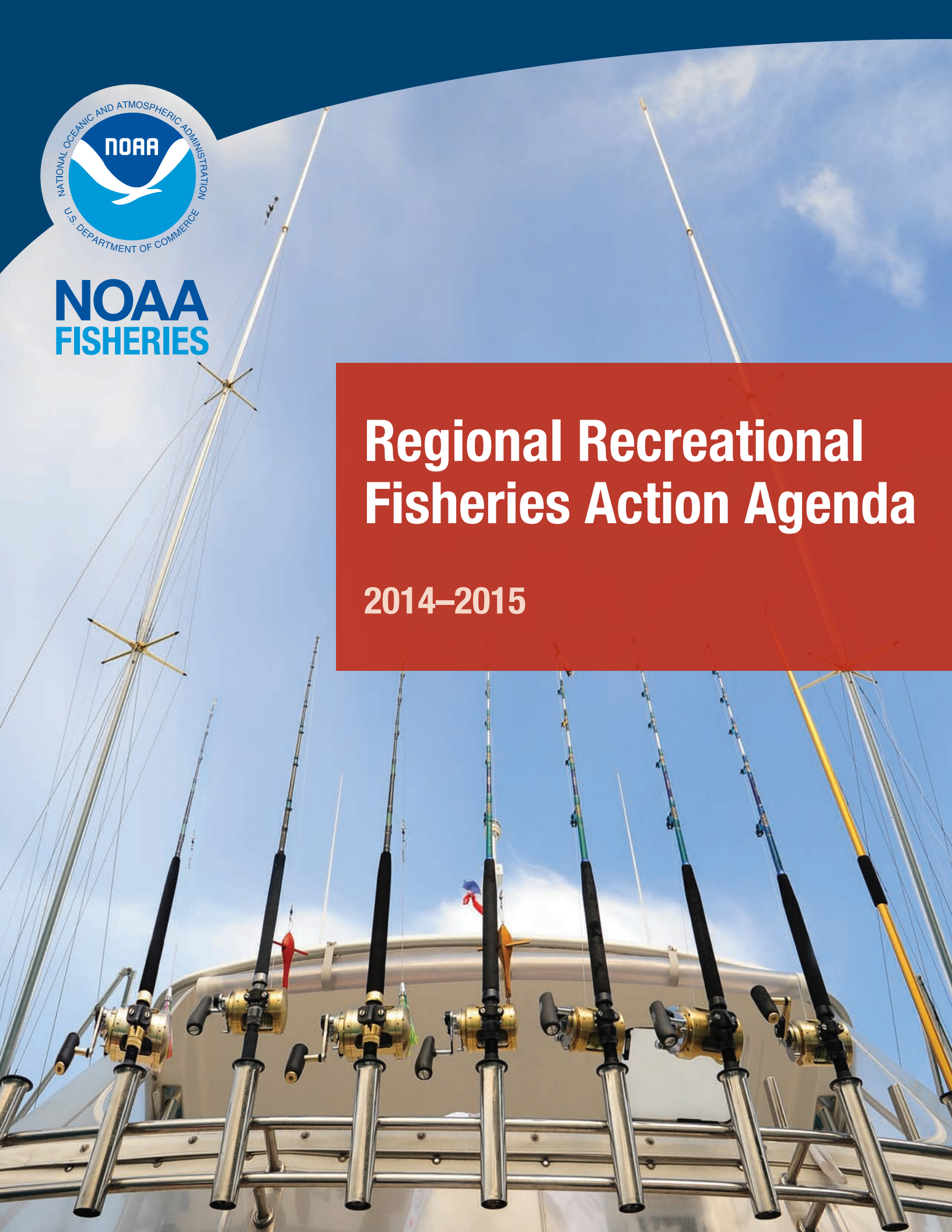
NOAA FISHERIES

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

NOAA FISHERIES

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.

