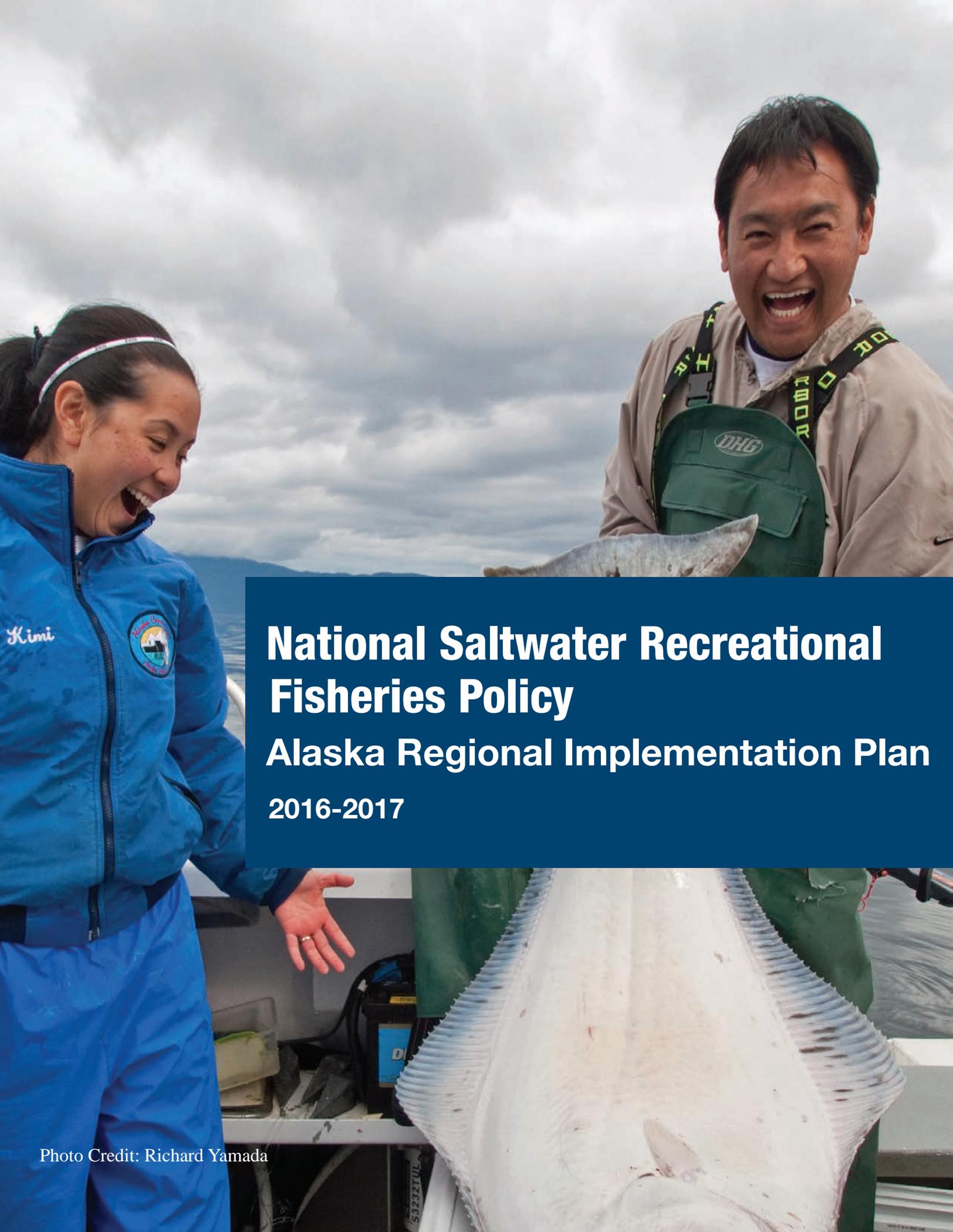
Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
<i>Communicate NOAA's commitment to improve the condition, stewardship, and management of the recreational and non-commercial fisheries of the Pacific Islands Region, and engage the region's fishing communities as an integral part of the regional strategy.</i>	Provide various links and opportunities for dialogue and communication between NOAA Fisheries and the recreational and non-commercial fishing communities of the Pacific Islands Region.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Develop a recreational and non-commercial regional communications plan.</i>	Continue development and implementation of a multimedia plan, including in-person appearances at fishing tournaments/clubs, presentations, website development, conference calls, maintenance of a listserv, video clips, TV fishing shows, publication in fishing magazines, social media, and collaboration with government and NGO outreach programs. Maintain a calendar of recreational and non-commercial related events, and schedule contact with all island areas to maintain a two-way dialogue.
<i>Foster two-way dialogue and contact between the recreational and non-commercial fishing communities and NOAA Fisheries.</i>	The Regional Office will hold monthly and opportunistic meetings open to the public to discuss topical issues; territories and outer islands can participate via conference line.
<i>Demonstrate agency commitment to improve the condition, stewardship, and management of recreational and non-commercial fisheries of the Pacific Islands Region and enhance program planning.</i>	The Regional Office will coordinate a roundtable meeting with representation from American Samoa, CNMI, Guam, and all islands of Hawai'i on an annual basis to review progress and plan additional activities in support of the Recreational Fisheries Engagement Initiative.
<i>Recognize outstanding commitment to improving recreational and non-commercial fishing in the Pacific Islands Region.</i>	Develop an award program for contributions that improve recreational and non-commercial fishing in the region.



SUMMARY

The 2016-2017 Pacific Islands Region Saltwater Recreational Fishing Implementation Plan incorporates the information and input provided by the above accomplishments and serves as the framework for NOAA Fisheries to continue its work with the culturally diverse and geographically widespread recreational and non-commercial fishing communities of the region to improve their recreational and non-commercial fisheries. The plan should be considered a living document to be followed, amended, and revised over time with critical input from government partners, non-governmental groups, and the broader Pacific Islands recreational and non-commercial fishing communities.





National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy Alaska Regional Implementation Plan 2016-2017

Photo Credit: Richard Yamada

Foreward

We are pleased to share with you the 2016-2017 Alaska Region Recreational Fisheries Implementation Plan. On a national level, NOAA Fisheries has made substantial commitments since 2010 to help develop an internal culture that supports recreational fisheries. In 2015, a formal National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy was established which set forth goals and guiding principles for NOAA Fisheries activities to ensure saltwater recreational fisheries issues are fully considered in deliberations.

In 2012 the Alaska Regional Recreational Fisheries Action Agenda was first introduced. This implementation plan builds on the directives outlined in the Action Agenda and focuses on our responsibilities for managing Alaska's Pacific halibut (*Hippoglossus stenolepis*) resources within the North Pacific Fishery Management Council process and improving communications with the recreational fishing community in Alaska.

The Alaska Regional Office and the Alaska Fisheries Science Center are responsible for science-based stewardship of our nation's living marine resources in Alaska. This implementation plan, a joint effort by the Alaska Regional Office and the Alaska Fisheries Science Center, builds on the guiding principles found in the National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy.

Jim Balsiger, Regional Administrator
NOAA Fisheries Alaska Regional Office

Doug Demaster, Director
Alaska Fisheries Science Center

ALASKA REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Alaska's 40,544 miles of coastline make up 40 percent of the total U.S. coastline and provide endless recreational fishing opportunities in both fresh and marine waters. In 2013, 312,000 recreational anglers took nearly 595,000 trips and caught a total of 2.5 million fish in marine waters off Alaska.¹ Commonly caught sport fish species include Pacific halibut, rockfishes (*Sebastes* spp.), Pacific cod (*Gadus macrocephalus*), lingcod (*Ophiodon elongatus*), and five species of Pacific salmon (*Oncorhynchus* spp.): Chinook, chum, coho, pink, and sockeye. In marine waters, Pacific halibut is the most common sport-caught species, averaging more than 790,000 fish caught annually by recreational anglers between 2005 and 2014.² A 2011 study estimated that anglers spent more than \$387 million on marine recreational fishing expenditures in Alaska and supported 4,200 jobs to the state's economy.³

The State of Alaska manages most of Alaska's recreational fisheries including in federal waters out to 200 nautical miles. The state's role in the management of recreational fisheries encompasses issuing angler fishing licenses, licensing fishing guides, licensing charter vessels, administering the charter vessel logbook program, estimating recreational harvest and effort, and managing species other than Pacific halibut.

NOAA Fisheries' regulatory authority for recreational fishing off Alaska is generally focused on Pacific salmon and Pacific halibut. NOAA Fisheries supports the mission of the Pacific Salmon Commission to implement the Pacific Salmon Treaty, which includes management of salmon stocks in Alaska. Sport fishing regulations for Pacific halibut in Alaska are developed on the international, federal, and state levels by the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC), the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council), NOAA Fisheries, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (State).

The IPHC annually surveys and assesses the Pacific halibut stock to determine the stock size and catch limit of Pacific halibut for Alaska, Canada, and the Pacific Northwest (Washington, Oregon, and California). The catch limits are divided among regulatory areas, and the Council allocates the catch limit among user groups in regulatory areas within Alaska. The Pacific halibut resource is fully utilized among several user groups: guided and unguided recreational anglers, the directed commercial fishery, bycatch in groundfish fisheries, and subsistence fishermen. In recent years, the total biomass of Pacific halibut has stabilized, but the preceding decline resulted in reduced allocations to the directed commercial and guided recreational (charter) sectors. This has led to large regulatory changes in how Pacific halibut is allocated between the commercial and charter sectors. NOAA Fisheries, the State, the IPHC, and the Council have worked to facilitate engagement and participation of the recreational fishing sector in the rulemaking and policy decision process.

¹ Fisheries Economics of the U.S. 2014. Current Fishery Statistics No. 2014. National Marine Fisheries Service, Office of Science and Technology, Fisheries Statistics Division. US Dept. of Commerce, Silver Spring, MD. Available at: www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/commercial-fisheries/fus/fus14/index

² Alaska Sport Fishing Survey. Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Available at: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/sportfishingsurvey/index.cfm?ADFG=region.home>

³ Lovell, Sabrina, Scott Steinback, and James Hilger. 2013. The Economic Contribution of Marine Angler Expenditures in the United States, 2011. U.S. Dep. Commerce, NOAA Tech. Memo. NMFS-F/SPO-134, 188 p.

The Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan in southeast and southcentral Alaska was adopted by the Council and implemented by NOAA Fisheries in January 2014.⁴ The catch sharing plan was developed to address the ongoing Pacific halibut allocation conflict. It defines an annual process for allocating Pacific halibut between the charter and commercial Pacific halibut fisheries in Alaska and establishes sector allocations that vary in proportion to changing levels of annual Pacific halibut abundance. A public process was also established using a committee of charter operators recommending annual management measures to the Council to ensure charter Pacific halibut catches remain below annual catch limits.

Management of the Pacific halibut resource requires catch data and economic information to inform managers, biologists, and recreational fishery constituents about the impacts associated with their decisions. NOAA Fisheries collects economic information on the recreational fisheries in Alaska to help inform management decisions regarding Pacific halibut resources. The State collects recreational catch data through a combination of mail surveys, creel sampling, and charter logbooks. Funded in part through grants by NOAA's Marine Recreational Information Program, the State will launch a pilot program in 2016 to test electronic logbooks in charter fisheries. NOAA Fisheries, the IPHC, and the State work cooperatively to coordinate data collection to ensure State-managed and federally managed programs use the best available information to help guide management of Pacific halibut resources in Alaska.

In addition to managing Pacific halibut, NOAA Fisheries supports habitat restoration and salmon management. Habitat restoration projects occur throughout Alaska, and include projects in both marine and anadromous fish habitats. These projects are not necessarily focused on recreational fisheries, but have obvious benefits for species important to recreational anglers. NOAA Fisheries delegates authority of salmon management in federal waters to the State but does administer funds in support of the Pacific Salmon Treaty and the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund.⁵ NOAA staff also participate in Pacific Salmon Commission panels and technical committees in addition to conducting research in support of the Pacific Salmon Commission's mission.

NOAA Fisheries has increased its involvement in recreational fisheries in recent years in response to several ongoing management issues. Recreational anglers rely on species that are fully allocated with limiting catch quotas divided across multiple sectors. These species will continue to be fully allocated and managers face a number of challenges that will require diligence by NOAA Fisheries to monitor stock status and ensure constituents remain engaged in the public process. The Pacific halibut resource is currently in a state of low abundance, and allocation among sectors continues to be a Council priority. Chinook salmon population estimates are at low levels, and marine survival and salmon bycatch in groundfish fisheries are receiving increased attention in response to low salmon returns. In addition, warming trends in the marine environment coupled with climate change effects are especially important in Alaska and may have profound effects on the abundant marine resources found in the state. NOAA Fisheries recognizes that these issues directly impact recreational fisheries in Alaska. As suggested in survey responses from the 2014 National Saltwater Summit, NOAA Fisheries has dedicated additional resources in the Alaska region to engage in these issues and improve communication with the recreational fishing community on issues of concern. Despite the current fishery management challenges facing the region, NOAA Fisheries is committed to supporting and maintaining sustainable saltwater recreational fisheries resources in Alaska.

⁴ 78 *Federal Register* 75844, December 12, 2013

⁵ http://www.nwr.noaa.gov/publications/recovery_planning/salmon_steelhead/pcsr/pcsr-rpt-2011.pdf

SETTING THE STAGE

This implementation plan is designed to complement the National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy¹ and help guide NOAA Fisheries' role in the research and management of recreational fisheries in the Alaska region. The goal of this implementation plan is to focus on tangible efforts in the region that will help advance the six guiding principles introduced in the NOAA National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy; these principles are detailed below.

This implementation plan is consistent with the new NOAA Fisheries Alaska Regional Office Strategic Plan² for fiscal years 2016-2020. The Alaska Regional Office Strategic Plan identifies four broad goals:

1. Sustainable fisheries: Ensure productive and sustainable North Pacific fisheries and fishing communities through science-based management.
2. Protected resources: Conserve and recover protected marine resources in the North Pacific.
3. Habitat conservation: Sustain healthy North Pacific marine habitats that support vital ecosystem functions and resilient coastal communities.
4. Organizational excellence: Internally align people, information, communications, work processes, and strategies leading to the optimization of mission value to stakeholders.

Goal 1 of the Strategic Plan commits the Alaska Region to advancing and supporting NOAA Fisheries' Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy and preparation of this regional recreational fisheries implementation plan.

This implementation plan builds upon the Alaska Regional Recreational Fisheries Action Agenda for 2014-2015.³ The Alaska Region has completed many of the projects set forth in the Action Agenda, and continues to support ongoing outreach and research efforts to maintain sustainable saltwater recreational fisheries resources in Alaska. Notable among those accomplishments is increasing the size of the mailing list for outreach efforts to the recreational fishing community from fewer than 100 to more than 700 individuals, publication of a NOAA Technical Memorandum describing the results of a charter business cost and earnings survey,⁴ collaboration with the recreational fishing community to secure NOAA Cooperative Research Program funding in 2015 to study ecological interactions between arrowtooth flounder (*Atheresthes stomias*) and Pacific halibut, and funding for a pilot project to test new electronic reporting methods for the charter Pacific halibut fishery. A complete update

¹ <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/management/recreational/policy/>

² <https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/omi/NmfsAKRStrategicPlan2015.pdf>

³ http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/management/recreational/documents/noaa_rfaa_ar.pdf

⁴ Lew, D. K., et al. 2015. Cost, earnings, and employment in the Alaska saltwater sport fishing charter sector, 2011-2013. NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-AFSC-299, U. S. Dept. of Commerce. doi: 10.7289/V5KP803N

on the status of projects listed in the 2014-2015 Action Agenda is provided in Appendix A of this plan. NOAA Fisheries' Alaska Region and the Alaska Fisheries Science Center remain committed to furthering the goals and objectives outlined in prior Action Agendas, the Region's Strategic Plan, the National Saltwater Recreational Fishing Policy, and this plan.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Support ecosystem conservation and enhancement

NOAA Fisheries' Alaska Region and the Alaska Fisheries Science Center are committed to protecting Alaska's living marine resources. Protecting and restoring anadromous fish habitats is essential for ensuring healthy salmon populations thrive in Alaska. Ecosystem-based fishery management represents the future for ensuring sustainable fisheries continue and is especially important in Alaska, where the loss of sea ice and effects of climate change are impacting our marine resources. Ensuring the recreational fisheries community is included in conservation efforts represents a step toward fulfilling NOAA's commitment to successful ecosystem-based fishery management.

