



**NOAA
FISHERIES**

Regional Recreational Fisheries Action Agenda

2014–2015

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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



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A Message from the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries

I am proud to present NOAA Fisheries' Regional Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Action Agendas for 2014–2015. These Action Agendas are the culmination of an important collaborative dialogue with recreational fisheries constituents and signify our continuing commitment to anglers. They were prepared by NOAA Fisheries staff in our Regional Offices and Science Centers and will be implemented for, with, and by people in your community.

Our vision for the future is thriving fish stocks, healthy fish habitats, vibrant coastal communities, and world-class fisheries. Achieving this goal requires a foundation of trust—built through sustained action—between NOAA and the recreational saltwater fishing community. In 2009, NOAA pledged to improve relations with the recreational fishing community and announced the Recreational Fisheries Engagement Initiative. We have now made many improvements and completed dozens of important projects in every region and nationally. Responding to the requests of fishermen, we created a new opportunity for angler input, by establishing recreational fisheries working group associated with the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee, and we are improving recreational catch data through the Marine Recreational Information Program and socio-economic information through a number of surveys. We also are enhancing conservation by working with anglers to improve the survival of recreationally released fish. These updated Agendas build on our progress and put us on a path for continued success.

Our track record of measured, significant progress has helped us establish a firm foundation on which we can build as we turn our attention toward evolving issues. Looking forward, some of the issues and challenges we will face include: the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act; continued implementation of improved methods for recreational data collection and reporting; and increased demand for fishing opportunities as coastal populations grow and oceans warm.

An open and honest dialogue with the recreational community is critical. As we head toward our next Recreational Saltwater Fisheries Summit, planned for April 1–2, 2014, we'll look for new opportunities to engage about the future of recreational saltwater fishing. As our budgets continue to be a challenge, partnership becomes even more critical. Please take a few minutes to review this document and share it with others in your community. Follow our progress through our e-newsletter FishNews and through regional recreational fisheries websites. I look forward to continuing the conversation and I will see you on the water.

Eileen Sobeck
Assistant Administrator for Fisheries



Background

The marine recreational and non-commercial fishing community is NOAA Fisheries' largest single constituency. In 2011 alone, an estimated 11 million anglers took 70 million fishing trips, which contributed roughly \$85 billion to the national economy in sales and valued added impacts and supported 364,000 jobs. Recognizing that partnership is the best approach to effectively address the interests of anglers, NOAA embarked on the Recreational Fisheries Engagement Initiative, in 2009. The goal of this focused effort was to establish a stronger and more trusting partnership with the recreational fishing community. To implement this Initiative, a National Policy Advisor for Recreational Fisheries was appointed, and a National Recreational Fisheries team was created.

In 2010, NOAA Fisheries convened a National Saltwater Recreational Fishing Summit near Washington, DC, that gathered over 100 participants from all regions, representing a broad range of saltwater fishing backgrounds and experience. The direct result of the Summit was the development of a National Recreational Saltwater Fisheries Action Agenda.

The need for external engagement and input on recreational fisheries management and science at the regional scale was recognized, and hence the NOAA Fisheries Regional Recreational Fisheries Coordinator Network was created. This team works in concert with a National Recreational Fisheries Team to help develop and implement the Engagement Initiative through national and regional action agendas. These agendas are aligned with five broad goals to improve recreational fisheries identified at the national Summit and outlined in NOAA's 2010 National Saltwater Action Agenda:

- Improved recreational fishing opportunities.
- Improved recreational catch, effort, and status data.
- Improved social and economic data on recreational fisheries.
- Improved communication.
- Improved institutional orientation.

Nearly four years have passed since the 2010 Summit and much has been accomplished. It is time to update the regional Action Agendas to reflect the evolving priorities of constituents and changing fishery conditions as stocks rebuild. Spring 2013 included many opportunities to work with anglers on developing the way forward and identify priorities for 2014 and 2015, such as the roundtable discussions hosted in each NOAA Fisheries region and the Managing Our Nation's Fisheries III Conference. Building on input from these events and others, the regional Action Agendas serve as public roadmaps detailing region specific priorities and objectives for addressing recreational fishing issues. The input obtained during the development of these documents will also be used to inform the focus of a planned April 2014 National Saltwater Recreational Fishing Summit.