Southeast Region

Regional Overview

NOAA Fisheries' Southeast Region comprises eight coastal states (Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina), the territory of the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

The Southeast Regional Office and Southeast Fisheries Science Center work with three Regional Fishery Management Councils—Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic, and Caribbean—to manage 24 fishery management plans, containing 172 fish stocks or complexes within their respective Exclusive Economic Zones.

Of these 172 fish stocks, seven species or units were removed from the overfishing list in 2012, including Caribbean parrotfishes, South Atlantic vermilion snapper, and Gulf of Mexico red snapper. Ten species remain on the overfishing list. One species was removed from the overfished list and 12 species remain on that list. Additionally, a 2013 stock assessment found South Atlantic black sea bass no longer undergoing overfishing or overfished, so this stock will be removed from the overfishing list in the next Status of the Stocks update.

The region supports the largest recreational fisheries in the nation. In 2011, an estimated 5.3 million U.S. recreational fishermen completed more than 40 million fishing trips and spent more than $15 billion in fishing trip and durable equipment expenditures in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic. The majority of these anglers were residents of a regional coastal county.

The following is a list and brief description of the region-wide recreational fishing issues in the Southeast.

- **Science and data collection** – Increase constituents' confidence in the science and data collection methods including information used to set catch limits and quotas, landings and effort estimations, and stock assessment models.
- **Electronic reporting** – Broaden use of electronic logbooks and mobile applications.
- **Marine Recreational Information Program** – Improve timeliness of when data becomes available and provide more precise estimates.
- **Data-poor stocks** – Improve understanding and management of data-poor stocks.

- **Allocation** – Ensure fishery allocations are representative of current fishery status, including updates as needed.
- **Increased fishing opportunity**
  - **Stable fishing seasons** – Work toward stable fishing seasons for recreational fisheries.
  - **More flexibility** – Improve flexibility regarding when and where anglers can fish and in terms of how they operate their fishing practices and businesses.
- **Enhanced methods to reduce release mortality of fish** – Work to increase research and innovation invested into effective tools to prevent or reduce catch and release mortality.
- **Protected species interactions with recreational fishing gear** – There are increased reports of recreational fishing interactions and entanglements (during active fishing and by discarded gear) of bottlenose dolphins, sea turtles and smalltooth sawfish throughout the southeast region.
- **Communication** – Improve real-time communication with NOAA Fisheries.

There is a large highly migratory species recreational fishery in the southeast U.S. and Caribbean. More information on this fishery can be found in the Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Action Agenda.

Setting the Stage

Staff in the Southeast Regional Office and Southeast Fisheries Science Center continue to have an open dialogue with the recreational fishing community using various mechanisms. This Action Agenda took shape from constituent feedback received during open question-and-answer sessions hosted by the Southeast Regional Administrator and Southeast Fisheries Science Center Director at Council meetings, recreational constituent conference calls on Gulf of Mexico red snapper, a meeting with southeast recreational fishing representatives from each of the Councils and members of the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee's Recreational Fisheries Working Group, and many other conversations.

Several actions recently completed in the Southeast Region have focused on recreational fisheries issues. Funding opportunities in the Southeast Region have also targeted species and issues linked to recreational fisheries interests. These projects include studies on stock abundance, life history, and culture methods for recreationally important finfish and baitfish species; reducing the amount of fishmeal in commercial aquaculture diets; improving recreational catch data; and examining post-release mortality. In addition, in 2014 regional staff will conduct a workshop on stock enhancement for marine finfish populations.

The Southeast Region is involved in a number of activities linked to the five goals identified during the April 2010 Recreational Saltwater Fishing Summit.