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Support angler habitat and ecosystem conservation efforts by increasing awareness of potential federal funding and partnership opportunities.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Identify important habitat areas for anadromous fish species and partner with other agencies and communities to restore and preserve anadromous fish habitat in Alaska through the National Fish Habitat Partnership.



Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
<p><i>Support angler habitat and ecosystem conservation efforts by increasing awareness of potential federal funding and partnership opportunities.</i></p>	<p>NOAA Fisheries will continue to provide funding opportunities and the Alaska Region will increase its outreach efforts to inform constituents of funding sources such as the Saltonstall-Kennedy Act, NOAA Cooperative Research Program, NOAA Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program, Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and Marine Recreational Information Program grant programs, among others.</p>
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<p><i>Identify important habitat areas for anadromous fish species and partner with other agencies and communities to restore and preserve anadromous fish habitat in Alaska through the National Fish Habitat Partnership.</i></p>	<p>NOAA Restoration Center will work with partners to continue large-scale restoration efforts of fish passage on the Kenai Peninsula on four major projects from 2016-2018.</p> <p>NOAA is providing support for removal of marine debris generated by the Tōhoku earthquake of 2011. Removal of debris is expected to benefit more than 35 species, including many that are recreationally important.</p>

Promote public access to quality recreational fishing opportunities

Access to quality fishing opportunities in Alaska includes allocation of Pacific halibut resources among users. The Alaska Region will continue to support Pacific halibut management activities in Alaska by participating in the Council process and Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan activities.

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Coordinate with the Council to ensure fishery management is achieving goals set forth in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) and the Northern Pacific Halibut Act.
- Continue to provide services that promote management objectives associated with the recreational Pacific halibut fisheries, including the collection of economic information and disseminating that information to the Council audience.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Work with the Council and constituents to implement and manage the Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan.
- Work with the Council and constituents to develop a market-based mechanism to allow the charter sector to purchase commercial Pacific halibut quota share to supplement the Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan allocations and reduce harvest restrictions.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
<i>Coordinate with the Council to ensure fishery management is achieving goals set forth in the MSA and the Northern Pacific Halibut Act.</i>	NOAA Fisheries will continue to participate in the Council process and work collaboratively with the Council and IPHC to manage Pacific halibut under the requirements of the MSA and the Northern Pacific Halibut Act.
<i>Continue to provide services that promote management objectives associated with the recreational Pacific halibut fisheries, including the collection of economic information and disseminating that information to the Council audience.</i>	NOAA Fisheries will continue to support research, collection of economic information, and data analyses pertinent to recreational fisheries in Alaska to help inform management decisions regarding Pacific halibut and salmon resources.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Work with the Council and constituents to implement and manage the Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan.</i>	<p>Support the public process by which the Council develops recommendations to the International Pacific Halibut Commission for charter angler harvest.</p> <p>Participate in the Council’s Charter Halibut Management Implementation Committee process.</p> <p>Continue to support and collaborate in the collection of recreational Pacific halibut catch data to help inform management.</p>
<i>Work with the Council and constituents to develop a market-based mechanism to allow the charter sector to purchase commercial Pacific halibut quota share to supplement the Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan allocations and reduce harvest restrictions.</i>	Contribute to the Council’s development of an action to authorize a Recreational Quota Entity to purchase and hold commercial Pacific halibut quota share.

Coordinate with state and federal management entities

The Alaska Region works closely with the State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the International Pacific Halibut Commission through the Council process to manage and monitor the recreational Pacific halibut fishery. Additionally, NOAA Fisheries supports the Pacific Salmon Commission through grants administered by the Alaska Region and scientific expertise through the Alaska Fisheries Science Center.

Ongoing responsibilities:

- Support the Pacific Salmon Treaty and the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Develop outreach materials addressing important fisheries science and management issues for recreational fisheries to support improved understanding by Council members and the public.
- Improve agency awareness of recreational fishing issues and projects in Alaska and share knowledge with partnering agencies and management bodies.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
<i>Support the Pacific Salmon Treaty and the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund.</i>	Provide grant funding and scientific expertise to the State of Alaska and Pacific Salmon Commission in support of the Pacific Salmon Treaty.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Develop outreach materials addressing important fisheries science and management issues for recreational fisheries to support improved understanding by Council members and the public.</i>	The Alaska Region annually develops and distributes a concise, plain-language summary of regulations affecting charter Pacific halibut anglers, as well as small entity compliance guides, frequently asked questions (FAQs), news releases, and other outreach documents to educate the public about fisheries science and management issues.
<i>Improve agency awareness of recreational fishing issues and projects in Alaska and share knowledge with partnering agencies and management bodies.</i>	Internal briefings with NOAA Fisheries regional and national leadership will provide updates on recreational fishery issues important to constituents, cooperative research, regulatory projects, and progress on this plan.

Advance innovative solutions to evolving science, management, and environmental challenges

NOAA Fisheries is committed to supporting scientifically sound research that will benefit the management of fisheries resources in Alaska. Accurate accounting of Pacific halibut catch information is a multi-agency priority and is critical for making informed management decisions. Promoting and funding research that addresses reducing discard mortality and improved data collection in recreational fisheries is a national and regional priority.

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Provide scientific advice to the Pacific Salmon Commission and State of Alaska and conduct research on Pacific salmon in the marine environment.
- Foster partnerships with constituents to conduct cooperative research relevant to recreational fisheries in Alaska.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Work in cooperation with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to collect more timely recreational fishing data from the charter Pacific halibut fleet to support annual management measures.
- Support scientifically rigorous projects to improve data collection and investigate bycatch and release mortality reduction tools that can be implemented in the recreational fishery.



Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
<i>Provide scientific advice to the Pacific Salmon Commission and conduct research on Pacific salmon in the marine environment.</i>	<p>NOAA researchers support Pacific Salmon Treaty missions for coast-wide salmon management, research, and enhancement programs. NOAA activities support accurate and timely forecasting, catch, effort, escapement, stock identification, and migratory timing assessment.</p> <p>The Alaska Fisheries Science Center in partnership with the State of Alaska and University of Alaska conducts scientific research on the impacts of climate change on the productivity of salmon in both nearshore and offshore habitats and evaluates the potential fitness impacts of stock enhancement on wild salmon populations.</p>
<i>Foster partnerships with constituents to conduct cooperative research relevant to recreational fisheries in Alaska.</i>	Collaborate and partner with the Alaska recreational charter fleet to conduct a NOAA Cooperative Research Program funded project (2015) to tag arrowtooth flounder and investigate interactions between arrowtooth flounder and Pacific halibut.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Work in cooperation with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to collect more timely recreational fishing data from the charter Pacific halibut fleet to support annual management measures.</i>	An electronic Saltwater Charter Logbook pilot project partially funded by NOAA will be expanded in 2016 to select ports used by the Pacific halibut charter fishery.
<i>Support scientifically rigorous projects to improve data collection and investigate bycatch and release mortality reduction tools, such as barotrauma research, that can be implemented in the recreational fishery.</i>	<p>NOAA Fisheries is supporting research through Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program funding to develop a mobile phone application to measure large Pacific halibut while they are still in the water to minimize harm and release mortality.</p> <p>Alaska Fisheries Science Center researchers will continue to participate in, publish, and keep abreast of rockfish barotrauma research and convey the best practices for releasing Pacific rockfish using rapid recompression techniques.</p>

Provide scientifically sound and trusted social, cultural, economic, and ecological information

Informed management decisions rely on scientifically sound advice. NOAA Fisheries is committed to continuing socio-economic analyses and providing accurate data that will help managers make informed decisions and effectively manage Pacific halibut resources in Alaska.

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Support socio-economic research on recreational fisheries.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Conduct socio-economic projects and analyses that help inform Council management decisions relevant to Pacific halibut management and the Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan.
- Improve coordination with International Pacific Halibut Commission staff to make catch statistics consistent with stock assessment and management needs.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
<i>Support socio-economic research on recreational fisheries.</i>	The Alaska Fisheries Science Center is analyzing data to estimate the demand for recreational fishing trips in Alaska; estimating the costs, earnings, and employment potential of recreational fishing in select Alaska fishing communities; addressing existing gaps in the Recreational Fishing Economic Assessment Index; and developing decision support tools to help improve available economic data.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Conduct socio-economic projects and analyses that help inform Council management decisions relevant to Pacific halibut management and the Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan.</i>	NOAA Fisheries is supporting and conducting socio-economic research for the charter Pacific halibut fleet in Alaska including analysis of a 2012 angler survey and 2012-2014 charter business survey; examining the economic values associated with both charter and private boat fishing for saltwater species in Alaska; summarizing the results of a survey of participants in the Guided Angler Fish Leasing Program; and exploring the stated preferences and values that charter Pacific halibut permit holders placed on relaxing Guided Angler leasing rules and options to fund the Recreational Quota Entity proposal.
<i>Improve coordination with International Pacific Halibut Commission staff to make catch statistics consistent with stock assessment and management needs.</i>	Agencies will work closely to provide estimates of Pacific halibut bycatch in the groundfish fisheries by the Commission's reporting area level rather than the less accurate federal reporting areas.



Communicate and engage with the recreational fishing public

One of NOAA Fisheries’ most important responsibilities is to involve interested members of the public in our fact-finding, evaluation, and decision-making processes. NOAA Fisheries is committed to including the recreational fishing community in Council decisions regarding Pacific halibut resources in Alaska. Charter fishery representatives on the Council’s Charter Pacific Halibut Management Implementation Committee have been directly involved in the management process to recommend their preferred management measures for the fishery to the Council and IPHC and participate the Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan process. Continued outreach and interactions with the recreational fishing community will help inform, educate, and explain management decisions that will ultimately result in a better engaged and informed constituency.

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Inform and engage the recreational fishing community in Alaska with ongoing efforts in the region.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

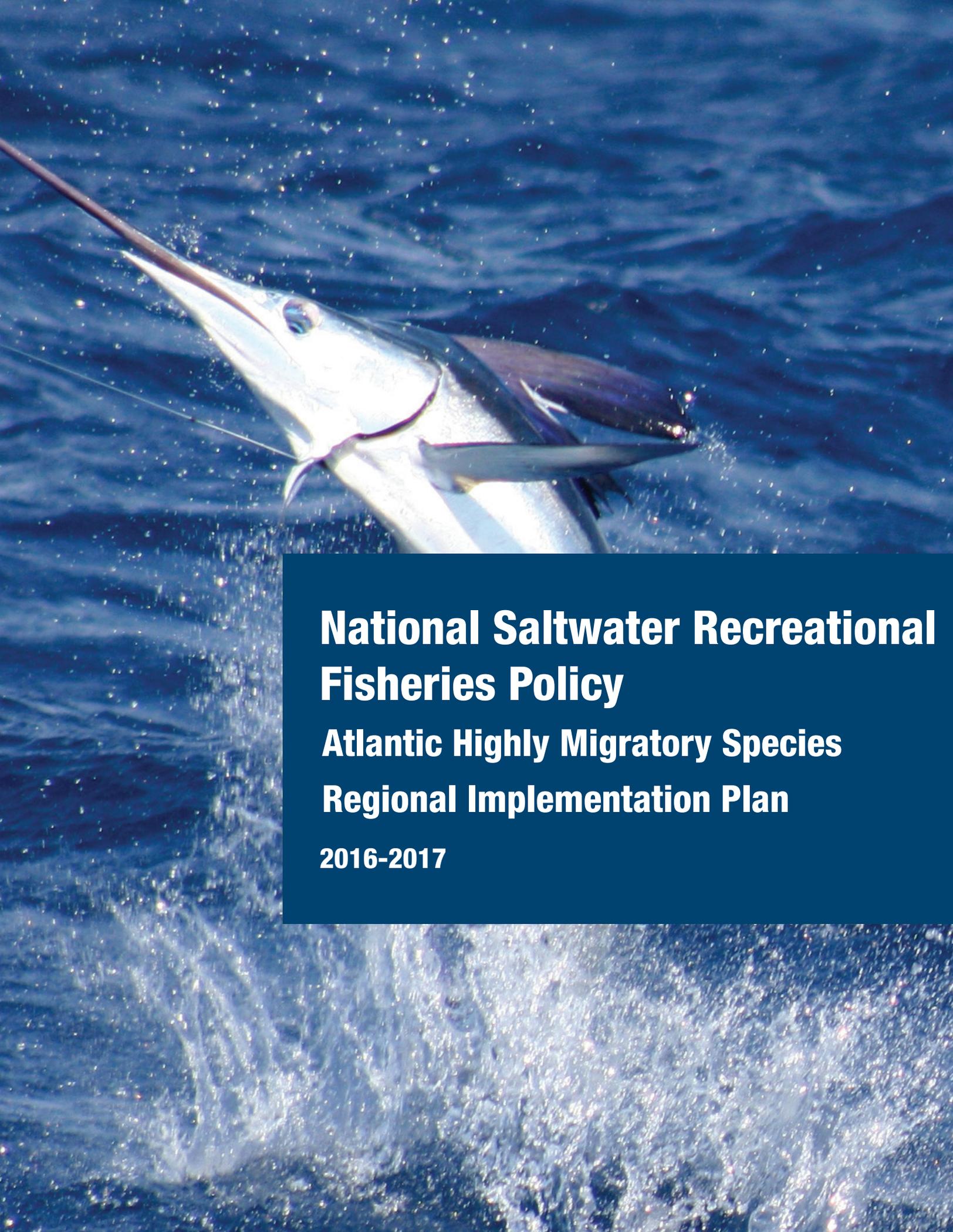
- Increase the visibility of NOAA Fisheries in the recreational fishing community in Alaska and improve awareness and understanding of relevant issues occurring at Council management levels regarding Pacific halibut management.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
<i>Inform and engage the recreational fishing community in Alaska with ongoing efforts in the region.</i>	<p>Continue to expand the existing Alaska recreational fishing list-serv, provide monthly newsletters, increase the content relevant to recreational anglers, and use multimedia tools to help distribute information. Provide relevant NOAA information in an efficient and consistent manner and follow up with anglers about resulting agency actions or decisions.</p> <p>Maintain strong working relationships and open lines of communication with community leaders to ensure regular dialogue and a policy of “no surprises.”</p>
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Increase the visibility of NOAA Fisheries in the recreational fishing community in Alaska and improve awareness and understanding of relevant issues occurring at Council management levels regarding Pacific halibut management.</i>	<p>Identify opportunities for angler engagement in major NOAA Fisheries actions and decision-making that affect recreational fishing, such as the selection of annual management measures for the Pacific halibut charter fishery.</p> <p>Work with interested stakeholder groups to strengthen relationships and share information.</p> <p>Recreational Fishing Coordinators will increase collaborative efforts with the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement to improve outreach efforts in charter communities, and other public forums such as state fairs and maritime festivals.</p>

SUMMARY

NOAA Fisheries' involvement in recreational fishing in Alaska is limited to Pacific halibut and Pacific salmon, as the State has been delegated the regulatory authority over the majority of recreationally caught species. Recent Council actions regarding Pacific halibut allocation have elevated the recreational fishing community's interests in Pacific halibut management in Alaska. This implementation plan builds on the previous Action Plan and highlights NOAA Fisheries' commitment to participating in the Council and International Pacific Halibut Commission processes to effectively manage Pacific halibut resources. Additionally, this plan highlights our responsibilities to the State of Alaska and the Pacific Salmon Commission to support salmon management and describes ongoing habitat restoration work. Finally, the Alaska Region is committed to improving communication with recreational constituents and increasing awareness and understanding of pertinent recreational fishing topics.





