

### **Forward**

One of our nation's greatest treasures is our coastal waters, which have been enjoyed by generations of Americans for recreation and sport. Today, **10 million Americans** turn to those waters each year for recreational saltwater fishing. This pastime has become more than just an occasional hobby for millions of individuals and families. Millions more Americans fish and fish more often in more of our ocean spaces than they could 45 years ago. Saltwater recreational fishing is a major driver of the nation's outdoor economy through everything from retail sales to licensing fees. In fact, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Office of Fisheries (NOAA Fisheries) now estimates that the growing recreational saltwater fishing industry contributes nearly **\$74 billion annually in sales impacts.** Yet, antiquated federal policies threaten to stem this positive economic trend. At the heart of our recommendations is a shift away from a continued approach to federal fisheries management that uses commercial fishing tools to manage recreational fishing.

There are profound differences in the nature of these activities and their respective impacts on our fishery resources and marine habitats. **Restrictions on public access to our public marine fisheries** continue to flow from a system that no longer reflects the reality of demand for recreational access, the current economic activity associated with that access, or the scientific reality of the light footprint recreational access has on our fishery resources.

We have been heartened in recent years to see important first steps acknowledging marine recreational fishing. In 2018, President Donald Trump signed the **Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act** (**Modern Fish Act**), which has been the most significant step forward in federal recreational saltwater fishing management to date. While there has been some forward progress in implementing the Modern Fish Act, there is still a long way to go.





### Connecting Recreational Saltwater Fishing with Policymaking



### Recreational Anglers Provide Significant Support to the American Economy

Saltwater recreational anglers are a powerful force in the U.S. economy and in the efforts to conserve and sustain the nation's marine resources.

- ➤ 10 million Americans participate in saltwater angling annually.
- This leads to nearly \$74 billion in economic activity and creates more than 487,000 jobs, according to NOAA Fisheries.
- Saltwater angling and freshwater angling combined generate \$157 billion in economic activity and support over 1 million jobs.
- Recreational fishing makes this big economic splash while accounting for only 2 percent of all finfish harvested nationally. Commercial fishing accounts for the remaining 98 percent. The recreational fishing sector has the larger economic impact with the much lighter environmental footprint.

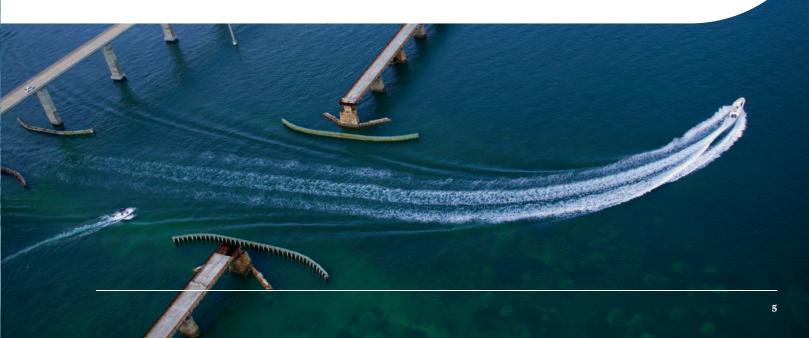
Recreational anglers and boaters generate the vast majority of funding for conservation of our nation's marine habitats and fish. Since the passage of the 1950 Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act, anglers have paid a federal excise tax on fishing tackle. Congress later



imposed the federal excise tax on motorboat fuel. In 2020 alone, anglers and boaters contributed \$649 million in excise taxes for sportfish conservation and management, boating safety and infrastructure, and habitat restoration. An additional \$748 million was contributed by anglers through fishing license fees. Also, anglers donate over \$400 million in personal funds each year to various conservation and fishing organizations. In turn, these funds become the lifeblood of conservation efforts aimed at maintaining the vitality of our nation's inland and coastal waterways.

Angling is also at the core of culture and quality of life for countless coastal communities and families with annual events, family gatherings and vacations all centered on fishing in our nation's coastal waters.

These Socio-Economic Realities and Conservation Contributions Can be Better Acknowledged in Federal Policy





- Recreational fishing is a fundamentally different activity than commercial fishing and requires different management tools
- Anglers need
  dependable access
  to healthy resources

While the Magnuson-Stevens Act has improved fish stocks, we now need to manage that success in a way that fully develops saltwater recreational fishing's economic, social and conservation benefits to our nation. As recognized in the Modern Fish Act, recreational fishing is a fundamentally different activity than commercial fishing, requiring different management approaches.