Southeast Region: Goals and Objectives

GOAL	OBJECTIVE	PROJECT(S)	DETAILS
GOAL 1 - Improved Recreational Fishing Opportunities	Objective 1: Reduce release mortality in recreational fisheries.	Project 1: Improve scientific understanding of post-release mortality. A national working group of experts representing each region was assembled to develop a science strategy to improve our understanding of post-release mortality. This group will review practices to reduce barotrauma and other types of release mortality; focus on updating and improving post-release mortality assumptions for stock assessments; identify species for which better post-release mortality assumptions should be a priority; and identify next steps for addressing broader post-release mortality issues.	Deliverable: A white paper summarizing key findings. Timing: 2015.
	Objective 2: Examine the role of artificial substrates, including oil and gas structures in Gulf of Mexico fisheries management.	Project 1: Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's Ad Hoc Artificial Substrate Advisory Panel. Participation in the Gulf Council's ad hoc panel along with state officials, the oil and gas industry, commercial fisheries, recreational fishing and diving sectors, and the Department of the Interior.	Deliverable: A panel recommendation to the Gulf Council. Timing: The ad hoc panel is scheduled to meet in 2013 to continue discussions, and may be ongoing through 2015.
	Objective 3: Characterize bottlenose dolphin interactions with recreational fishing gear and evaluate safe ways to prevent interactions.	Project 1: Conduct a survey on bottlenose dolphin interactions with recreational fishing gear. Explore survey designs and methods to determine the frequency and geographic extent of bottlenose dolphin interactions with recreational fishing gear.	Deliverable: Technical report. Timing: Report issued in 2014.
		Project 2: Research bottlenose dolphin depredation on recreational rod and reel fishing gear and scavenging behaviors. Conduct a 2-year research project in the Gulf of Mexico to research bottlenose dolphin depredation on rod and reel fishing gear and scavenging behaviors, with an emphasis on developing and testing the effectiveness of safe methods to prevent or reduce fishing interactions.	Deliverable: Technical report. Timing: 2014.
GOAL 2 - Improved Recreational Catch/ Bycatch, Effort, and Stock Status Data	Objective 1: Improve understanding of recreational fishing in the U.S. Virgin Islands.	Project 1: Conduct field surveys of recreational fishing activities on St. Croix. Gather information through in-person surveys about who is fishing, where, and what they are catching in order to create a more accurate picture of recreational fishing in the U.S. Virgin Islands. This program includes funding support from NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program.	Deliverable: A technical report. Timing: Final report is expected in 2014.
	Objective 2: Evaluate the applicability of electronic self-reported angler data for use in fish stock assessments.	Project 1: Conduct self-selected angler data collection pilot project. In partnership with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, NOAA Fisheries will evaluate the use of self-selected angler data collected via smartphones and online for use in fish stock assessments.	Deliverable: A final report detailing potential uses and next steps. Timing: Ongoing throughout 2014 and 2015.