National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy

Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Regional Implementation Plan

2016-2017

Foreward

Recreational saltwater fisheries for Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS)—which include tunas, sharks, swordfish, and billfish—are an important component of our Office of Sustainable Fisheries mission. Annually, millions of recreational HMS fishing trips take place throughout the Atlantic, including the Gulf of Mexico and U.S. Caribbean. Recreational HMS fisheries are economically important; for example, according to *NOAA Fisheries' National Marine Recreational Fishing Expenditure Survey* conducted in 2011 from Maine to North Carolina, \$24.5 million in Atlantic HMS angling trip-related expenditures generated approximately \$33 million in economic output, and that is only a portion of the area where U.S. Atlantic HMS recreational fisheries are taking place. HMS charter vessels, headboats, and private vessels land millions of pounds of fish each year, not including the thousands of fish that are caught and released. The HMS Management Division of the Office of Sustainable Fisheries is responsible for the science-based stewardship of our nation's living HMS marine resources in the Atlantic Ocean, including the Gulf of Mexico and U.S. Caribbean. We are responsible for maintaining healthy marine ecosystems, sustainable and productive fishery resources, and commercial and recreational access to those fishery resources for the long-term use and benefit of the nation.

On a national level, NOAA Fisheries has recently begun refocusing some of our efforts to better support saltwater recreational fishing and recreational fisheries issues. The [National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy](#) was published in 2015 and highlights six key principles intended to guide us in considering the development and promotion of sustainable high-quality saltwater recreational fisheries.

In the Atlantic HMS fisheries, our vision for the future includes preserving thriving fish stocks, healthy fish habitats, vibrant coastal communities, and world-class fisheries. Achieving this goal requires a foundation of trust between NOAA and recreational anglers; therefore, collaboration with the recreational fisheries community is essential. This implementation plan is the next step toward maintaining Atlantic HMS recreational fisheries as a key focus of our activities. While the plan will be a basic roadmap for action, it is a living document that can accommodate new challenges and opportunities as they arise. We intend for this plan, and the activities described here, to embrace a wide range of partners and stakeholders to allow for successful recreational and for-hire fisheries.

This implementation plan is built on engagement with the recreational fishing public. In developing this plan, we reached out to the recreational community for input to help us focus on their issues of greatest concern, as well as suggestions on how best to address those issues. Based on that input, we developed a draft implementation plan that we discussed with the HMS Advisory Panel for further public input. The result is this Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Recreational Fisheries Implementation Plan for 2016 and 2017.

Alan D. Risenhoover, Director
NOAA Fisheries Office of Sustainable Fisheries

ATLANTIC HMS OVERVIEW

Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) consist of a number of fish species including tunas, sharks, swordfish, and billfish that live throughout the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico and often migrate long distances crossing domestic and international boundaries. Atlantic HMS fisheries are managed by the Secretary of Commerce, as delegated to NOAA Fisheries, under the dual authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) and the Atlantic Tunas Convention Act (ATCA). The Magnuson-Stevens Act authorizes the Secretary to conserve and manage fishery resources found off the coasts of the United States, while ATCA authorizes the Secretary to promulgate regulations necessary to carry out recommendations of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). Unlike other recreational fisheries that use the fishery management council process, the Atlantic HMS Management Division of NOAA Fisheries oversees all aspects of recreational and commercial fisheries management, including implementation of regulations and initiation of operational actions, such as permitting, quota implementation and monitoring, and data collection.

Atlantic HMS recreational fisheries provide positive social experiences for recreational fishermen as well as significant positive economic impacts to coastal communities including angler expenditures, recreational charters, tournaments, and shore-side supporting businesses. Atlantic HMS recreational fisheries occur in waters of the western Atlantic Ocean including the Caribbean Sea (Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands) and the Gulf of Mexico. Currently, recreational fishing for Atlantic HMS requires one of two vessel permits: 1) An HMS angling permit or 2) a charter/headboat permit. In 2015, the Atlantic HMS Management Division issued approximately 25,000 Atlantic HMS Angling permits and over 4,000 Atlantic HMS Charter/Headboat permits. Additionally, there are an average of 260 Atlantic HMS tournaments per year (2003-2015) which play a significant role in the recreational fisheries for several HMS, especially blue and white marlin, sailfish, and yellowfin tuna. According to a [NOAA Fisheries National Marine Recreational Fishing Expenditure Survey](#), in 2011 from Maine to North Carolina alone, \$24.5 million in Atlantic HMS angling trip-related expenditures generated approximately \$33 million in economic output and supported 216 full-time jobs.

The goal of improving recreational fishing opportunities is largely supported through protecting the health of target stocks, which in turn ensures availability of fish. For internationally managed Atlantic HMS, NOAA Fisheries implements harvesting quotas for some species as adopted by ICCAT. Utilization of these quotas by recreational and commercial components of the fisheries can have mutual benefits for recreational and commercial fishermen if the United States maintains its international quota shares. For example, NOAA Fisheries continues efforts to encourage further utilization of the U.S. swordfish quota by maintaining liberal retention limits in the recreational fishery, increasing some commercial swordfish retention limits, and continuing access and flexibility to Atlantic HMS Charter/Headboat permitted vessels that can also sell swordfish. NOAA Fisheries also continues to encourage recreational fishermen to report their swordfish landings so they can be counted toward U.S. landings and reported to ICCAT.

SETTING THE STAGE

This Atlantic HMS Recreational Fisheries Policy Implementation Plan outlines the regional approach for implementing the National Recreational Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy. This regional implementation plan is a continuation of and builds on the previous Atlantic HMS Recreational Action Agenda. It presents categories of project commitments that are binned within the six guiding principles of the National Recreational Fisheries Implementation Plan.

The making of this plan included a solicitation of public input from the Atlantic HMS Advisory Panel, who provided important ideas and feedback about HMS fishery management measures and strategies. The Advisory Panel includes representation from diverse constituencies including private anglers, charter/headboat operators, tournament operators, commercial fishermen, academics, state and council representatives, and non-governmental organizations.

To obtain input on the Atlantic HMS Recreational Fishing Policy Implementation Plan, discussions were held with the Atlantic HMS Advisory Panel during the September 2015 meeting in Silver Spring, Maryland. The Atlantic HMS Management Division regularly seeks out the opinion of constituents to inform the decision-making process and distributes fisheries news bulletins via e-mail through “Atlantic HMS News” and the Atlantic HMS webpage. Information obtained during the development of the 2014-2015 Atlantic HMS Recreational Fisheries Action Agenda was also incorporated into this implementation plan. Members of the public, Atlantic HMS Advisory Panel members, and Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee Recreational Fisheries Working Group members have expressed their support for NOAA Fisheries’ efforts to improve collection of catch and fishing effort data, but expressed concern about the potential to underestimate landings of trips originating from private boat docks and marinas. Participants were also greatly interested in efforts to estimate the economic impact of Atlantic HMS fishing tournaments and Atlantic HMS private angling and for-hire trips.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

NOAA Fisheries has made progress to address these and other issues via the analysis and implementation of general economic studies on private Atlantic HMS anglers and the Atlantic HMS for-hire fleet and continues to address these issues via an Atlantic HMS tournament expenditure survey being conducted in 2016, the ongoing Large Pelagics Survey re-design, and [MRIP survey improvements](#). Other accomplishments on items included in the 2014-2015 Action Agenda include implementation of regional recreational “trophy” bluefin tuna sub-quotas that provide enhanced opportunities to harvest bluefin tuna throughout their temporal/geographic range and development of online registration of Atlantic HMS tournaments to the beta-testing stage in anticipation of going live in 2016.

Support ecosystem conservation and management

Atlantic HMS populations are critical to healthy ocean ecosystems. Conservation and management measures sustain healthy populations and help to rebuild them when needed. Data collection programs are necessary to supply quality data to fishery managers and decision-makers so that the most appropriate management measures may be implemented.

Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity:

- Support and conduct research and stock assessments to better understand the biology and stock health of HMS.
- Promote best practices for safely handling and releasing fish.



Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Seek to better understand climate change and its effects on Atlantic HMS biology.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
Support and conduct research and stock assessments to better understand the biology and stock health of HMS.	<p>NOAA Southeast Fisheries Science Center will support stock assessments of HMS species to provide a better picture of stock health and improve management of the fishery for recreational and commercial uses.</p> <p>NOAA Northeast and Southeast Fisheries Science Centers will support cooperative tagging programs for sharks, tunas, and billfish to provide valuable information about fish movement patterns.</p> <p>NOAA Southeast Fisheries Science center will conduct satellite tagging of dusky sharks to better understand habitat use.</p>
Promote best practices for safely handling and releasing fish.	Promote live release of shortfin mako sharks via webpage and phone apps: Educate anglers about the benefits of releasing shortfin mako sharks and collect data from the public on catch and release location through shortfin mako Android and iPhone applications of live release maps.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
Seek to better understand climate change and its effects on Atlantic HMS biology.	Actively participate in developing NOAA climate regional action plans to remain cognizant of changes and potential vulnerabilities associated with Atlantic HMS fisheries and their respective management.

Promote public access to quality recreational fishing opportunities

Recreational fisheries for Atlantic HMS provide food and enjoyment for anglers as well as support local economies through fishing tackle, boat, fuel, bait, and equipment sales and through the tourism dollars that anglers spend at hotels and restaurants.

Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity:

- Provide fair and equitable access to recreational Atlantic HMS fisheries consistent with legal obligations, stock health, and the goals and objectives of the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic HMS FMP and its amendments.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Provide for and, where practical, improve recreational opportunities for Atlantic HMS through management practices that ensure healthy stocks are available to anglers.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
<p><i>Provide fair and equitable access to recreational Atlantic HMS fisheries consistent with legal obligations, stock health, and the goals and objectives of the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic HMS FMP and its amendments.</i></p>	<p>Provide continued access to billfish, swordfish, Atlantic tuna, and shark fisheries through issuance of HMS Angling and Charter/Headboat permits to vessels that would target these species.</p> <p>Provide continued access to billfish, swordfish, Atlantic tuna, and shark fisheries through management activities (e.g., quota specification processes, in-season adjustments, etc.) that promote balanced access for recreational and commercial sectors for these species.</p>
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<p><i>Provide for and, where practical, improve recreational opportunities for Atlantic HMS through management practices that ensure healthy stocks are available to anglers.</i></p>	<p>Seek to expand U.S. recreational fishing opportunities on internationally managed fish stocks, where feasible and appropriate, and promote the legitimacy and recognition of the economic importance of recreational fisheries within international fisheries management bodies.</p> <p>Implement bluefin tuna management program that increases the likelihood of availability of bluefin tuna to the recreational fishery: Utilize inseason management authority to provide mid-season recreational fishing opportunities for bluefin tuna among different recreational user groups based on real-time fishery conditions.</p> <p>Conduct HMS Tournament Angler Satisfaction Survey: A survey that measures angler satisfaction with respect to available fishing opportunities would provide an important feedback mechanism for the largest category of HMS permit holders and may provide insight into preferred future management approaches/objectives allowing for the design of management actions which could provide for a more satisfying fishery while still meeting conservation mandates. The Atlantic HMS Management Division will develop a proposal for a research project to measure angler satisfaction with HMS recreational fishing resources and management.</p>

Coordinate with state and federal management entities

The input and coordination received from state and other fishery management entities, such as regional fishery management councils and interstate marine fisheries commissions are invaluable to the success of Atlantic HMS management.

Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity:

- ◉ Fully utilize the Atlantic HMS Advisory Panel to gain valuable input.
- ◉ Coordinate with councils and commissions on HMS management issues as appropriate.
- ◉ Collaborate with states and territories on fisheries data collection efforts.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Explore ways to maximize enforcement, education, and outreach on Atlantic HMS issues.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
<i>Fully utilize the Atlantic HMS Advisory Panel to gain valuable input.</i>	Recruit active participation by state and council representatives on the Atlantic HMS Advisory Panel: Encouraging states and councils to provide active representation on the Atlantic HMS Advisory Panel.
<i>Coordinate with councils and commissions on HMS management issues as appropriate.</i>	Directly engage councils and commissions to facilitate communication and coordination on relevant fisheries management and science issues.
<i>Collaborate with states and territories on fisheries data collection efforts.</i>	NOAA Fisheries Office of Science and Technology will also continue to support state-based efforts to collect catch and effort data on HMS fisheries, such as the catch card programs in place in North Carolina and Maryland and the shark catch card program in Maryland.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Explore ways to maximize enforcement, education, and outreach on Atlantic HMS issues.</i>	Maximize partnership and outreach opportunities between NMFS Office of Law Enforcement and Joint Enforcement Agreement partners, especially as more Uniformed Officers are hired. For Atlantic HMS Management Division, we will maximize engagement opportunities with enforcement partners (e.g., present HMS priorities at annual or regional Office of Law Enforcement training events).

Advance innovative solutions to evolving science, management, and environmental challenges

The challenges of HMS management are constantly changing. Improvements in science help to provide new perspectives on ocean processes and the biology of oceanic species. Environmental changes such as climate change cause uncertainty about the future state of ocean ecosystems and effects on the species that live in and around it, including humans.

Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity:

- Support the improvement of fisheries surveys to obtain accurate catch and effort data.
- Support the operation of Atlantic HMS tournaments and provide opportunities to obtain recreational catch and biological data on a variety of HMS species.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Streamline and improve opportunities to obtain Atlantic HMS tournament recreational catch data and biological data on a variety of HMS species.
- Facilitate quick reporting of catch information by anglers through internet and phone reporting.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
<i>Support the improvement of fisheries surveys to obtain accurate catch and effort data.</i>	Implement the updated NOAA Fisheries Office of Science and Technology Access Point Angler Intercept Survey, which will improve catch and effort data for HMS fisheries by eliminating potential sources of bias and expanding sampling coverage to fishing tournaments and 24-hour-a-day sampling.
<i>Support the operation of Atlantic HMS tournaments and provide opportunities to obtain recreational catch and biological data on a variety of HMS species.</i>	Continue to administer tournament registration and reporting in order to quantify the extent and impact of these events.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Streamline and improve opportunities to obtain Atlantic HMS tournament recreational catch data and biological data on a variety of HMS species.</i>	Improve HMS tournament registration: Provide online mechanisms for tournament operators to register Atlantic HMS tournaments quickly and efficiently.
<i>Facilitate quick reporting of catch information by anglers through internet and phone reporting.</i>	Design smartphone apps for collecting HMS catch data: Capitalize on technological improvements for electronic reporting of HMS catch via smartphone apps.

Provide scientifically sound and trusted social, cultural, economic, and ecological information

Effective fisheries management depends on scientifically sound data, and programs must be in place to supply these data.

Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity:

- ⦿ Pursue contemporary analyses of the socio-economic impacts of regulations on recreational fishing communities.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- ⦿ Evaluation and improvement of “rare event” recreational fisheries surveys (which include HMS fisheries).
- ⦿ Collect updated social and economic data from recreational anglers.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
<i>Pursue contemporary analyses of the socio-economic impacts of regulations on recreational fishing communities.</i>	Advocate for research to update HMS socio-economic studies: Updated benchmark socio-economic analyses of HMS recreational anglers, for-hire sector, and fishing tournaments are a significant data priority for HMS recreational fisheries management, as they are needed to assess the economic effects of current/proposed regulations. The Atlantic HMS Management Division will work with NOAA Fisheries Office of Science and Technology to develop and execute research project(s) to collect+ data on the socio-economics of HMS recreational fisheries.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Evaluation and improvement of “rare event” recreational fisheries surveys (which include HMS fisheries).</i>	Redesign the NOAA Fisheries Office of Science and Technology Large Pelagics Survey and improve MRIP survey techniques. Collaborate on the redesign and re-estimation of HMS recreational catch and effort estimates derived from the Large Pelagics Survey to produce improved/revised estimates for stock assessments in support of management.
<i>Collect updated social and economic data from recreational anglers.</i>	<p>Conduct and report on HMS Tournament Expenditure Survey: Survey tournament operators and participants to better understand the economics of tournaments for all HMS in 2016. Report on survey findings in 2017.</p> <p>Conduct and report on a non-durable goods survey: Survey will be conducted in 2016 and 2017 that includes HMS angler expenditures with a final report expected in 2017.</p> <p>Report on the economic contribution of marine angler (including Atlantic HMS anglers) expenditures on durable goods in the United States: Analysis and reporting on this survey will occur in 2016.</p>

Communicate and engage with the recreational fishing public

Fisheries management depends on effective implementation of management measures, and an important part of effective implementation comes from anglers who are motivated because they understand the science and rationale behind the measures. Communication and engagement are integral to developing an informed and motivated recreational constituency.

Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity:

- ⦿ Conduct on-the-ground communication efforts with constituents.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

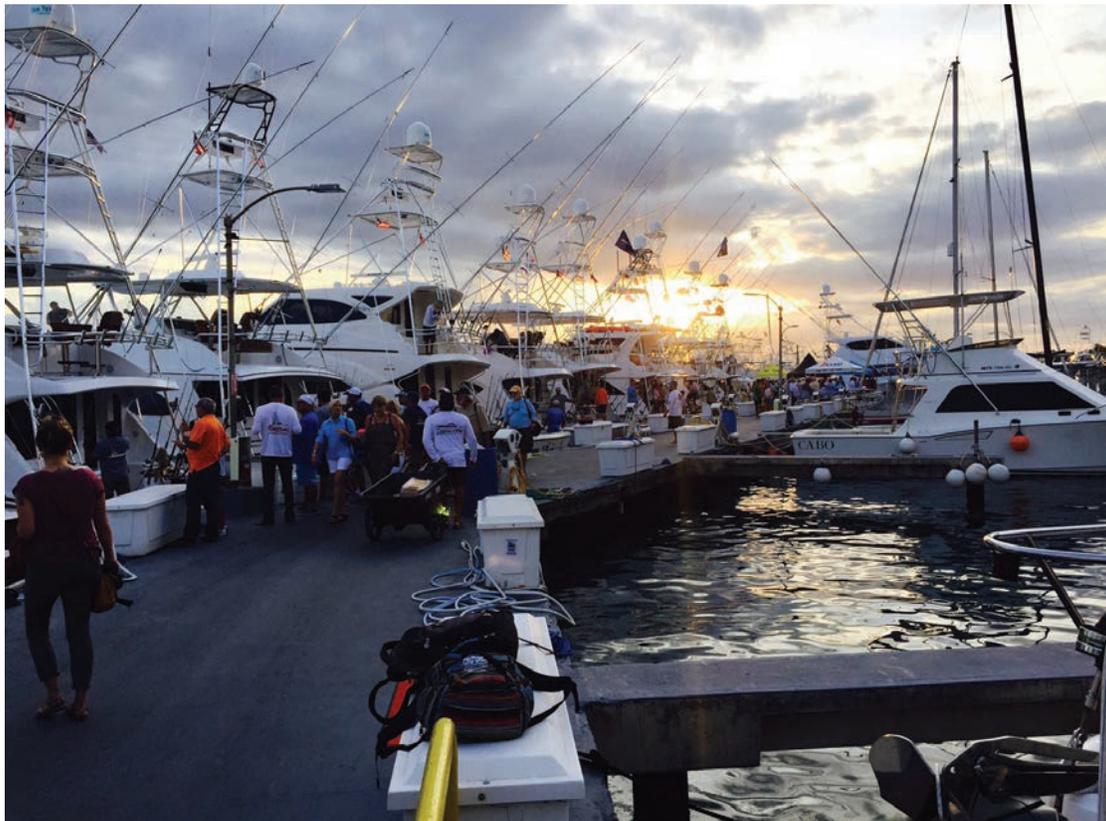
- ⦿ Communicate information regarding major NOAA initiatives with constituents, tournaments, and various associations that represent fishermen.

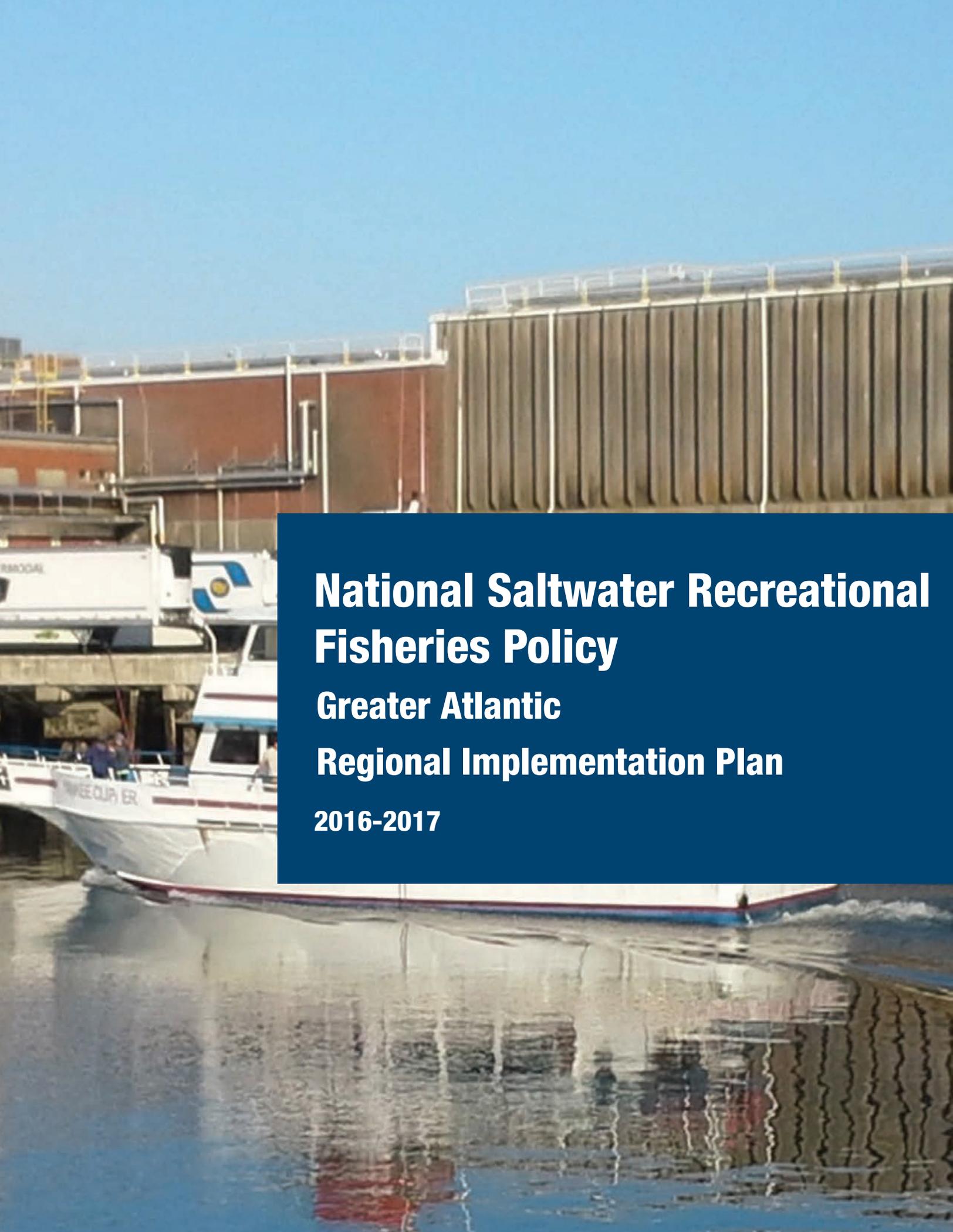
Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
On-Going Responsibilities/Activity	
<p><i>Conduct on-the-ground communication efforts with constituents.</i></p>	<p>Continue to communicate HMS recreational fishing regulations and other helpful information by preparing and distributing HMS News releases and informational material such as the Recreational Compliance Guide, Tuna Identification Guide, MRIP fliers, Large Pelagics Survey fliers, and a shark identification placard.</p> <p>Improve constituent communications: Identify constituents and constituent groups through Atlantic HMS tournament registration and other mechanisms of constituent contact for distribution of outreach materials, which will facilitate biological data collection on landed HMS; provide on-the-ground outreach to anglers.</p> <p>Conduct regular on-the-ground outreach efforts at boating, recreational, and species-specific events in order to provide information to and receive feedback from recreational constituents in addition to feedback from HMS Advisory Panel members.</p> <p>Recruit recreational participation in shark stock assessments: Identify and recruit, through Atlantic HMS Advisory Panel members and HMS News Notices, recreational constituents to participate in domestic shark stock assessments to ensure recreational interests and knowledge are represented in the assessment process.</p> <p>Recruit participation in cooperative tagging programs and communicate results: NMFS Cooperative Shark Tagging Program and Cooperative Tagging Center (for tagging of tuna and billfish) work with volunteer anglers to tag thousands of fish, providing valuable information about movement patterns, as well as documenting the success of catch and release outreach efforts. The Cooperative Tagging Center also collaborates with The Billfish Foundation to enhance billfish tagging efforts throughout the Atlantic Ocean and beyond. Results are communicated back to anglers.</p>

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<p><i>Communicate information regarding major NOAA initiatives with constituents, tournaments, and various associations that represent fishermen.</i></p>	<p>Conduct collaborative communication for MRIP studies: Explore collaborations with the MRIP Communications and Education Team to increase awareness and understanding of MRIP projects among the fishing community.</p>
	<p>Investigate additional ways for the public to listen to and participate in Atlantic HMS Advisory Panel meetings: Investigate webcasting or other technologies to allow for remote access to Advisory Panel meetings.</p>

SUMMARY

The actions listed above will enable progress in achieving the plan's objectives and goals for Atlantic HMS recreational fisheries in keeping with the NOAA Fisheries Recreational Saltwater Fisheries Policy. Some projects have specific timeframes (e.g., MRIP initiatives to improve data collection for recreational fisheries), and others are expected to continue throughout the effective time period of this implementation plan (2016-2017). Outcomes from the actions above will enable the Atlantic HMS Management Division to better address the needs of the Atlantic HMS recreational fisheries. The Atlantic HMS Management Division will continue to integrate recreational considerations into the management of tunas, sharks, swordfish, and billfish and provide for recreational fishing opportunities.





**National Saltwater Recreational
Fisheries Policy
Greater Atlantic
Regional Implementation Plan
2016-2017**

Foreward

Recreational saltwater fisheries are an important component of our regional identity. Annually, millions of recreational fishing trips take place throughout the region. Recreational fishing contributes \$4.8 billion to our regional economy each year (\$1.3 billion across New England and \$3.5 billion across the mid-Atlantic in 2013). For-hire vessels, private vessels, and shore-based anglers harvest more than 75 million pounds of fish. The [Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office](#) and the [Northeast Fisheries Science Center](#) are responsible for the science-based stewardship of our nation's living marine resources in the northwest Atlantic Ocean. Together with our management partners, we are responsible for maintaining healthy marine and coastal ecosystems, sustainable and productive fishery resources, and commercial and recreational access to those fishery resources for the long-term use and benefit of the nation.

On a national level, NOAA Fisheries has been refocusing some of our efforts to better support saltwater recreational fishing and recreational fisheries issues. The [National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy](#) was published in 2015 and highlights six key principles intended to guide us in considering the development and promotion of sustainable high-quality saltwater recreational fisheries.

In the northeast, our vision for the future includes thriving fish stocks, healthy fish habitats, vibrant coastal communities, and world-class fisheries. Achieving this goal requires a foundation of trust between NOAA and recreational anglers; therefore, collaboration with the recreational fisheries community is essential. This implementation plan is the next step toward making recreational fisheries a key focus of regional activities. While the plan will be a basic roadmap for action in the region, it is a living document that can accommodate new challenges and opportunities as they arise. We intend for this plan, and the activities described here, to embrace a wide range of partners and stakeholders to allow for successful recreational and for-hire fisheries.

This implementation plan is built on engagement with the recreational fishing public. Prior to developing this plan, we reached out to the recreational community for input to help us focus on their issues of greatest concern, as well as suggestions on how best to address those issues. Based on that input, we developed a draft implementation plan that we presented at meetings of the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils for further public input. The Councils provided comments that we have incorporated in this final version. The result is this Greater Atlantic Region Recreational Fisheries Implementation Plan for 2016 and 2017.

See you on the water,

John Bullard, Regional Administrator
Dr. William Karp, Science Center Director

GREATER ATLANTIC REGIONAL OVERVIEW

The Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office manages fisheries that predominantly occur in federal waters from Maine through North Carolina.¹ This covers the jurisdiction of two regional fishery management councils and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. The Northeast Fisheries Science Center is responsible for providing the Regional Office and Councils with the best scientific information available to support the sustainable management of commercial and recreational fisheries.

New England

In collaboration with the [New England Fishery Management Council](#), we manage the recreational fisheries in federal waters for cod, haddock, pollock, winter flounder, and other groundfish species throughout their range from the Gulf of Maine to Georges Bank and into southern New England. Recreational fishing in New England waters includes many other species, notably striped bass, bluefish, summer flounder, and others; however, these fisheries are managed by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and/or the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council. In the Greater Atlantic Region, possession of striped bass is prohibited in federal waters, with states managing the fishery in state waters through the Commission. On average, 1 to 1.5 million saltwater anglers fish every year in the New England states. Overall, \$1.3 billion was spent on fishing trip and equipment expenditures across New England in 2013.



A number of challenges face recreational management in New England. The Gulf of Maine is warming faster than most places on Earth, which is complicating the management of fisheries in the region. The recreational fisheries for cod and haddock in the Gulf of Maine have separate annual catch limits from the commercial fishery. The Regional Administrator establishes the cod and haddock recreational management measures for the upcoming fishing year to ensure that the recreational catch limits are not exceeded, in consultation with the Council. In the Gulf of Maine, balancing a cod stock at historically low size with a healthy and growing haddock stock has been a challenging process. The remaining groundfish stocks have recreational measures set by the New England Council or the Commission.

¹ NOAA Fisheries' Highly Migratory Species division manages tunas, sharks, and billfish outside of the Council or Commission process. The recreational activities for HMS can be found in the HMS Implementation Plan.

Mid-Atlantic

Recreational fisheries are a significant focus of the management process in the Mid-Atlantic. An average of 2.6 million anglers fished in the Mid-Atlantic annually from 2003 to 2013. Overall, total fishing trip and equipment spending across the Mid-Atlantic Region in 2013 was approximately \$3.5 billion. Summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, bluefish, mackerel, and golden tilefish are significant recreational fisheries managed by the [Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council](#). The Mid-Atlantic Council has identified recreational fishing objectives in its [Strategic Plan](#), and we will support the Council in achieving those objectives. Summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish are managed cooperatively with the [Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission](#). Recreational fisheries for other species, including striped bass, croaker, and spot, are managed by the states through the Commission.