The Magnuson-Stevens Act relies heavily on fixed, hard-pound quotas that can be managed in real-time, often using limited entry and catch share programs. This works for the commercial sector where relatively few vessels are focused on harvesting as many fish as they can on a maximum sustainable yield strategy. However, recreational fisheries are enjoyed by millions of individuals with diverse goals. Some try to catch fish for food while others simply want to have fun catching and releasing fish and enjoying their time outdoors. **Recreational anglers need predictable**, **dependable access to healthy and abundant fisheries**.



Federal laws and policies governing saltwater recreational fishing have not kept pace with dramatic changes in the fishing industry.

Recreational saltwater fishing is now immensely popular, and the economic impact of recreational fishing is greater than the commercial industry in terms of number of jobs provided and total economic impact. Yet, recreational anglers are allowed only a fraction of overall landings. In some cases, draconian measures have been put in place limiting recreational fishing seasons for some species to just a few days a year. These actions run counter to data that these fish stocks are vibrant and healthy. This has an economic ripple effect, from fewer fishing fees to reduced tax receipts from sales of everything ranging from boats to merchandise and bait.

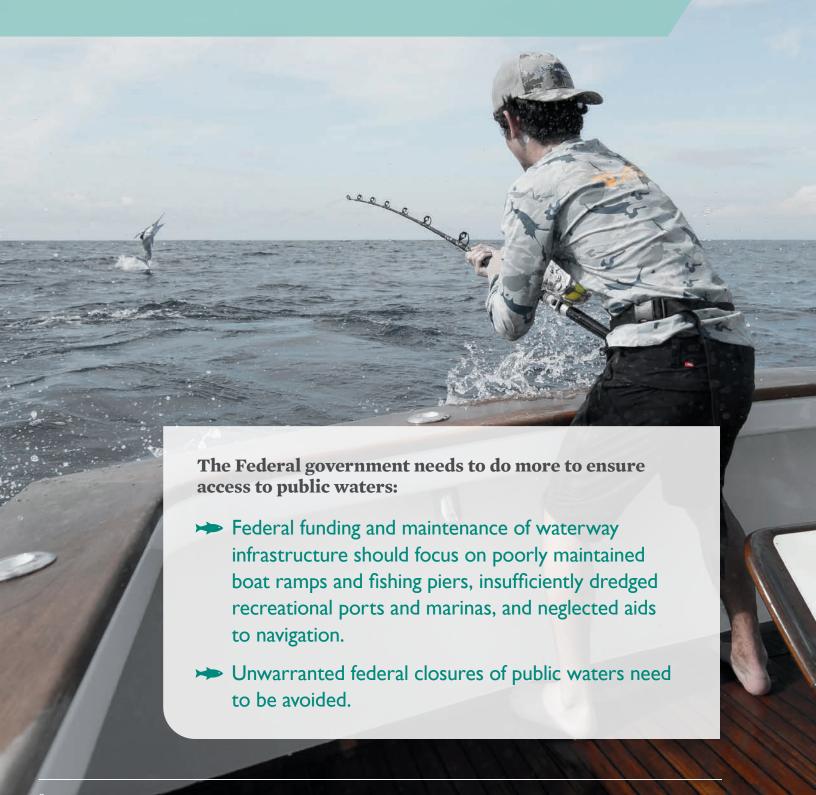
In our view, NOAA Fisheries needs to maximize benefits to the nation by developing a cooperative management system with state fishery managers. NOAA Fisheries also needs to implement long-proven ways of managing fish stocks used by states for recreational fishing sectors.

### ALTERNATIVE MANAGEMENT CASE STUDY



The recreational fisheries for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass and bluefish in the Mid-Atlantic have faced management challenges even though several of these stocks are well above conservation targets. To address these challenges, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission are working jointly on a recreational reform initiative with the goal of bringing more stability, flexibility and accessibility to those fisheries. These initiatives include addressing Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) data uncertainty; setting multi-year recreational measures; improving the management measure setting process, and setting measures earlier in the year. Additionally, the recreational fishing community has continued to support this work by submitting for consideration a harvest-control rule approach, consistent with the Modern Fish Act, that aligns with the objectives of this initiative. We recommend the continued development of these reforms through a thorough stakeholder engagement process.