Alaska Region

Regional Overview

In 2011, more than 286,000 recreational anglers fished approximately 811,000 angler-days in marine waters off Alaska and spent more than \$446 million on fishing trips and durable equipment and had a total economic impact of over \$1.0 billion.^{1,2} Alaska's 40,544 miles of coastline represents 40 percent of the U.S. coastline total and provides endless recreational fishing opportunities in both fresh and marine waters.

Pacific halibut (*Hippoglossus stenolepis*) is the most commonly caught species in marine waters off Alaska, averaging 789,000 fish caught annually over a 10-year period. Pacific salmon (*Oncorhynchus* spp.), rockfish (*Sebastes* spp.), lingcod (*Ophiodon elongatus*), several species of char (*Salvelinus* spp.), and shellfish are other common recreationally caught marine species. This Action Agenda is focused on recreational fishing for marine species, but also includes salmon, an anadromous species.

NOAA Fisheries' regulatory authority for recreational fishing off Alaska is primarily for Pacific halibut with some authority over Pacific salmon. NOAA Fisheries delegates authority of salmon management in federal waters to the State of Alaska and administers funds in support of the Pacific Salmon Treaty and the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund.³ 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 Fisheries Management Council, and the State. Due to the overlap of halibut and non-halibut recreational fishing activity off Alaska, NOAA Fisheries collaborates with the State in the management of the recreational halibut fisheries. The State plays a key role in the management of halibut fisheries, including issuing angler fishing licenses; licensing fishing guides; licensing charter vessels; administering the charter vessel logbook program; estimating recreational harvest and effort using creel census, logbook, and mail survey information; and managing non-halibut species.

The concerns of recreational halibut anglers regarding regulatory actions primarily focus on allocation among halibut user groups: i.e., commercial, guided recreational, unguided recreational, commercial bycatch, and subsistence users. The halibut resource is fully utilized among these groups. In Southeast

¹ Fisheries Economics of the U.S. 2011: Economics and sociocultural state and trends series. US Dept. of Commerce, NOAA Tech. Memo. NMFS-F/SPO-128, December 2012. http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/economics/publications/feus/fisheries_economics_2011

² Southwick Associates, W. J. Romberg, A. E. Bingham, G. B. Jennings, and R. A. Clark. Economic impacts and contributions of sportfishing in Alaska, 2007. http://www.southwickassociates.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/2007AK_reportFORWEB.pdf

³ http://www.nwr.noaa.gov/publications/recovery_planning/salmon_steelhead/pcsr/pcsr-rpt-2011.pdf



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Alaska, harvestable halibut biomass has declined, reducing commercial quota and allowable guided halibut catch, and creating tension between commercial and guided recreational users.

Because halibut resources are fully allocated in Alaska, a catch sharing plan is being implemented. This plan divides catch limits between the recreational charter and commercial sectors. Much of the work surrounding the plan is a Council-driven process, yet issues regarding the plan dominate the recreational fishing concerns in Alaska and are a major emphasis of discussions between the NOAA Recreational Coordinators in Alaska and the recreational community. The catch sharing plan is expected to be a more fair and transparent system than current regulations allocating the halibut resource.

Management of the halibut resource requires catch data and economic information to inform managers, biologists, and recreational fishery constituents about the impacts associated with their decisions. The State collects recreational catch data through a combination of mail-out surveys, creel sampling, and saltwater logbooks. NOAA Fisheries, the IPHC, and the State work cooperatively to coordinate data collection to ensure State and federally managed programs are adequately informed. NOAA Fisheries collects economic information on the recreational fisheries in Alaska. This type of data collection is a critical component of this Action Agenda.

In addition to managing Pacific halibut, NOAA Fisheries also 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.

Setting the Stage

Development of the Alaska Action Plan revolved around two driving forces. First, Council-related requests and directives in response to the catch sharing plan have helped formulate the socio-economic and data improvement research. Second, engaging the recreational community in Alaska is a major component of the NOAA Fisheries recreational coordinators' efforts. To improve communications, internal efforts such as redesigning websites and creating list-servs have been undertaken, as well as engaging MAFAC members and hosting roundtable discussions with constituents to help engage and interact with the recreational community. These efforts have helped foster relationships and prioritize Action Plan content primarily designed to improve communications between NOAA Fisheries and the recreational community in Alaska.