Summer flounder, also called “fluke,” is a highly prized commercial and recreational fish, and 40 percent of the allowable landings are allocated to the recreational sector. Both sectors of the fishery land nearly all of the fluke available to them. Scup, or “porgy” in some areas, is a healthy stock that contributes significantly to recreational fisheries in this region. Black sea bass is a sought-after food fish, that prefers structure on live-bottom and reef habitats, with an interesting life history (some black sea bass are born female and become male at some point in their lifetime). The population of this unique fish is difficult to assess, which has made determining an appropriate level of catch a difficult task. While recreational mackerel catches in the Mid-Atlantic have been lower in recent years, historically there are years when mackerel provide an important niche fishery.

Bluefish is one of the most popular and widely caught recreational fish along the U.S. Atlantic coast, with catches from Maine all the way to Florida. As fast-swimming predators, bluefish are well known for their strong fights on rod and reel. The Mid-Atlantic Council and Commission jointly manage the fishery, with up to 87 percent of the catch being allocated to the recreational sector. The remainder is allocated to commercial fisheries in each state that harvest bluefish as the population seasonally migrates up and down the coast.

Tilefish is typically caught in deeper waters, and is not as widely known as some other species. Two species of tilefish are caught in the Mid-Atlantic: Golden tilefish, also known as great northern tilefish or just “tilefish,” and blueline tilefish, which is also known as gray tile. The recreational fisheries for both of these species are relatively small and not well characterized by existing angler surveys. As they become more popular, party and charter vessels have been increasing the number of trips specifically targeting tilefish, and trips by private vessel owners are likely increasing as well. Because of increased targeting of blueline tilefish, new management measures are under development to help ensure the continued health of this stock.

Recent Accomplishments

In recent years, we have expanded our work in recreational fisheries and fisheries engagement in a number of important ways. In 2015, we finalized a rule to establish special management zones off the coast of Delaware to reduce user conflicts between recreational and commercial fishing on artificial reefs. We also gave a number of presentations to angler groups on barotrauma reduction methods to improve survivability of recreationally released fish, and greatly expanded our outreach efforts by attending sportfishing shows and giving seminars on recreational management to recreational angler clubs. We continued to work on assessing, protecting, and improving essential fish habitat through our work with the fishery management councils, dam removals, and habitat restoration. In addition, we have expanded our outreach and research into minimizing recreational impacts to protected species like sea turtles and marine mammals. The Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) has completed or substantially completed a number of studies in recent years that support the successful management of recreational fisheries. This includes an assessment of habitat in the Delmarva region, economic studies on recreational groundfish anglers, development of the bioeconomic models to estimate effects of regulatory changes on anglers in the mid-Atlantic fisheries, and stock assessments or assessment updates on bluefish, summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, cod, and haddock, among several other important recreational stocks. Please see APPENDIX A 2014-2015 Greater Atlantic Regional Recreational Fisheries Action Agenda for more information.



SETTING THE STAGE

This implementation plan is specific to the role of NOAA Fisheries in the cooperative research and cooperative management of marine recreational fisheries in the Greater Atlantic Region. The goal of this implementation plan is to guide our actions related to recreational fisheries. It lays out our commitment to continue to take an active role in the collaborative development of management measures, to provide scientific expertise and data, and to implement regulations within our jurisdiction. Our partners from the Councils, Commission, and state management agencies each have responsibilities to manage recreational fisheries within their jurisdictions and this plan identifies pathways to improve collaboration and support for our management partners¹. The actions detailed in the plan work within the framework of Council priorities, objectives, and management strategies to help guide the Agency in better incorporating recreational fishing issues into our responsibilities and decision-making.

The Regional Implementation Plan is built around the six Guiding Principles in the National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy. This plan describes how we intend to apply those principles to activities within our region. Both the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office and the Northeast Fisheries Science Center have 5-Year Strategic Plans that guide the [Regional Office](#) and [Center](#) in priority setting and overall direction. Recreational fisheries issues and integrating anglers into science programs are key components to these Strategic Plans across all of our divisions, particularly for the Regional Office's Sustainable Fisheries Division and the Center's Populations Dynamic Branch. Recreational outreach is also an important priority for the Stakeholder Engagement and Protected Resources Divisions, as well as being a part of our Habitat Conservation, Habitat Restoration, and Analysis and Program Support efforts. (See APPENDIX C for contact information.)

The Regional Action Agenda for 2016-2017 (APPENDIX B) provides specific detail on activities and milestones of this plan. Working from our 2014-2015 Regional Action Agenda, we have expanded upon the underlying principles for multi-year priorities and listed specific activities and milestones to guide our day-to-day work.



¹ This implementation plan is not intended to supersede any Council or Commission responsibilities, priorities, or objectives.

We developed this implementation plan and the previous Action Agenda after soliciting public comment from members of the recreational fishing community, particularly targeting those actively engaged in the management process (e.g., Council and Commission members, Advisory Panel members, leadership from national and regional angler and for-hire vessel associations, etc.). We received comments from groups and individuals and incorporated their input in this plan. While many of the comments were focused on specific, current management measures, several themes emerged. As a result, many of the activities listed in the current Action Agenda are related to educating the public about the fishery data collection, cooperative research, and management processes to encourage anglers to more fully engage in the management of recreational fisheries. The implementation plan and the National Policy are intended to increase understanding of the management process for anglers, as well as for the agency to have a better institutional understanding of recreational fisheries and the unique challenges associated with them.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Support ecosystem conservation and management

Particularly in this time of changing ecosystems, the Regional Office and the Science Center are involved in the advancement of ecosystem science and management. Ensuring our recreational fisheries partners are aware of and involved in these efforts is an important aspect of this plan.

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Restore habitat for both recreationally targeted fish stocks and for the forage fish upon which those species depend.
- Understand ecosystem services of habitat and forage species and climate change impacts.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Increase recreational angler stewardship activities and activities to support healthy ecosystems.
- Increase awareness of ethical angling practices for targeted and protected species by ensuring consistent and accurate information is being distributed to the public on barotrauma, other safe fishing practices, and protected species interactions.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Areas of Ongoing Responsibilities	
<i>Restore habitat for both recreationally targeted fish stocks and for the forage fish upon which those species depend.</i>	Provide financial and technical assistance to partners for dam removal and enhancement of fish passages.
<i>Examine ecosystem services of habitat and forage species and climate change impacts.</i>	River herring research and monitoring efforts will enhance our understanding of the importance of this forage species to recreationally important stocks. The NEFSC will work with partners to improve river herring bycatch monitoring and mitigation in commercial fisheries, improve fish passage infrastructure on New England streams and rivers, and work to improve our understanding of the importance of river herring ecosystem services.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Increase recreational angler stewardship activities (e.g., ethical angling equipment) and other activities for public participation in restoration.</i>	Increase barotrauma recovery equipment usage through educational programs. Increase outreach activities regarding seasons, bag, and size limit regulations.
<i>Increase awareness of ethical angling practices near protected species by ensuring consistent and accurate information is distributed to the public on safe fishing practices and protected species interactions.</i>	Increase awareness of protected species activities and responsibilities for recreational boaters and anglers to ensure safe fishing practices related to protected species. Increase awareness of “See a Spout, Watch Out” Program to educate recreational boaters about responsible whale watching from private vessels.

Promote public access to quality recreational fishing opportunities

Broad and sustained public access to recreational fishing opportunities comes from sound, science-based fisheries management.

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Ensure effective management measures for the recreational fishing sector of all fisheries consistent with the overall management strategy.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Improve coordination between GARFO and the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary (SBNMS).
- Increase the flexibility of the bioeconomic model used to establish recreational Gulf of Maine cod and haddock management measures.
- Increase understanding of the “true” value of saltwater recreational fishing.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Areas of Ongoing Responsibility	
<i>Ensure fishing opportunities consistent with stock condition.</i>	Support the development of management measures that are consistent with scientifically sound limits that are designed to maximize recreational opportunity within catch limits.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Improve coordination between GARFO and Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary (SBNMS).</i>	Include Sanctuary materials at outreach events. Develop an informational handout on fisheries management in Stellwagen Bank Sanctuary.
<i>Increase the flexibility of the bioeconomic model used to establish recreational Gulf of Maine cod and haddock management measures</i>	Explore the feasibility of adjusting the bioeconomic model to quantify monthly, rather than bimonthly, effects of different regulatory scenarios on angler effort, catch, expenditures, and welfare in the Northeast.
<i>Increase understanding of the “true” value of saltwater recreational fishing.</i>	Expand the information available to fishery managers by estimating the value anglers place on marine saltwater fishing rights in Massachusetts.

Coordinate with State and Federal management entities

Successful recreational fisheries management is only possible when done collaboratively with our state partners, through the Council and Commission process, and with the recreational fishing community.

Ongoing Responsibilities

- Support Council and Commission goals and the development of actions intended to increase success of recreational fisheries management in both state and federal waters.
- Collaborate on the development of critical science priorities and data needed to improve stock assessments and inform fisheries management.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Improve coordination between GARFO, NEFSC, and states on recreational fisheries issues and activities, including data gathering, analytical techniques, and improved estimates of fishing effort and catch.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Areas of Ongoing Responsibilities	
<i>Support Council and Commission development of actions intended to increase success of recreational fisheries management in both state and federal waters.</i>	Provide technical and policy assistance for Council and Commission actions, notably the Comprehensive Summer Flounder Amendment, a Black Sea Bass Amendment to address ongoing management challenges, and a limited entry Amendment for the New England groundfish for-hire fleet.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Improve coordination between GARFO and states on recreational fisheries issues, including data gathering, analytical techniques, and improved estimates of fishing effort and catch.</i>	Collaborate with ACCSP on smartphone application that complies with state and federal trip reporting requirements (i.e., eTrips/M).

Advance innovative solutions to evolving science, management, and environmental challenges

Novel solutions start with an open mindset to new developments and approaches.

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Support development of additional electronic fishery-dependent data reporting.
- Continue to fund research on recreational fishing impacts, particularly on recreational discard mortality.
- Increase awareness of, and compliance with, federal recreational fishing regulations among private anglers.
- Continue to fund research on recreational fishing impacts, particularly on recreational discard mortality.
- Collaborate on the development of critical science priorities and data needed to improve stock assessments and fisheries management.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Seek balanced consideration of both commercial and recreational sectors in fishery policy discussions at all levels.
- Establish a process for a communicating feedback from recreational industry.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Areas of Ongoing Responsibilities	
<i>Support development of additional electronic reporting systems for for-hire vessels.</i>	Develop universal web-based application for federally permitted vessels, including for-hire fleet.
<i>Increase awareness of, and compliance with, federal recreational fishing regulations among private anglers.</i>	Increase awareness of for-hire vessels eVTR reporting. Support development of a “Fish Rules” smartphone application in the Greater Atlantic Region.
<i>Continue to fund research on recreational fishing impacts, particularly on recreational discard mortality.</i>	Support execution and consideration of studies of recreational discard mortality for cusk and haddock in the Gulf of Maine.
<i>Collaborate on the development of critical science priorities and data needed to improve stock assessments and fisheries management.</i>	Work closely with recreational anglers, fishing organizations, and shark tournaments to tag highly migratory pelagic sharks with the Cooperative Shark Tagging Program.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Seek more balanced consideration of commercial and recreational sectors in fishery policy discussions.</i>	Ensure recreational impacts are discussed with decision-makers.
<i>Increase communication and feedback efforts between staff and fishermen.</i>	Establish a process for communicating feedback from recreational industry.

Provide scientifically sound and trusted social, cultural, economic, and ecological information

Our fisheries management programs are built on a requirement to use the best scientific information available. Science Center, Regional Office, and NMFS headquarters staffs all have key roles in ensuring this requirement is fulfilled.

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Produce accurate stock assessments for recreationally important fish stocks.
- Support research on recreational fishing impacts on protected species and other species of concern.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Enhance the working relationship and communication between the NMFS Headquarters Office of Science and Technology and the Regional Office, Science Center, and management partners.
- Increase multidisciplinary and cross-cutting science through greater investments in cooperative and collaborative research, as described in the NEFSC Strategic Plan.
- Enhance cooperative research integration throughout the NEFSC by incorporating more cooperative research and collaborate more with fishing industry, recreational anglers, and non-governmental science institutions.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Areas of Ongoing Responsibilities	
<i>Produce accurate stock assessments for recreationally important fish stocks.</i>	Support development of benchmark black sea bass stock assessment. Complete stock assessments (or updates) as needed for other stocks. Support evaluation of blueline tilefish in the Mid-Atlantic.
<i>Support research on recreational fishing impacts on protected species and species of concern.</i>	Develop and undertake a survey to better understand the extent of interactions with sea turtles in mid-Atlantic recreational fisheries.
<i>Understand economic contributions of recreational uses of ocean and coastal resources.</i>	Assist in the estimation of the economic contribution of marine angler expenditures on durable goods in the United States. Assist in the development and analysis of the National Marine Recreational Use Survey. Assist in the estimation of the economic contribution of marine angler expenditures on trip-related goods in the United States.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Enhance the working relationship and communication between the Office of Science and Technology, other partners (ACCSP), and Regional Office and Science Center staff.</i>	GARFO membership and active participation on MRIP Transition Team, RecTech Committee. Support MRIP outreach plan.
<i>Increase multidisciplinary and cross-cutting science through greater investments in cooperative and collaborative research, as described in NEFSC Strategic Plan.</i>	Work to develop similar self-reporting applications that may be used on smartphones and tablet computers. Studies are proposed to make comparisons among current recreational fishing estimates and catch gathered via mail, telephone, and face-to-face interviews conducted during access point surveys.
<i>Enhance cooperative research integration throughout the NEFSC by incorporating more cooperative research and collaborate more with fishing industry, recreational anglers, and non-governmental science institutions.</i>	Collaborate with Rutgers University researchers on a recreational fishery-independent survey to estimate black sea bass distributions and abundance.

Communicate and engage with the recreational fishing public

Communication with and outreach to the recreational fishing public, including the for-hire industry, is key to the success of the implementation plan.

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Increase interaction and relationship building between the recreational fishing community and Regional Office and Science Center staff and leadership.

- Increase visibility of NOAA Fisheries in the recreational fishing community.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Improve awareness and understanding in the recreational fishing community of relevant scientific and management issues, including stock assessments, data collection and usage, and the management process.
- Increase institutional awareness of recreational fisheries.
- Demonstrate that the concerns of the recreational fishing community are incorporated when alternative management measures are considered and evaluated.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Areas of Ongoing Responsibilities	
<i>Increase interaction between recreational fishing community and Regional Office staff and leadership.</i>	Formalize Regional Recreational Fisheries Team to enhance regional coordination of recreational issues. Increase port agent outreach to bait and tackle shops, etc. Leadership participation at recreational events.
<i>Increase visibility of NOAA Fisheries in the recreational fishing community.</i>	Attend and participate in recreational fishing, sporting, and boating shows. Increase social media presence for recreational fishing issues, news, and activities. Increase distribution of federal regulatory information at high-visibility points. Increase coordination with state partners for recreational outreach efforts.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Improve awareness and understanding in the recreational fishing community of relevant scientific and management issues, including stock assessments, data collection and usage, and the management process.</i>	Develop information sheets or pamphlets for public distribution. Assist in planning and participate in at least one MREP workshop focused on recreational anglers. Maintain and utilize a recreational contacts database for focused recreational outreach.
<i>Increase institutional awareness for recreational fisheries.</i>	Provide GARFO and NEFSC staff training on MRIP and other recreational concerns. Publicize internal recreational fishing activities to GARFO and NEFSC staff. Demonstrate that the concerns of the recreational fishing community are incorporated when alternative management measures are considered and evaluated.



West Marine

MACHIAS SAVINGS BANK

SUMMARY

This Implementation Plan is designed to highlight the importance of recreational fisheries for the Region and Center. We intend for this plan to be a living guidance document to better focus our efforts in supporting and enhancing recreational fisheries and their management. The success of the plan requires collaboration and participation of our management partners and the entire recreational fishing community, including both the for-hire and private angler sectors.