Southeast Region: Goals and Objectives

GOAL	OBJECTIVE	PROJECT(S)	DETAILS
GOAL 2 - Improved Recreational Catch/ Bycatch, Effort, and Stock Status Data	Objective 3: Improve understanding of recreationally important species in Puerto Rico.	Project 1: Evaluate options for queen conch and spiny lobster sampling. Evaluate options for how to effectively sample the recreational harvest of queen conch and spiny lobster in Puerto Rico, with the goal of designing a sampling program to add to the MRIP surveys.	Deliverable: Updated data for use in management and stock assessments. Timing: Ongoing through 2014.
	Objective 4: Improve understanding of scientific uncertainty.	Project 1: Create standards for target levels of uncertainty in recreational catch estimates. Participate in agency efforts to establish accepted standards for scientific uncertainty (measured as proportional standard error) in recreational catch estimates for use in creating stock assessments and assessing risk in management decisions.	Deliverable: White paper presenting acceptable standards. Timing: 2014.
	Objective 5: Create reliable recreational catch and effort estimates for the U.S. Virgin Islands.	Project 1: Conduct a feasibility study through a survey of recreational boat-based anglers. Characterize the boat-based recreational fishery of the U.S. Virgin Islands by using the boater registration lists maintained by the government of the Virgin Islands to conduct a pilot survey of registered boat owners.	Deliverable: Feasibility study regarding a specific approach for surveying anglers. Timing: 2014.
GOAL 3 - Improved Recreational Socio-Economic Data	Objective 1: Improve the understanding of angler interactions with bottlenose dolphins.	Project 1: Conduct bottlenose dolphin human dimensions surveys. Conduct surveys and focus groups in Panama City, Florida, and Corpus Christi, Texas, to improve understanding of the perceptions, attitudes, motivations, and behaviors of commercial businesses (including charter fishing businesses), tourists, and residents who interact with dolphins in the wild. These results will also inform future development of outreach and education products targeted to specific audiences and user groups.	Deliverable: Technical report. Timing: 2014.
	Objective 2: Generate updated and improved economic value estimates for recreational anglers in the Gulf of Mexico.	Project 1: Conduct economic mail survey. Conduct a mail survey of recreational anglers fishing from private and for-hire boats in the Gulf of Mexico. Data will be used to estimate the economic value of changes in saltwater fishing regulations for individual anglers—specifically the willingness to pay for bag limits for groupers, snappers, red snapper, dolphin, and king mackerel.	Deliverable: Survey development and implementation and final technical report. Timing: Survey implementation in 2014, final results in 2015.
	Objective 3: Improve economic data collection from headboats in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic.	Project 1: Expand Southeast Regional Headboat Survey to include economic information. Expand Southeast Regional Headboat Survey to include economic questions concerning input quantities and prices. Collect output prices (i.e., charter and headboat fees) annually from websites to create a for-hire fee database.	Deliverable: Report summarizing data and results. Timing: 2014; data collection continuous thereafter.
	Objective 4: Improve understanding of the human dimensions of tournament fishing in the Southeast.	Project 1: Prepare a proposal to collect data about tournament fishing. A research proposal will be developed for tournament data collection, using surveys and unstructured interviews to collect demographic, cultural, economic, and social information about those who organize and participate in fishing tournaments in the Southeast.	Deliverable: Research report. Timing: Results will be released in 2015.

Southeast Region: Goals and Objectives

GOAL	OBJECTIVE	PROJECT(S)	DETAILS
GOAL 4 - Improved Communication	Objective 1: Determine the effectiveness of recompression for barotrauma mitigation strategies and develop a video tailored to conditions in the southeast United States as an outreach tool to encourage fishermen to use the devices.	Project 1: Evaluation of reef fish recompression devices and outreach training video. Building upon previous work, produce a video to evaluate specific conditions (e.g., thermal shock) and species in the southeast United States subject to barotrauma. Snapper and grouper will be captured, evaluated for barotrauma symptoms, and recompressed using different recompression devices. Recompression will be filmed for evaluation of release condition and predation.	Deliverable: Video available to public and evaluation of various recompression devices. Timing: Ongoing through early 2015.
	Objective 2: Improve recreational fishermen's access and knowledge of Caribbean fishing regulations.	Project 1: Produce recreational fishing brochure and waterproof fishing regulations. Develop a brochure and waterproof summary of federal fishing regulations pertaining to the U.S. Caribbean exclusive economic zone. These materials are part of a larger effort to increase fishermen's knowledge of the regulations governing U.S. Caribbean federal fisheries. English and Spanish language versions will be widely distributed throughout Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.	Deliverable: Brochure and handouts. Timing: 2014.
	Objective 3: Improve communication with recreational fishermen through outreach and education on protected species interactions with recreational fishing gear.	Project 1: Improve fishermen's understanding of how to help reduce protected species interactions. Produce outreach materials geared toward providing information on how to help prevent protected resource interactions and minimize harm, and on steps to take when an interaction occurs. In addition, outreach materials will include phone numbers to stranding response organizations in an effort to increase reporting of injured, entangled, or stranded animals.	Deliverable: Targeted outreach efforts with constituents, including press releases, in-person educational visits, direct mailings of educational materials and letters, and development and distribution of Frequently Asked Questions. Timing: 2014.
		Project 2: Cast with Care outreach program. Implement a Cast with Care program throughout the Southeast. Cast with Care will inform anglers on the conservation benefits of circle hooks to reduce and minimize accidental hooking of bottlenose dolphins, sea turtles, and small-tooth sawfish.	Deliverable: Small packages containing circle hooks, educational messages, and hotline numbers to report injured, stranded, or entangled animals will be provided to recreational fishermen free of charge at boat shows, tournaments, and other maritime events. In addition, Cast with Care posters and tackle box decals promoting ways to prevent interactions will be distributed at fishing piers, bait and tackle stores, and marinas. Timing: Ongoing through 2014.
		Project 3: Don't Feed Wild Dolphins and Protect Sea Turtles fishing pier outreach initiative. Implement a fishing pier initiative to increase the visibility of conservation messages at fishing piers to reduce potential for harmful interactions.	Deliverable: Small weatherproof placards will be affixed along the decks of fishing piers and permeate piers with legal and educational messages, hotline numbers (to report injured or entangled animals), and links to additional information. Timing: Ongoing through 2015.
		Project 4: Regional leadership and constituent conference calls. The Southeast Regional Administrator hosts conference calls, when appropriate, on issues garnering constituent concern.	Deliverable: Question-and-answer conference calls. Timing: Ongoing through 2015.