Alaska Region: Goals and Objectives

GOAL	OBJECTIVE	PROJECT(S)	DETAILS
GOAL 1 – Improve Recreational Fishing Opportunities	Objective 1: Ensure quality recreational fishing habitat.	<p>Project 1: Work with federal and state agencies and local communities to implement Fish Habitat Partnerships under the National Fish Habitat Action Plan.</p> <p>NOAA Fisheries is a partner with other federal and state agencies and local communities in the Matanuska-Susitna basin, Kenai Peninsula, and Southeast and Southwest Alaska to implement fish habitat partnerships under the National Fish Habitat Partnership program. These efforts identify important habitat areas for salmon and other aquatic organisms, protect and restore habitats that support recreational fisheries, and increase related public education and outreach. These partnerships provide a framework for prioritizing work to maximize protection and restoration for commercial and sport fishing.</p>	<p>Deliverable: Active role in fish habitat partnerships planning, protection, and restoration.</p> <p>Timing: Ongoing through 2015.</p>
	Objective 2: NOAA Restoration Center implementation.	<p>Project 1: Conduct restoration projects throughout the State under community-based programs or the Damage Assessment and Restoration Program to improve fish habitat and production.</p> <p>The NOAA Restoration Center is devoted to restoring the nation’s coastal, marine, and migratory fish habitat. Where possible, NOAA works with partners on habitat restoration approaches that improve fishery production.</p>	<p>Deliverable: There are two specific restoration projects to restore fish passage, improve water quality, and enhance riparian zones. These projects benefit anglers by improving the quality of habitat for important sport fish species:</p> <p><i>The Mountain View Drainage Fish Passage Improvement Project.</i> This project will replace two undersized culverts with a bridge, improving access for coho and pink salmon to 5 miles of high-quality spawning and rearing habitat upstream. Project partners include Trout Unlimited, the City of Gustavus, and others.</p> <p><i>Habitat Restoration for the Adak Petroleum Diesel Spill.</i> On January 11, 2010, up to 142,000 gallons of diesel fuel was released from a 4.8-million-gallon underground tank at the Adak Petroleum Bulk Fuel facility on Adak Island in the central Aleutian Islands of Alaska. Following the spill, dead fish were collected from Helmet Creek and diesel fuel was observed in the creek. The fuel was also absorbed into the stream banks. It is likely that pink salmon and Dolly Varden eggs, and aquatic insects were affected in the creek and associated riparian area. The project will mitigate effects from the oil spill and improve fish passage in Helmet Creek.⁷</p> <p>Timing: Ongoing through 2015.</p>
	Objective 3: Provide recreational anglers with trip-planning tools.	<p>Project 1: Integrate trip planning tools into NOAA Fisheries recreational outreach.</p> <p>The ShoreZone Coastal Mapping and Imagery Project is a multi-agency collaboration that specializes in the collection and interpretation of low-altitude aerial imagery of the coastal environment. A web-based tool integrates this imagery into an easily searchable mapping application that is extremely useful for recreational boaters and fishermen planning coastal trips off Alaska. This tool has not been widely promoted to recreational anglers.</p>	<p>Deliverable: ShoreZone will be integrated into the Alaska Region’s outreach portfolio through web services, outreach events, and the newly created recreational fishery list-serv.</p> <p>Timing: Outreach will be ongoing.</p>

⁷ More information on this project is available at <http://www.darrp.noaa.gov/northwest/adak/index.html>.