**National Saltwater Recreational
Fisheries Policy
West Coast
Regional Implementation Plan
2016-2017**



Foreward

Dear West Coast Anglers,

It is our pleasure to share with you the West Coast Region's Recreational Fisheries Implementation Plan (Implementation Plan) for 2016-2017. This Implementation Plan builds on the accomplishments and progress made under the Region's Recreational Fisheries Action Agenda for 2014-2015, and is a living document meant to serve as our commitment to continuing the close working relationship that has been established with you, our valued West Coast recreational fishing stakeholders. This partnership is vital to ensure that the needed science and proactive management is in place to foster economically viable and sustainable recreational fisheries and the habitat that supports them, now and into the future. This implementation plan is consistent with the goals of our National Recreational Fisheries Policy and Implementation Plan,¹ and it is designed to be a discrete list of action items aligned with NOAA Fisheries' mission and budgetary resources. Its purpose is to both complement existing science and management processes and add value to NOAA's commitment to recreational fisheries issues.

Recreational fishing on the U.S. West Coast presents a vast array of quality fishing opportunities in both state and federal waters. From the United States-Mexico border in the south to the United States-Canada border in the north, with approximately 1,300 miles of coastline in between, these waters support a broad range of marine life, including bluefin and albacore tuna, Chinook and coho salmon, and many species of groundfish. Each year, anglers from all across the United States and the world visit our ports and communities and support our local economies by fishing for these iconic gamefish. The fertile West Coast waters are found within the dynamic California Current, which is characterized as a highly productive and variable ecosystem. Within the past year, the variability has been on grand display with the ongoing El Niño event that is bringing exotic species such as wahoo and blue marlin within range of U.S. West Coast recreational anglers. It also presents a unique set of science and management challenges that we cooperatively address in some of the projects contained within this plan. These challenges include impacts from the ongoing drought, climate change, ocean pollution and acidification, El Niño and La Niña, the "warm water blob" and associated domoic acid outbreaks, and the recurrent boom and bust cycles for forage fish that provide the foundation for our West Coast recreational fisheries. These impacts can have dramatic effects on populations of West Coast gamefish, including salmon, whose survival has been shown to decrease at various life stages during prolonged drought and recurring El Niño events.

These challenges will take a coordinated and cooperative effort to address, and we are confident that, with your help, we can meet the call and provide the trusted science and management to continue

¹ http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/management/recreational/documents/noaa_refish_policy.pdf

supporting our West Coast communities, businesses, and valued stakeholders. We thank you for your role in this effort and look forward to working closely with you to achieve the goals and objectives laid out in this plan. We value your input and feedback on this living document so please feel free to contact our Recreational Fisheries Coordinator or one of our Recreational Fisheries specialists in our Regional Field Offices and Science Centers up and down the West Coast. Their contact information can be found in Appendix B.

Thank you and see you on the water!

Cisco Werner, Director
Southwest Fisheries Science Center

John Stein, Director
Northwest Fisheries Science Center

Will Steele, Regional Administrator
NOAA Fisheries West Coast Regional Office

WEST COAST REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Many U.S. West Coast fisheries are managed as a shared enterprise between numerous federal, state, tribal, and international bodies. The NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region (WCR) manages fisheries in federal waters off California, Oregon, and Washington, with interstate coordination facilitated through the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission.¹ The Pacific Fishery Management Council² and NOAA Fisheries co-manage fisheries primarily through four fishery management plans (FMPs): coastal pelagic species, groundfish, salmon, and highly migratory species. Our Science Centers in the Southwest³ and in the Northwest⁴ provide trusted science in support of federal fisheries management.

Marine recreational fisheries on the U.S. West Coast occur in both non-federal waters (0 to 3 nautical miles off the coast) and federal waters (3 to 200 nautical miles off the coast), and they encompass resident and non-resident anglers fishing from shore and private boats, and a commercial passenger fishing vessel (CPFV) fleet that provides access and guiding services to anglers. These recreational fisheries are economically, socially, and culturally important, measured in part by the number of jobs supported, the income generated by trip and durable goods–related expenditures, and the economic value placed on fishing and fishery resources by the public. In 2013, 1.7 million anglers took 7.5 million saltwater fishing trips generating more than 21,000 full- and part-time jobs, supporting in excess of \$2.5 billion in sales on the West Coast. Value-added impacts surpassed \$1.5 billion and durable equipment expenditures totaled approximately \$1.9 billion.

Each of the WCR FMPs includes federally managed species whose biological and economic sustainability are key to the health and success of our WCR businesses and communities. In the case of coastal pelagic species, the need to maintain healthy populations of sardines, anchovies, and other forage species is critical to support the growth and development of those species that depend on them for prey, as well as our CPFV and private vessel recreational fishing fleets that depend on them for live bait. In the case of groundfish, management has been heavily centered on the need to rebuild overfished stocks. For salmon, management of various stocks listed under the Endangered Species Act has had a similar effect. The resulting need to constrain some harvest of healthy stocks has had economic implications for recreational anglers, businesses, and communities due to the loss of landings and revenue. Regarding highly migratory species, domestic and international management measures to reduce fishing mortality on the overfished Pacific bluefin tuna have led to reduced bag limits and a temporary closure to historically important fishing grounds in Mexico, a key ally in the rebuilding of this transboundary stock.

¹ <http://www.psmfc.org/>

² <http://www.pcouncil.org/>

³ <https://swfsc.noaa.gov/>

⁴ <http://www.nwfsc.noaa.gov/>

As valued WCR stakeholders, you have our commitment that the dedicated staff at our West Coast Regional Offices and Science Centers will continue to be actively engaged in studying, monitoring, and managing the varied and important recreational fisheries and resource challenges outlined above. We look forward to working cooperatively with you to ensure availability of quality recreational fishing opportunities for present and future generations to enjoy.



SETTING THE STAGE

We have made excellent progress in achieving many of the key objectives set out in the 2014-2015 WCR Recreational Fisheries Action Agenda (Progress Report, Appendix A). Highlights include research on the impacts of angling on survivorship of released sharks, the installment of monofilament recycling stations in key watersheds and access areas, collaborative biological and economic surveys with industry partners, and improvements in the quality of data used in stock assessments for important West Coast gamefish species. A major outreach focus was active engagement with anglers, which we accomplished via representation at major fishing shows in California and Washington, participating on sportsfishing talk radio shows, and establishing a comprehensive West Coast Rec Fish Listserv communications platform. Our outreach and education campaign told the story of innovative rockfish barotrauma research conducted in collaboration with our industry partners and scientists, documented best practices for safe catch-and-release of rockfish using descending devices in partnership with the West Coast state Fish and Wildlife Departments and the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, and communicated the science supporting the domestic and international management and conservation of the Pacific bluefin tuna.

Building off of this momentum, the WCR 2016-2017 Implementation Plan contains a suite of new projects and activities, as well as areas of renewed focus with on-going work from the previous Action Agenda. This plan was developed, in part, after the WCR Recreational Fisheries Coordinator and Recreational Fish Team members solicited input from key stakeholders in the recreational community to help identify concerns, develop action ideas, and offer suggestions on how best to address those issues.

Based on that input, additional discussions were held at various venues with industry leaders for further guidance and collaboration, including several Advisory Body meetings of the Council in 2015, the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee meeting in San Diego in April 2015, and the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Committee meeting in Santa Barbara in August 2015. We also reached out to leadership from national and regional angler associations including, among others, the Sportfishing Association of California and the Westport Charterboat Association.

We used the following guidelines to determine which projects and actions were appropriate for inclusion in this plan:

- Practical and timely (i.e., a project that can be implemented within the life of the Implementation Plan).
- Cost-effective and within available resources.

- Value added (i.e., a new activity or renewed focus on an existing activity).
- Alignment with the WCR Strategic Plan specifically and, more generally, with NOAA Fisheries' overarching mission.¹

The West Coast Regional Office and the Southwest and Northwest Fisheries Science Centers have Strategic Plans² that guide priority setting and overall direction. Recreational fisheries issues, and the science supporting their management, are key components to these Strategic Plans. The WCR's strategic plan identifies our priorities for the next 5 years, from 2016 through 2020, and will be used by leadership to guide internal decision-making and resource allocation. A key strategy in the West Coast Regional Office Strategic Plan is to increase engagement with anglers in carrying out NOAA Fisheries' Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Engagement Initiative on the West Coast to enhance recreational fishing opportunity, improve recreational fisheries data, and strengthen communications between the agency and anglers.



¹ http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/aboutus/our_mission.html

² http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/about_us/strategic_plan.html; <https://swfsc.noaa.gov/uploadedFiles/Home/SWFSCStratSciencePlan-2013.pdf>; <http://www.nwfsc.noaa.gov/about/planning/index.cfm>

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Support ecosystem conservation and enhancement

A healthy and properly functioning California Current ecosystem serves as the foundation for sustainable recreational fisheries and the communities that depend upon them. However, the pervasive impacts of trash and debris accumulating in our rivers, watersheds, and oceans have been widely recognized and are harmful to human health and the environment. Addressing the many factors that influence ecosystem health requires an effective and ongoing public-private partnership that includes the engagement of anglers as key stewards of the resource. Actions supporting this guiding principle include:

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Empower anglers as resource stewards by developing and distributing education and outreach materials to provide them with straightforward interpretations of recreational fisheries regulations, research, and management actions for federally managed species.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Support research that improves knowledge of community structure and ecosystem linkages between the inshore habitats and offshore production of recreationally important fishes.
- Coordinate with U.S. West Coast anglers to increase participation in marine debris and coastal cleanup programs to prevent trash and debris from causing harm to our oceans, wildlife, and coastal economies.

Support ecosystem conservation and enhancement	
Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
<i>Improve species health by avoiding and reducing the impacts of unwanted interactions</i>	<p>Facilitate development of best practices for: deterrence of whale entanglements in recreational crab fishing gear, increasing their post-release survivorship.</p> <p>Promote awareness of Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed sea turtle and sportfishing interactions and best practices for safe release in southern California coastal waters and embayments.</p> <p>Encourage effective use of descending devices and other means of reducing barotrauma-related mortality of rockfishes.</p> <p>Support improved understanding of recreational fisheries issues among those participating in the Council process (Council members, Advisory Bodies, and the public).</p>
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Support research that improves knowledge of community structure and ecosystem linkages between the inshore habitats and offshore production of recreationally important fishes.</i>	<p>Explore groundfish community structure in Oregon and California by incorporating at-sea observer and bathymetry data in model structure for stock assessments (Project 3C).</p> <p>Conduct water quality modeling of estuarine habitat for salmonids in the Russian River, California, basin to maximize habitat conditions for salmon and steelhead trout.</p>
<i>Coordinate with U.S. West Coast anglers to increase participation in Marine Debris and Coastal Cleanup Programs to prevent trash and debris from causing harm to our oceans, wildlife, and coastal economies.</i>	<p>Coordinate with West Coast marine debris removal programs to report lost gear and hire SCUBA divers to remove gear from near-shore waters.</p> <p>Coordinate with West Coast beach cleanup programs to remove trash and debris.</p>
<i>Conserve and restore salmonid habitat in Puget Sound.</i>	<p>As part of the NOAA Habitat Blueprint, NOAA Fisheries will work with federal, state, tribal, and local partners to develop new strategies to conserve salmon habitat in Puget Sound benefiting the ecosystem as well as recreational, commercial, and tribal fisheries.</p>

Promote public access to quality recreational fishing opportunities

Working with West Coast state and tribal co-managers and key public stakeholders, fishing access is collectively determined through the Council process. In addition to supporting access to fishing opportunities through participation in the Council process, creating enduring public-private partnerships to foster ethical fishing practices and enhancing non-traditional fishing opportunities for the public is a key objective under this implementation plan. Actions supporting this guiding principle include:

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Continue programs with established partners that take children and non-traditional fishery participants, including youth groups, veterans, disabled anglers, and minority groups, on fishing trips to improve stewardship awareness and ethical fishing practices.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Recruit and support West Coast recreational fishing sector participation in planning and implementation of restoration projects benefitting recreational fisheries, including projects in identified Regional Habitat Focus Areas.
- Support development and siting of artificial reefs to enhance nearshore rocky reef habitat and increase recreational fishing opportunities.
- Cultivate a partnership with WCR National Marine Sanctuaries to launch a public-private effort to enhance non-traditional fishing opportunities in sanctuary waters.

Promote public access to quality recreational fishing opportunities	
Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
<i>Continue programs with established partners that take children and non-traditional fishery participants, including youth groups, veterans, disabled anglers, and minority groups, on fishing trips to improve stewardship awareness and ethical fishing practices.</i>	Continue support and participation in the Friends of Rollo (http://rollokids.org/) and Fish4Life (http://www.fishforlife.org/) youth fishing programs in southern California.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Participate in planning and implementation of restoration projects benefitting recreational fisheries, including projects in identified Regional Habitat Focus Areas.</i>	Attend and participate in applicable County Task Forces under the umbrella of the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project. Attend and participate in the California Fish Passage Forum and the Pacific Marine and Estuarine Fish Habitat Partnership. Assist in restoration efforts in Tillamook Bay and Siuslaw River, Oregon, to increase survival and abundance of salmon and other recreationally important species.
<i>Support development and citing of artificial reefs to enhance nearshore rocky reef habitat and increase recreational fishing opportunities.</i>	Engage in cooperative planning effort to design and locate an artificial reef off of the coast of Eureka, California, to enhance limited nearshore rocky bottom habitat and increase fishing opportunities.
<i>Cultivate a partnership with WCR National Marine Sanctuaries to launch a public-private effort to enhance non-traditional fishing opportunities in sanctuary waters.</i>	Partner with the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary and the Friends of Rollo Program to take local fourth grade students fishing as part of the “Every Kid in the Park” Initiative.

Coordinate with state and federal management entities

Sustainable and efficient conservation and management of West Coast recreational fisheries requires effective coordination and engagement both with the public and with our co-management colleagues. This coordination and engagement is critical to improve the quality and quantity of data used in support of science and management that addresses the many issues and challenges impacting West Coast recreational fisheries. Actions supporting this guiding principle include:

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Strengthen existing partnerships with state fish and wildlife agencies (FWAs) and other state resource agencies to collect needed data for conservation and management of West Coast co-managed species.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Review and modify existing databases with state FWDs to improve quality of data used in stock assessments for co-managed species.
- Partner with state FWAs to collect biological data needed to meet domestic and international management obligations for co-managed species.
- Cultivate a partnership with WCR National Marine Sanctuaries to serve as resource for management, research, and enhanced fishing opportunities.

Coordinate with state and federal management entities	
Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
<i>Strengthen existing partnership with state fish and wildlife agencies and other state resource agencies to collect needed data for conservation and management of West Coast co-managed species.</i>	Collaborate with state and industry partners on the Pacific Bluefin Tuna Recreational Fisheries Sampling Enhancement Project to provide fishery managers and scientists with harvest estimates (by weight) of tunas taken onboard southern California CPFV boats.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Review and modify existing databases with state fish and wildlife agencies to improve quality of data used in stock assessments for co-managed species.</i>	Review and error-check the 1987-1998 California Department of Fish and Wildlife onboard groundfish observer survey data and provide the updated data to stock assessment scientists.