### Support Public Access to Public Resources





Outdoor recreation accounts for 2.2 percent of U.S. GDP and recreational boating and fishing make up the largest part of that output. Outdoor recreation is already playing and will continue to play a critical role in the nation's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic – as social distancing guidelines persist, families are taking to the water more than ever to go fishing and boating. While this is the perfect activity for families who will likely be staying closer to home, the long lines at boat ramps, parking lots and marinas have highlighted the need to invest in recreational infrastructure. Not only do we need investments to increase access *to* the water, like maintaining and expanding boat ramps, parking lots, and docks, but we need to improve access *on* the water, ensuring you can get your boat to your destination through properly dredged waterways.

In expanding two Pacific marine monuments and establishing a marine monument in the Atlantic, the Obama Administration allowed recreational fishing to occur in these areas, explicitly making a distinction between public recreational access to a Federal public marine resource and access for private commercial activities. While we have been pleased to see important decisions made to maintain access in various Federal waters, the sportfishing community has also unfortunately seen federal management policies in some National Parks, National Marine Sanctuaries, and National Marine Monuments prevent anglers from accessing these public resources. Visitation to these waterways helps boost tourism to local economies, increases funding for federal and state governments, and ensures public access to areas maintained for the use, enjoyment and recreation of all Americans.

Protecting 30 percent of lands and waters by 2030 is a global initiative born of the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity, and it is being discussed now at the national and state level in the United States. This effort has been said to be a step toward conserving half of the planet. It is important to remember that many marine and aquatic protections exist in the United States that do not exist in the rest of the world. There are many layers of protection by federal and state laws and regulations that establish the United States as a global leader in conservation. As America's original conservationists, recreational anglers and boaters deserve a seat at the table in the discussions surrounding 30x30. President Barack Obama set the precedent for compatibility of recreational fishing in conservation zones by recognizing recreational fishing as a sustainable use in marine national monuments.

For the recreational fishing and boating community to get behind the 30x30 movement, "no take" policies must be recognized as the most extreme form of protection and only considered when proven scientifically necessary and for the shortest term possible to achieve intended results.

# Improved Management and Science for Improved Federal Policy

States are now the experts at managing – very successfully – numerous fish species such as red drum, spotted sea trout and snook.

The state fish and wildlife agencies are leaders and willing partners in conservation and management. The Federal government should embrace them. In response to inadequacies of Federal data gathering on recreational fisheries, many coastal states have created world-class data systems to manage their coastal and marine fisheries. The State systems have proven far more accurate and timely than the Federal system, and NOAA Fisheries should recognize such certified programs as the best available science.

NOAA Fisheries must modify their management system to constrain recreational catch based on metrics that are more accurate and measurable relative to recreational fishing, or they should rely on state-based data collection systems that have been certified to supplement or replace the current federal data system, known as the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). MRIP is a very broad estimate of angler harvest that was never designed for the current in-season management approach under annual catch limits (ACLs). In order to realize the full economic and conservation benefits of recreational fishing, change is needed.

The regional fishery management councils provide regional governance of many fisheries under the guidance and instruction of NOAA Fisheries. Few Americans realize the councils, acting on instruction from NOAA Fisheries, divide up the total fish catch between for-profit commercial companies and recreational anglers. NOAA Fisheries makes this allocation based on historical catch numbers from decades ago—when millions fewer were enjoying America's coastal waters for recreational fishing. The doors to reallocation have long been rusted shut. Currently, NOAA Fisheries has the data and the technology to recognize allocations are out of balance and are denying access to the American people. However, they claim to lack the data to determine exactly where allocation should be set to maximize fisheries value for the nation.



- The Modern Fish Act required a study by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) on the process of mixed-use fishery allocation review by the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Regional Fishery Management Councils. As a result, GAO gave two recommendations:

  1) NOAA Fisheries should work with the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Councils to develop documented processes for conducting allocation reviews, and 2) specify how they will document their allocation reviews, including the basis for their decisions, whether fishery management plan objectives are being met, and what factors were considered in the reviews. These recommendations signify there is still work to do to make the allocation process transparent and accountable to the American public.
- Section 102 of the Modern Fish Act authorizes the regional fishery management councils to use alternative management tools more appropriate for recreational fishing, many of which are successfully used by state fisheries agencies (e.g., extraction rates, fishing mortality targets, harvest control rules, or traditional or cultural practices of native communities). The councils need NOAA Fisheries leaders to be proactive in encouraging councils' efforts on alternative management methods.
- Although statutorily a "privilege," Limited Access Privilege Programs (LAPPs) have functionally assigned private ownership of public fishery resources to individual commercial fishers for their exclusive use. Section 103 of the Modern Fish Act requires an assessment by the National Academy of Sciences of the social, economic, and ecological effects of LAPPs considering each sector of a mixed-use fishery and related businesses, coastal communities, and the environment and any impacts to stakeholders in a mixed-use fishery caused by these programs.
- Section 201 of the Modern Fish Act requires improved recreational harvest data collection by requiring federal managers to facilitate greater incorporation of state and other data sources. This has tremendous potential to improve the accuracy and timeliness of harvest estimates, such as state programs and electronic reporting (e.g., through smartphone apps). Again, NOAA Fisheries should focus on partnering with the states, which have a much greater understanding of recreational angler behaviors and more experience measuring angler effort, in order to improve federal fisheries management.