Alaska Region: Goals and Objectives

GOAL	OBJECTIVE	PROJECT(S)	DETAILS
GOAL 1 - Improve Recreational Fishing Opportunities	Objective 4: Cleanup of marine debris on Alaska's coastline.	<p>Project 1: Restoration Center partnership with National Ocean Service to remove marine debris from sensitive habitats on Alaska's shoreline.</p> <p>Marine debris is an important issue off Alaska, particularly since debris from the 2011 tsunami in Japan has littered Alaska beaches. Marine debris endangers and degrades the very resources recreational anglers appreciate and rely on for commerce.</p>	<p>Deliverable: The Sitka Sound Science Center and NOAA will partner to remove debris generated by the T hoku earthquake of 2011. The cleanup effort will cover 200 acres of shoreline habitat in the Eastern Gulf of Alaska, including federally designated Wilderness Areas. Removal of debris from important habitat is expected to benefit more than 35 species, including salmon, rockfish, Pacific herring, sablefish, flatfish, Dungeness crab, and pinto abalone.</p> <p>Timing: Removal efforts are ongoing through 2014.</p>
GOAL 2 - Improve Recreational Catch, Effort, and Status Data	Objective 1: Create a reporting system for tracking halibut caught under the proposed Guided Angler Fish Program (GAF).	<p>Project 1: Electronic reporting system.</p> <p>NOAA Fisheries is creating an electronic reporting system for the proposed GAF program. This reporting system will allow GAF participants, NOAA Fisheries, and NOAA Office of Law Enforcement to monitor the number and sizes of halibut harvested as GAF in near-real time, as well as track the amount of commercial quota that is transferred between the guided recreational and commercial sectors.</p>	<p>Deliverable: NOAA Fisheries will create a web-based application for electronic reporting of halibut harvested as GAF.</p> <p>Timing: The web-based application is anticipated to be completed by the beginning of the 2014 recreational fishing season.</p>
	Objective 2: Grant funding to the State in support of the Pacific Salmon Treaty.	<p>Project 1: Support the State in its management, research, sampling, and stock identification of treaty salmon stocks in transboundary rivers.</p> <p>Adherence to abundance-based harvest sharing agreements for U.S. and Canadian fisheries requires in-season management and stock assessment efforts in Alaska fisheries by the State. These agreements also indirectly influence salmon harvesting in other fisheries, including recreational fisheries. The Pacific Salmon Treaty provides for management and research programs that support accurate and timely forecasting, catch, effort, escapement, stock identification, and run timing data.</p>	<p>Deliverable: NOAA cooperative agreement award to the State of Alaska.</p> <p>Timing: Award period is on an annual basis, awarded in July 2013 through July 2014.</p>
	Objective 3: Support cooperative research partnerships.	<p>Project 1: Engage constituents to promote cooperative research projects relevant to recreational fishing interests.</p> <p>NOAA Fisheries is available to offer information regarding funding opportunities, proposal review and assistance, and scientific advice regarding project design to help further cooperative research opportunities. NOAA Fisheries has collaborated with a local charter group and the Pacific Islands Fisheries Group (PIFG) to submit a proposal to the State to tag and release demersal shelf rockfish to investigate survivability following recompression.</p>	<p>Deliverable: NOAA cooperative research partnerships with the recreational community, collaborating with and scientifically advising PIFG to develop rockfish tagging program.</p> <p>Timing: Ongoing, with proposal submission for demersal shelf rockfish tagging to commence Summer 2014.</p>
GOAL 3 - Improve Social and Economic Data on Recreational Fisheries	Objective 1: Conduct Alaska saltwater sportfishing economic survey.	<p>Project 1: Economic survey.</p> <p>NOAA Fisheries will collect data from resident and non-resident anglers on their saltwater fishing activities, expenditures, preferences, and attitudes toward saltwater recreational fishing off Alaska. Data collected through this survey will be used to estimate the demand for saltwater fishing in Alaska and for conducting analyses to determine how factors such as fisheries regulations affect behavior and the value of recreational fishing trips.</p>	<p>Deliverable: Analyses that determine the value of recreational saltwater fishing off Alaska and factors affecting this value.</p> <p>Timing: Survey data were collected in 2012, and analyses are ongoing with results to be published in 2014.</p>