<p><i>Partner with state fish and wildlife agencies to collect biological data needed to meet domestic and international management obligations for co-managed species.</i></p>	<p>Partner with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife on dockside monitoring of non-treaty ocean salmon recreational fisheries to collect scale samples and coded wire tag returns to determine harvest rates, stock composition, compliance with Pacific Salmon Treaty obligations, and forecast impacts of fisheries on various stocks.</p>
<p><i>Cultivate a partnership with WCR National Marine Sanctuaries to serve as resource for management, research, and enhanced fishing opportunities.</i></p>	<p>Attend and participate in West Coast Sanctuary Science Advisory Committee meetings when relevant recreational fisheries items are on the agenda.</p>

Advance innovative solutions to evolving science, management, and environmental challenges

Successful cooperative research efforts with the recreational fisheries stakeholders on the West Coast have led to innovative and enhanced methods to collect data in support of recreational fisheries conservation and management. Given the increasing need for near real-time management of fisheries under quotas and catch limits, including the West Coast recreational groundfish fishery, these innovative data collection methods are a critical component to help rebuild overfished stocks and maintain economically viable fishing communities and the businesses they support. Maintaining and building upon these successful efforts, the actions supporting this guiding principle include:

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Support cooperative research and federal grant programs to investigate bycatch and release mortality reduction tools and handling techniques to ensure the use of best practices for safe and effective catch-and-release.
- Assess the effects of management actions on angler participation in West Coast recreational fisheries.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Assess efficacy of angler survey methods to enhance accuracy and precision of economic data used to manage recreational fisheries.
- Engage in angler-supported research to collect genetic samples to better identify and quantify stock structure dynamics for recreational game fish species.



Advance innovative solutions to evolving science, management, and environmental challenges	
Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
<i>Support cooperative research and federal grant programs to investigate bycatch and release mortality reduction tools and handling techniques to ensure the use of best practices for safe and effective catch-and-release.</i>	Collaborate with industry and non-profit research institutes to conduct research on catch-and-release survivorship for sport-caught Pacific bluefin tuna.
<i>Assess the effects of management actions on angler participation in West Coast recreational fisheries.</i>	Analyze the regulatory impacts of recreational fishery management alternatives for Pacific bluefin tuna.
<i>Engage in angler supported research to support fisheries science.</i>	Sample the recreational Pacific bluefin tuna catch off southern California to determine size structure of fish caught by the San Diego CPFV fleet.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Assess efficacy of angler survey methods to enhance accuracy and precision of economic data used to manage recreational fisheries.</i>	Undertake a recreational economic survey mode study to determine the feasibility and preferred survey methods to collect angler trip expenditure data from the San Diego CPFV fleet.
<i>Engage in angler-supported research to collect genetic samples to better identify and quantify stock structure dynamics for recreational game fish species.</i>	Carry out a genetic comparison of Pacific halibut caught by recreational anglers off northern California to those caught further north to better understand stock structure.

Provide scientifically sound and trusted social, cultural, economic, and ecological information

Engaging and involving West Coast anglers and interested stakeholders in the design, implementation, and use of data collected to support recreational fisheries conservation and management is a critical component in achieving sound and lasting programs and policies. Continuing to improve and verify the science that underpins these programs and policies, while working to improve the public's understanding and confidence, is one of the key actions under this plan. Actions supporting this guiding principle include:

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Engage recreational fishermen in data collection and reporting efforts to benefit protected resources recovery and conservation through citizen science programs to report tagged animals and document sightings of protected species.
- Bolster understanding of the social and economic importance of recreational fishing.
- Inform anglers and the public on seafood safety and consumption guidelines for harvested marine gamefish species.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Provide recreational catch and effort information that supports stock assessments and informs management.
- Identify key areas for habitat mapping to foster improved characterization and assessment of recreational fish habitats.

Provide scientifically sound and trusted social, cultural, economic, and ecological information	
Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
<i>Engage recreational fishermen in data collection and reporting efforts to benefit protected resources recovery and conservation through citizen science programs to report tagged animals and document sightings of protected species.</i>	<p>Encourage anglers to participate in the Southwest Fisheries Science Center's (SWFSC) Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Biological Sample Donation Program.</p> <p>Encourage anglers to participate in the SWFSC's Basking Shark Reporting Program.</p> <p>Encourage anglers to participate in the SWFSC's HMS Billfish Tagging.</p> <p>Improve fish identification and catch reporting to increase the accuracy and precision of creel surveys and other appropriate reporting mechanisms.</p>
<i>Bolster understanding of the social and economic importance of recreational fishing.</i>	<p>Develop a bio-economic model to examine the effects of management actions on angler effort, economic value, economic impact, and stock biomass of marine recreational fisheries off the coast of Washington and Oregon.</p> <p>Conduct an economic survey of West Coast anglers to estimate the effects of changes in catch rates and management actions on angler effort and economic values.</p>
<i>Inform anglers and the public on seafood safety and consumption guidelines for harvested marine gamefish species.</i>	Assist Montrose Settlements Restoration Program (MSRP) in educating anglers on seafood safety through their Fishing Outreach Mini-Grant Program.
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Provide recreational catch and effort information that supports stock assessments and informs management.</i>	<p>Conduct analysis of relative abundance indices derived from fishery-dependent and fishery-independent groundfish monitoring programs to incorporate into stock assessments.</p> <p>Conduct sensitivity analyses of relative indices of abundance developed from onboard and dockside surveys of the west coast recreational fisheries to incorporate into stock assessments.</p> <p>Conduct southern California shelf rockfish hook and line survey to provide an annual index of relative abundance and a time series of biological data for several key species of shelf rockfish.</p>
<i>Identify key areas for habitat mapping to foster improved characterization and assessment of recreational fish habitats.</i>	<p>Examine fishery interactions, catch-and-release mortality, and habitat usage of juvenile cowcod to understand the effects of fishery interactions.</p> <p>Quantify seasonal shifts in walleye diet composition in the Columbia River basin to examine the ecological role and extent to which walleye prey on ESA-listed salmonids.</p>

Communicate and engage with the recreational fishing public

One of the key drivers behind the creation of a permanent West Coast Recreational Fisheries Coordinator (RFC) position was to improve two-way communications with West Coast anglers and the public. Without this shared communications pathway, support for the programs and policies needed to sustainably and cooperatively manage West Coast recreational fisheries would not be possible. As part of this implementation plan, the RFC and Recreational Fisheries Team Members, with support from regional and center communications staff, are committed to maintaining and enhancing this critical engagement function. Actions supporting this guiding principle include:

Ongoing Responsibilities:

- Attend major community events to establish two-way communications with anglers and gain feedback on time-sensitive and important recreational fishing issues and challenges.
- Maintain strong working relationships and open lines of communication with recreational fishing community leaders to ensure regular dialogue and a policy of “no surprises.”

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

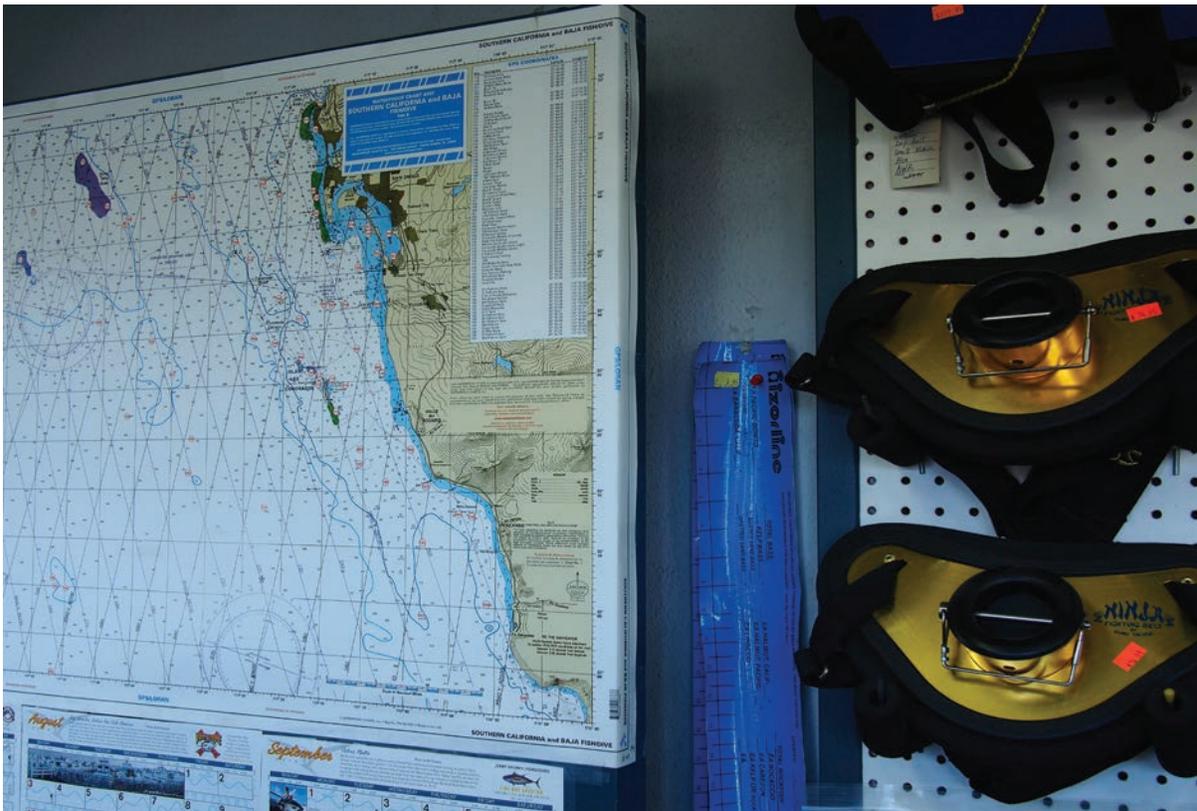
- Increase the amount of content (e.g., feature stories, videos, alerts) relevant to anglers.
- Strengthen internal communication and outreach capacity by providing training to regional recreational fisheries coordinators.

Communicate and engage with the recreational fishing public	
Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
<i>Attend major community events to establish two-way communications with anglers and gain feedback on time-sensitive and important recreational fishing issues and challenges.</i>	Participate in recreational fishing conventions and periodically attend relevant West Coast fishing club meetings and events. Participate in sportfishing radio shows, including southern California’s “Let’s Talk Hook Up” Show, to discuss relevant West Coast recreational fisheries science and management issues and concerns.
<i>Maintain strong working relationships and open lines of communication with recreational fishing community leaders to ensure regular dialogue and a policy of “no surprises.”</i>	Maintain effective internal communications to ensure timely sharing, both internally and externally, of relevant recreational fisheries science and management issues and concerns. Empower anglers as resource stewards by developing and distributing education and outreach materials to provide them with straightforward interpretations of recreational fisheries regulations, research, and management actions for federally managed species.

Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Increase the amount of content (e.g., feature stories, videos, alerts) relevant to anglers.</i>	<p>Participate in additional West Coast region sportfishing radio shows, including the “Hooked on Oregon” Radio Show, to discuss relevant West Coast recreational fisheries science and management issues and concerns.</p> <p>Work with West Coast communications specialists within the region and at centers to produce and distribute timely outreach products focused on recreational fisheries research and management issues.</p> <p>Acknowledge West Coast recreational fisheries constituents for exemplary marine resource stewardship with a NOAA Fisheries Award (plaque).</p>
<i>Strengthen internal communication and outreach capacity by providing training to regional recreational fisheries coordinators.</i>	<p>As needed, encourage training in media relations and effective messaging and public speaking for the WCR RFC and Recreational Fisheries Team Members.</p>

SUMMARY

This implementation plan highlights the importance of recreational fisheries for the WCR and Science Centers, and should be considered a living document that will help us proactively plan for and execute the science, management, and outreach efforts needed to sustainably manage West Coast recreational fisheries and communities. The success of the plan will require active cooperation of the West Coast recreational fishing community leaders and stakeholders and we look forward to fostering that cooperation now and in the coming years.





**National Saltwater Recreational
Fisheries Policy**
Southeast Regional Implementation Plan
2016-2017

Foreward

The 2016-2017 Southeast Recreational Fishing Implementation Plan was developed collaboratively between the Southeast Regional Office and the Southeast Fisheries Science Center. This regional plan is aligned with both the National Saltwater Recreational Fishing Policy and the plan to implement that policy. The intent of this plan is to have the national goals and objectives largely identified by the saltwater recreational fishing community considered throughout our region-specific initiatives.

We encourage you to read this plan and reflect upon the progress made in building sustainable fisheries over the years that resulted from the dedication of anglers like you, NOAA Fisheries experts, and our partners including fishery management councils, marine fisheries commissions, academia, and state agencies. For example, within the past few years catch levels for South Atlantic yellowtail snapper, vermilion snapper and black seabass, as well as Gulf of Mexico gag grouper and red snapper were increased—some to the highest levels ever seen since the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act was implemented in 1976.

Over the past few decades we've seen significant changes in saltwater recreational fishing. We've also seen some of these changes present as management challenges, especially as technology has progressed and more anglers are introduced to this great sport. After all, the Southeast is home to more than half of the nation's saltwater anglers, and innovations in fish finding technologies and fishing gear continue to improve anglers' ability to find and catch fish.

Despite these challenges, we must continue generating success stories together as conserving our saltwater fish populations and habitats will ultimately provide recreational fishing opportunities for generations to come. This plan is one way NOAA Fisheries is reaching out to the recreational fishing community to continue moving in such a positive direction. The plan highlights strategies to support ecosystem conservation and management; promote public access to quality recreational fishing opportunities; continue state-federal coordination; advance innovative scientific and management solutions; and continue to improve communication and engagement with the recreational fishing public.

In closing, recreational fishing is an economic driver for the Southeast United States. Anglers come from all over the world to hook up on that long-awaited billfish off the Carolinas and South Florida, land a giant grouper off Florida's west coast, or take their children to a favorite reef for red snapper in the northern Gulf of Mexico. It is an amazing sport that we must work together, now more than ever, to preserve because it is not only a pastime in the Southeast, but it's a way of life.

Dr. Roy Crabtree, Regional Administrator
NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office

Dr. Bonnie Ponwith, Director
Southeast Fisheries Science Center

SOUTHEAST REGIONAL OVERVIEW

NOAA Fisheries' Southeast Region includes federal waters in the Gulf of Mexico, the South Atlantic from North Carolina to Florida's East Coast, and the Caribbean including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. It is made up of some of the most varied habitats and climates, as well as numerous recreationally important fish species and fishing traditions. In 2014, the region boasted the largest recreational fishery in the country with more than 4.9 million anglers taking more than 40 million fishing trips.

Marine fish and fisheries have been vital to the prosperity and cultural identity of coastal communities in the southeastern United States. Recreational fishing is an important social activity for individuals, families, and communities, and is a critical economic driver of and contributor to local and regional economies, as well as the national economy.

Fishing has enormous cultural value as well. Anglers are some of the greatest conservationists and voices for fisheries and NOAA strives to work in concert as fellow stewards to protect and preserve fisheries and fishing opportunities. Scientists and specialists at NOAA work continuously to manage fish and fishing as part of the fishery management council process, as mandated by Congress under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, with current and innovative science as well as input from the fishing community. This collective approach has produced a number of increased recreational fishing opportunities in the region.

NOAA Fisheries in the southeast region is composed of the Southeast Regional Office (SERO) and the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC). The Southeast Regional Office is made up of multiple divisions whose collective goal is the successful management of fisheries. NOAA's SERO office manages federal fisheries and conserves and protects protected species and habitat throughout the South Atlantic, Caribbean, and Gulf of Mexico regions. SERO also works closely with each of the fishery management councils to apply science-based management approaches to maintain healthy fish stocks important to commercial, recreational, and subsistence fisheries. NOAA Fisheries also focuses on the protection and conservation of listed species such as marine mammals, corals, sea turtles, and smalltooth sawfish. Together, NOAA's SERO manages more than 160 species through 17 Fishery Management Plans (FMPs). Although not all of these species are targeted or harvested by recreational anglers, their protection and sustainable management contribute to the overall health of the marine environment, thus enhancing the availability of those species most prized by recreational anglers. In concert with the SERO, the SEFSC manages multidisciplinary research, data collection, and stock assessment programs to provide scientific information to support national and regional programs of NOAA Fisheries and to respond to the needs of regional fishery management councils, Interstate and International Fishery Commissions, Fishery Development Foundations, government agencies, and the general public. The SERO and SEFSC work closely on many recreational fishing initiatives and management issues and will continue to do so to achieve the objectives outlined in the National Saltwater Recreational Fishing Policy.