Southeast Region: Goals and Objectives			
GOAL	**OBJECTIVE**	**PROJECT(S)**	**DETAILS**
GOAL 4 - Improved Communication	Objective 4: Improve understanding of the federal fishery management process.	Project 1: Conduct the Marine Resource Education Program. The Marine Resources Education Program educates fisheries stakeholders in the fundamentals of fisheries science and management. This education enables fishermen and others to participate productively in the fisheries management process, and leads to improved cooperation and trust among fishermen, scientists, and fishery managers.	Deliverable: Two invitation-only workshops annually, one on science and one on management. Timing: The 2014 workshops are scheduled for April and September. The plan is to conduct these workshops annually, provided funding is available.
GOAL 5 - Institutional Orientation	Objective 1: Formally integrate recreational fishing projects into regional office planning documents.	Project 1: Southeast Regional Office's Internal Annual Operating Plan. Incorporate this Southeast Recreational Fishing Action Agenda into the Southeast Regional Office's Internal Annual Operating Plan	Deliverable: Include a line item in the region's Annual Operating Plan. Timing: Annually beginning 2014.

Additional Activities Supporting Recreational Fisheries

NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office and Southeast Fisheries Science Center will continue to collaborate with the three Councils on routine regulatory and science actions, such as drafting amendments and performing data analysis and stock assessments. The following species important to southeast U.S. recreational fishermen are scheduled for population assessments: Gulf of Mexico red snapper and red grouper; South Atlantic red snapper, red porgy, and gag grouper; and Caribbean spiny lobster and conch. Staff will work with the Councils to evaluate new programs or management plans regarding the need for federal management of coastal pelagic species (dolphin fish, wahoo, and mackerels) in the U.S. Caribbean, red snapper management in the Gulf and South Atlantic, allocation issues, and reopening recreational fisheries when excess quota is available. Discussions have also begun on evaluating better methods to monitor Gulf of Mexico red snapper recreational catches. The Regional Administrator and Science Center Director will continue to host roundtable discussions at the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Council meetings. Staff will continue to work with conservation organizations, energy companies, states, tribes, and citizens to evaluate barriers to improve fish passage. Fish passage is important to the protection and restoration of many fish, including forage fish important to recreational fish species.

Summary

As part of the ongoing effort to shape a more productive partnership between NOAA Fisheries and the recreational fishing community in the southeast region, this plan has identified several key issues facing fisheries managers and stakeholders in the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and South Atlantic.

Based upon feedback from question-and-answer sessions, roundtable discussions, and input from members of the recreational community, we have identified specific goals and objectives as well as the actions that have been and are currently being undertaken by staff in the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office and the Science Center. These actions are designed to involve constituents at the local and regional level and provide an opportunity for recreational fishermen to collaborate with scientists, economists, and managers in an ongoing effort to address the complex issues facing the region.

Acting U.S. Secretary of Commerce
Rebecca Blank

Acting Administrator of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and Undersecretary of Commerce
Dr. Kathy Sullivan

Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries
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