Alaska Region: Goals and Objectives

GOAL	OBJECTIVE	PROJECT(S)	DETAILS
GOAL 3 - Improve Social and Economic Data on Recreational Fisheries	Objective 2: Conduct Alaska saltwater recreational charter operator survey.	<p>Project 1: Cost and earnings survey.</p> <p>Collect economic data from the charter vessel fleet in Alaska regarding costs, earnings, and behavior of the charter fishing fleet. An annual cost and earnings survey of charter vessel operators was developed by NOAA Fisheries with the cooperation of several Alaska charter boat associations, who participated in qualitative testing of the survey instrument and provided other feedback and support.</p>	<p>Deliverable: Implementation of the survey to collect data for the 2013 fishing season and analysis of data collected to understand the economics of the saltwater charter vessel fishing sector in Alaska.</p> <p>Timing: The survey was implemented in 2012 and 2013 to collect economic data for the 2011 and 2012 fishing seasons. A third implementation will occur in 2014 to collect 2013 fishing season information. Analyses of the 2012–2014 data will occur in 2014 and 2015.</p>
GOAL 4 - Improve Communication	Objective 1: Improve recreational fishing constituent list-serv to help enhance communication with recreational anglers.	<p>Project 1: Improve information distribution through a list-serv.</p> <p>NOAA Fisheries Alaska Regional Office will improve and expand the existing recreational angler e-mail list to distribute information, news releases, and links specific to recreational angling interests in Alaska. Demographic data collection will be explored and efforts to reach out to new members will be pursued.</p>	<p>Deliverable: Improved recreational fishing constituent database specific to Alaska.</p> <p>Timing: Improvement of member list through outreach is ongoing. Reporting demographics of the recreational community and evaluating effectiveness of the list-serv will continue through 2015.</p>
	Objective 2: Perform outreach and education to recreational anglers to promote understanding of Alaska Recreational Fishing Action Agenda, program goals, and regulations.	<p>Project 1: Events planning.</p> <p>NOAA Fisheries will increase public awareness of its role in recreational fishing by attending at least one Alaska-based sport fish–related event annually. NOAA Fisheries will staff an outreach event highlighting various aspects of NOAA's role in recreational fisheries, including the science that underpins regulatory actions, how NOAA Fisheries works with the Council and IPHC, details of the proposed halibut catch sharing plan, and the opportunities and economic benefits of recreational fishing in Alaska. Educational materials will be distributed to interested members of the public.</p>	<p>Deliverable/Outcome: Recreational fishing–themed educational materials to be used at outreach events.</p> <p>Timing: Annually, dependent on funding.</p>
	Objective 3: Improve recreational fisheries webpage hosted by NOAA Fisheries Alaska Region.	<p>Project 1: Webpage construction: http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/sportfish</p> <p>NOAA Fisheries will continue to develop and maintain a specialized recreational fishing webpage, including implementation of FAQ material written for email and hard-copy distribution as well as posting on the webpage.</p>	<p>Deliverable: Improved user-friendly webpage designed to increase presence of recreational fishing information on NOAA Fisheries Alaska Region website and inform general public of recreational fishing issues relevant to Alaska.</p> <p>Timing: Webpage updates and improvements including development of FAQs will continue through 2015.</p>
GOAL 5 - Institutional Orientation	Objective 1: Improve agency awareness of recreational issues and projects through improved internal communication.	<p>Project 1: Internal briefings with NOAA Fisheries regional and national leadership.</p> <p>Periodic internal briefings with regional and national NOAA Fisheries leadership will provide updates on recreational fishery issues important to constituents, cooperative research, regulatory projects, and progress on the Action Agenda.</p>	<p>Deliverable: Conduct periodic briefings.</p> <p>Timing: Ongoing.</p>
	Objective 2: Improve recreational action plan coordination within the Alaska Region and Center.	<p>Project 1: Host annual Alaska Region and Center Recreational Coordination Meeting.</p> <p>Annual teleconference with multiple divisions of the Alaska Regional Office and the Alaska Fisheries Science Center. Meeting will be led by recreational coordinators and will be designed to bring together multiple divisions whose work contribute to recreational action agenda items. Annual updates on progress on the Alaska Action Agenda will be provided and future Action Agenda priorities and projects will be discussed.</p>	<p>Deliverable: Annual teleconference of Region and Center divisions associated with Alaska Action Plan.</p> <p>Timing: Conducted annually in the spring in 2014 and 2015.</p>

Additional Activity Supporting Recreational Fisheries

In addition to the Alaska Region's Saltwater Recreational Fishing Action Agenda, NOAA Fisheries supports numerous ongoing activities relevant to recreational fisheries. The Alaska Region and the Alaska Fisheries Science Center work closely with Council staff to prepare analyses and discussion papers for Council actions. In particular, development of the halibut catch sharing plan has required extensive resources to draft and respond to Council requests and public testimony. Additionally, the Alaska Region administers ongoing permitting and licensing programs to administer the charter halibut limited access program. The Alaska Region also administers numerous grants with the State on an annual basis in association with the Pacific Salmon Treaty.

Summary

NOAA Fisheries' involvement in recreational fishing in Alaska is limited to Pacific halibut and Pacific salmon, as the State has the regulatory authority over the majority of recreationally caught species. Recent Council actions regarding the halibut catch sharing plan have elevated recreational interests pertinent to halibut management in Alaska. The Alaska Region's Saltwater Recreational Fishing Action Agenda is highlighted by ongoing habitat restoration work to improve recreational fishing opportunities and collection of data pertinent to Council action on the halibut catch sharing plan, such as guided angler electronic logbooks and improved socio-economic data. Additionally, the Action Plan highlights work by NOAA Fisheries to improve communication with recreational constituents by establishing listservs, fostering cooperative research collaborations, and making NOAA websites more user-friendly.



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