SETTING THE STAGE

Recreational fishery interests in the Southeast Region are represented through a variety of fishing organizations, non-government organizations, state and federal governments, marine fishery commissions, and fishery management councils. The Southeast Region consists of three separate fishery management councils— Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean, and South Atlantic. The Southeast Regional Office and Southeast Fisheries Science Center staff continue to have an open dialogue with the recreational fishing community through various mechanisms, including open question-and-answer sessions hosted by the regional administrator and science center director at fishery management council meetings, recreational constituent conference calls on Gulf of Mexico red snapper, meeting with Southeast recreational fishing representatives from each of the fishery management councils and members of the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee’s Recreational Fisheries Subcommittee, and many other conversations. These types of forums are essential to gaining feedback on issues concerning or important to recreational fishermen.

This plan is designed to complement and support the National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy, the Southeast Region’s Strategic Plan, and build on previous Southeast Region recreational fisheries action agendas. It is intended to help guide NOAA Fisheries’ actions pertaining to recreational fisheries in the Southeast Region. This plan will serve as a basic roadmap for action, but is a living document that can accommodate new challenges and needs as they arise. It is organized around the six guiding principles identified in the National Saltwater Recreational Policy. These principles allow for transparent understanding of NOAA’s goals and objectives working with the recreational fishing community and help frame the goals of successful fisheries management in the Southeast.



Guiding Principles

Support ecosystem conservation and enhancement

Marine and coastal ecosystems across the nation suffer impacts and loss of services from a variety of threats. In the Southeast some of these factors include habitat loss and degradation from coastal development, sea level rise, tropical storms and hurricanes, and invasive species fishing interactions. Protection and restoration of our valuable marine habitats benefit these ecosystems and the species that depend on them. NOAA Fisheries is required to conduct consultations for any project that may impact valuable habitats or protected species. An essential fish habitat (EFH) consultation is the process used by NOAA Fisheries to protect and conserve habitats determined to be especially important to commercial and recreational marine fish and shellfish. NOAA Fisheries also is required to conduct consultations under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) to ensure that actions they authorize, fund, or carry out do not jeopardize the existence of any species listed under the ESA, or destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat of any listed species. Using the best science to monitor and understand these systems and including stakeholder input, NOAA strives to achieve this goal.

Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity:

- Improve understanding of ecosystems services of habitat and forage species and climate change impacts.
- Restore habitat for recreationally targeted fish stocks and/or for the forage fish upon which those species depend.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Sentinel Site Cooperative.
- Increasing recreational angler stewardship activities and activities to support healthy ecosystems.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
<p><i>Improve understanding of ecosystems services provided by habitat and forage species and impacts of climate change.</i></p>	<p>Support targeted efforts to advance fisheries modeling to include ecosystem dynamics through small pilot efforts (e.g., Atlantis model under Habitat Blueprint) to inform fisheries management.</p> <p>In 2015-2016, NOAA Fisheries and partners will develop Regional Action Plans that identify strengths, weaknesses, priorities, and actions to implement the Strategy in each Region over the next 3 to 5 years.</p> <p>Develop regional climate change strategy.</p>
<p><i>Restore habitat for recreationally targeted fish stocks and/or for the forage fish upon which those species depend.</i></p>	<p>Improve habitat conditions for fisheries and coastal and marine life providing economic, cultural, and other ecological benefits in NOAA's Southeast Habitat Blueprint areas (Puerto Rico's Northeast Reserves and Culebra Island and Florida's Biscayne Bay).</p> <p>Continue to address increasing threats to coral reef fisheries caused by invasive species, such as lionfish in the Atlantic, Caribbean, and Gulf of Mexico.</p>
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<p><i>Support Sentinel Site work to solve specific regional coastal problems affecting fishermen and communities.</i></p>	<p>Assess the impacts of sea level change and develop key conservation tools for local, state, and regional managers, including maps to define high- and low-risk areas at the North Carolina and Northern Gulf of Mexico Sentinel Sites.</p>
<p><i>Increase recreational angler stewardship activities and activities to support healthy ecosystems.</i></p>	<p>Charleston Harbor Watershed Habitat Conservation and Restoration. NOAA will pilot an interdisciplinary approach for prioritizing tidal creek restoration efforts. This approach will include criteria based on engineering feasibility, public perceptions, and the value of these habitats for fish and shellfish as well as for human health.</p>
<p><i>Contribute expertise to agency exploration of the potential role of artificial reefs.</i></p>	<p>Participate in the ASMFC-NOAA Fisheries Artificial Reef Workshop.</p>

Promote public access to quality recreational fishing opportunities

The SERO and SEFSC continue to strive to ensure healthy and robust fish populations are available for anglers to access and enjoy for generations to come. Recreational fishing opportunities are expanded through sound conservation and management principles, which include the regular review of allocations and regulatory measures, improving post-release survival, and enhanced habitat protection and restoration. These are the core tenets of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and are central goals in NOAA Fisheries management.

Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity:

- Collect and employ the best data to make sound management decisions to allow for increased public access for anglers.
- Safeguard the fishing experience by helping anglers avoid adverse interactions with protected species.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Identify and highlight recreational fishing opportunities.



Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
On-Going Responsibilities/Activity	
<p><i>Collect and employ sound data to support management decisions which may allow for increased public access for anglers.</i></p>	<p>Continue to conduct and support stock assessments for federally managed species, including red snapper, gag grouper, black sea bass, and other recreational target species in the South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean.</p> <p>Use the best available science to create consistent and predictable open seasons, while preventing catch limit overages, to allow recreational anglers to plan and pursue various species of fish throughout the year.</p>
<p><i>Safeguard the fishing experience by helping anglers avoid adverse interactions with protected species.</i></p>	<p>Expand programs like “Cast With Care” and “Dolphin Smart” to educate anglers about marine mammals and ESA-protected species like smalltooth sawfish and how to avoid causing injuries and takes while fishing.</p>
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<p><i>Highlight recreational fishing opportunities.</i></p>	<p>Highlight recreational fishing opportunities in National Marine Sanctuaries in the Southeast Region (Gray’s Reef, Florida Keys and Flower Garden Banks).</p> <p>Create an “OPT IN” text system to notify anglers via text message of open and closed seasons and species in each of the three Southeast regions.</p>
<p><i>Support identification of potential alternative management approaches to stabilize recreational fishing opportunities.</i></p>	<p>Provide expertise in an upcoming alternative management workshop.</p>

Coordinate with state and federal management entities

Coordination and communication with all engaged partners is a hallmark of successful fishery management. Given the large geographic area of the Southeast Region and the numerous partners involved, sustainable fishery management depends on a collective effort with a common goal. NOAA works hand-in-hand with state, commonwealth, and territorial governments; fishery management councils and commissions; and NGOs, academic institutions, sister federal agencies, and the recreational fishing community.

Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity:

- Create and identify opportunities to work with fishery management partners and to allow for increased communication and collaboration.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Provide agency expertise in support of partner projects.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
<p><i>Create and identify opportunities to work with fishery management partners, and increase communication and collaboration</i></p>	<p>Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity</p> <p>Seek balanced stakeholder representation, including recreational fishing on the South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean Fishery Management Councils.</p> <p>Engage the Atlantic States and Gulf States Fisheries Commissions and state agencies in discussions to identify opportunities to collaborate on initiatives and research projects that benefit the science and management used to improve recreational fisheries.</p> <p>Maintain a culture of collaboration with the USFWS Ecological Services Office in the Southeast Region routinely during the regulatory review process.</p> <p>Continue to support the Fishery Management Councils and states to identify shared goals and develop management options that more equitably distribute rebuilding benefits.</p>

Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Provide agency expertise in support of partner projects.</i>	<p>Support the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council to complete a Citizen Science blueprint, which will document the workshop recommendations for designing a Fishery Citizen Science Program.</p> <p>Work in cooperation with the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program and the Gulf Fisheries Informational Network to develop the necessary operational and funding plans for implementing the for-hire electronic trip reporting programs in the sub-regions where partners desire to implement them.</p>

Advance innovative solutions to evolving science, management, and environmental challenges

NOAA scientists and experts within the SERO and the SEFSC endeavor to develop new and innovative approaches to fishery science and management, providing tools to better understand processes and events. These methods and techniques enhance our understanding of habitat conservation and restoration, fish populations, and dynamics and instill confidence in our constituents that we use the best science available to make the best management decisions for sustainable fishing.

Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity:

- Enhance data collection in the Southeast Region with sound scientific techniques and innovative approaches.
- Continue to encourage angler support for innovative solutions to fishery management challenges through a variety of tools and resources.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Support the increase of electronic report of catches across various fishing sectors.
- Increase availability of educational opportunities to empower anglers to become part of the management process.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing	Responsibilities/Activity
<p><i>Enhance data collection in the Southeast Region with sound scientific techniques and innovative approaches</i></p>	<p>The SEFSC and SERO will continue to collaborate on CRP-funded projects that involve the fishing industry, stakeholders, and university scientists, in all phases of research programs, including survey/statistical design, conducting of research, analysis of results, and communication of results.</p> <p>Work to implement the Southeast Region Electronic Monitoring and Reporting Regional Implementation Plan.</p> <p>Work with the states of Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, and Texas to test supplemental angling survey solutions that could best meet management data needs.</p> <p>Work with the State of Louisiana to compare the results of MRIP and LA Creel, and complete an independent expert review of the state survey design.</p>
<p><i>Continue to encourage angler support for innovative solutions to fishery management challenges through a variety of tools and resources</i></p>	<p>Support Council work to evaluate allocation-based management approaches for red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico.</p>
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<p><i>Advance data collection through support of electronic catch reporting.</i></p>	<p>Work with the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils, states, commissions, ACCSP, and the Gulf Fisheries Information Network (GulfFIN) to develop an implementation strategy to support electronic catch reporting in the for-hire sector.</p>
<p><i>Increase educational opportunities to empower anglers to become part of the management process.</i></p>	<p>Maintain agency participation in the Marine Resource Education Program and seek to expand opportunities throughout the Southeast Region.</p>
<p><i>Support new Congressionally directed research on Gulf red snapper.</i></p>	<p>Collaborate with state and federal partners and with academic and other private sector interests in developing a new Gulf of Mexico red snapper research program.</p>

Provide scientifically sound and trusted social, cultural, economic, and ecological information

The objective of science-based conservation and management is to use sound scientific data, information, and advice to achieve the management goals of NOAA Fisheries, fishery management councils, state commissions, and international organizations. At the same time the public must have confidence in this information and understand how it will provide long-term biological, ecological, economic, and social benefits to fishing, recreation, tourism, and other activities. These actions support this guiding principle.

Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity:

- Improve recreational catch and effort data for pulse and other rare event fisheries.
- Collect statistically valid, long-term recreational fisheries data in the USVI.
- Continue to evaluate the social and economic effects that recreational fishing has on coastal communities.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Seek to improve through collaboration and scientifically valid methods data collection and sampling techniques to acquire data for better management decisions.

Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
<p><i>Improve recreational catch and effort data for pulse and other rare event fisheries</i></p>	<p><i>On-Going Responsibilities/Activity</i> Execute directed projects to improve recreational catch and effort data for pulse and other rare event fisheries, specifically red snapper in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico.</p>
<p><i>Collect statistically valid, long-term recreational fisheries data in the USVI.</i></p>	<p>Continue to explore opportunities to characterize recreational fisheries in the USVI through collaboration with territorial partners.</p>
<p><i>Continue to evaluate the social and economic effects that recreational fishing has on coastal communities.</i></p>	<p>Continue to evaluate the social and economic effects that recreational fishing has on coastal communities, along with the subsequent impacts management decisions have on them.</p>

Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<i>Seek to improve through collaboration and scientifically valid methods data collection and sampling techniques to acquire data for better management decisions.</i>	<p>Work to collect trip-level economic data pertaining to last trip revenues, expenses, and operating characteristics in a 2016 Economic Mail Survey.</p> <p>Transition to the use of new mail-based recreational fishing effort surveys on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, including incorporation of new data into stock assessments.</p>

Communicate and engage with the recreational fishing public

Sustainable fishery management depends on two-way communication and input. NOAA realizes open and frequent dialogue with anglers is necessary to achieve successful fishing practices. Anglers provide information and insight that can guide and enhance the science needed to be effective. It also allows for understanding challenges and working collaboratively to seek logical answers and effective solutions moving forward.

Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity:

- Identify opportunities for angler engagement in major NOAA Fisheries actions and decision-making that affect recreational fishing.
- Actively communicate with recreational captains and anglers to ensure participation and understanding on the management process with the states, councils, commissions, and NOAA Fisheries.

Areas of Enhanced Effort:

- Work with stakeholders, anglers, resource managers, and scientist to evaluate methods and techniques and to engage in open and transparent communication and collaborative efforts to better serve the recreational fishing community.



Objectives/Strategy	Projects/Deliverables
Ongoing Responsibilities/Activity	
<p><i>Identify opportunities for angler engagement in major NOAA Fisheries actions and decision-making that affect recreational fishing.</i></p>	<p>Actively engage recreational captains and anglers with open and meaningful conversation to encourage dialogue and increase understanding of needs from all perspectives.</p> <p>Continue to support and participate in the Southeast and Caribbean Marine Resource Education Program designed to provide an informal, hands-on educational setting for fishermen to learn about the federal science and management process.</p>
<p><i>Communicate with recreational captains and anglers to ensure participation and understanding on the management process with the states, councils, commissions, and NOAA Fisheries.</i></p>	<p>Maintain strong working relationships and open lines of communication with community leaders to ensure regular dialogue and a policy of “no surprises,” by meeting with them, calling them, etc.</p> <p>Meet with recreational constituents upon request.</p>
Areas of Enhanced Effort	
<p><i>Actively connect with the fishing public to enhance awareness, understanding of, and participation in the federal fisheries management process.</i></p>	<p>Work with interested stakeholder groups to host regular roundtable discussions to strengthen relationships and share information.</p> <p>Work with and encourage fishermen and others to participate productively in the fisheries management process, to improve cooperation and trust among fishermen, scientists, and fishery managers.</p> <p>Communicate the scientific rationale for management actions to stakeholders by explaining the scientific methods and findings that support the resulting management decisions.</p> <p>Communicate legal obligations and process limitations to establish accurate expectations about potential agency action.</p> <p>Strengthen communication and coordination with new and existing Recreational Fishing coordinators across and within regions providing more consistent communication with the recreational angling communities in each region.</p> <p>Enhance outreach in the Southeast Region to reduce bycatch and release mortality by educating anglers about innovative approaches.</p>
<p><i>Facilitate internal agency understanding and awareness of recreational fishing issues.</i></p>	<p>Host internal agency discussion between regional recreational coordinators.</p> <p>Lead internal recreational fishing discussion with SERO and SEFSC staff.</p>

SUMMARY

NOAA Fisheries strives to be a leader in fisheries management in the Southeast Region. Increased communication and partnering with recreational fishing interests has advanced our understanding of ongoing fishing issues. This plan is an opportunity to share with recreational anglers that NOAA does more than simply open and close fisheries, but that we are engaged in many aspects to protect and preserve fishing including habitat restoration, enforcement of conservation laws, new and groundbreaking science, and new avenues of education and outreach to anglers. Together, we can work to provide sustainable saltwater recreational fisheries resources by maintaining healthy marine and estuarine habitats; promote saltwater recreational fishing for the social, cultural, and economic benefit of the region and nation; and advance enduring participation and enjoyment of saltwater recreational fishing through science-based conservation and management.



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