Recreational boaters and anglers provide the financial foundation for aquatic resource conservation and access every time they go boating or fishing. Without recreational boaters and anglers there would be insufficient funds to support boat ramps, habitat restoration, fisheries research, and the creation of artificial reefs—all of which directly increase opportunities for the public to enjoy our shared aquatic resources.

The Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund (Trust Fund) – established in 1950 and funded by recreational boaters and anglers – receives the vast majority of its funding from the motorboat fuel tax and excise taxes on sportfishing equipment. These funds are distributed back to state fish and wildlife agencies to fund projects including fisheries management, data collection, boating safety, boating access, wetland conservation and aquatic education programs. In order to secure annual funding for fish habitat and conservation, Congress must reauthorize the Trust Fund in order to continue securing annual funding for fish habitat restoration and conservation. In the last decade, the \$650 million generated annually by the Trust Fund has restored more than 28,000 acres throughout coastal wetland ecosystems and built nearly 20,000 structures to protect and enhance the natural habitats of aquatic species.



The recreational fishing industry is eager to proactively work with federal agencies to enhance access for anglers while continuing our enduring commitment to protecting our nation's coastal waterways. The Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council (SFBPC) is currently the advisory body to the Secretary of Interior and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on inland fisheries, boating and aquatic resource conservation issues. Unfortunately, a similar body does not exist with the Secretary of Commerce and NOAA Fisheries. The Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee (MAFAC), which does advise the Secretary of Commerce, puts significant emphasis on commercial fishing interests while restricting input and participation from the average recreational fisherman.

The recreational fishing community strongly supports the transition of the SFBPC to a dual reporting role for both the Department of Interior and the Department of Commerce. A similar precedent exists on the wildlife conservation landscape with the Hunting and Shooting Sports Conservation Council, which reports to both the Department of Interior and the Department of Agriculture.

Consisting of representatives of state fisheries agencies, recreational fishing organizations, marine recreational industries, marine fishing outreach organizations and sportsmen's organizations, the SFBPC is already well positioned to provide the Department of Commerce and NOAA Fisheries with the input necessary to facilitate the expansion of recreational fishing opportunities, the management and conservation of marine fisheries and their habitat and economic growth related to marine recreational fishing.



## Conclusion

Federal laws and policies governing saltwater recreational fishing need to be brought up to date to reflect the current socio-economic realities of public demand for recreational fishing access and the scale of the recreational saltwater fishing sector of our outdoor economy. NOAA Fisheries has taken helpful first steps toward recognizing the economic impacts and multipliers associated with saltwater recreational angling and the profound differences regarding the impact of recreational fishing versus commercial fishing on resources. We appreciate these first steps. However, more remains to be done to take that recognition and incorporate the benefits recreational angling provides to the nation into fisheries management policy. We pledge to continue extending a hand of collaboration and cooperation to the next administration to help improve marine resource management for all Americans.

America's 10 million saltwater recreational anglers play a major role in supporting our economy, conserving our national resources and maintaining our culture. They help support half a million jobs and generate nearly \$74 billion in economic activity. And today, fishing has reached new heights of popularity, as parents continue to pass on proud traditions to their sons and daughters.

Laws, policies and regulations should take advantage of available technology and use new breakthroughs to inform management in near real-time. Investing in waterway infrastructure will expand the public's access to public waters, rather than exacerbating disrepair. Both will allow for more opportunities and consistency for recreational fishing and the corresponding economic activities while maintaining and improving conservation efforts.

Funding for infrastructure and other projects impacting fish habitats, in addition to key regulations like how fisheries are managed, sector allocations and catch shares, should balance the priorities and the economic impacts of the recreational and commercial sectors.

The next administration has a rare opportunity to haul in a remarkable trophy: sustainable, vibrant fisheries, thriving communities of recreational anglers passing on a cherished way of life, and millions of Americans in coastal towns and inland jobs alike benefiting economically from their passion. We cannot miss the opportunity.



















