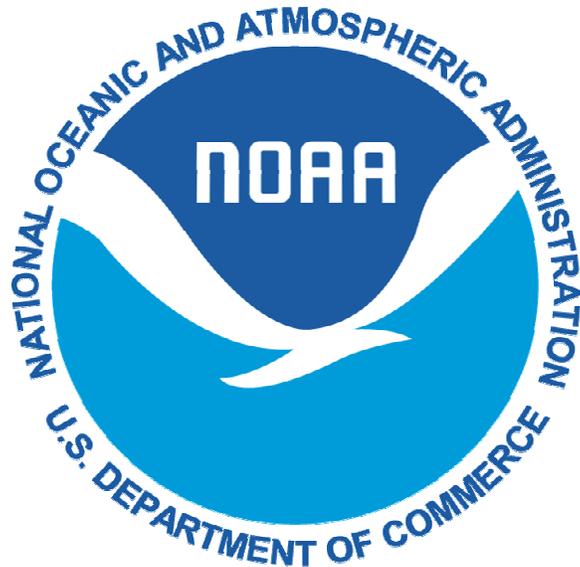


# The NOAA DRAFT Recreational Fisheries Strategic Plan 2004-2009

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## **Introduction**

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is a conservation and management partner with anglers, recreational fishing associations, state and tribal managers, and other federal agencies. Our role as the Nation's Marine Fisheries Steward requires collaboration with all recreational fishing stakeholders for the sustainable use of ocean resources. These collaborations enhance the management and conservation of recreational species, their habitat, and ocean ecosystems.

The development of this Recreational Fisheries Strategic Plan 2004-2009, draws on the expertise of national sportfishing leaders, resource managers, private recreational fishing industry representatives and anglers from around the United States. Through a series of national and regional meetings, a dedicated website to disseminate information and collect input, and an aggressive campaign to announce this plan, NOAA will be able to collect comments from stakeholders around the country.

With an emphasis on partnerships and deliverable outcomes, this plan charts a course for NOAA efforts that provides for major agency activities in science, management and outreach categories. These categories were developed by representatives of the various NOAA programs whose activities include some aspect of recreational fisheries. These programs came from around NOAA and included participants from the NOAA Fisheries, NOAA's Ocean Service, and NOAA Research line offices. A full list of these programs and their representatives can be found on page 14 of this document.

## **Linking to the NOAA Strategic Plan**

The NOAA Recreational Fisheries Strategic Plan provides a critical contribution to the NOAA and the NOAA Fisheries Strategic Plans. Our efforts contribute to the NOAA and NOAA Fisheries Mission Goal 1.

## **NOAA Mission Goal 1: Protect, Restore, and Manage the use of Coastal and Oceanic Resources through Ecosystem-Based Management**

Our efforts also contribute to the following NOAA and NOAA Fisheries cross-cutting priorities:

- Environmental Literacy, Outreach and Education
- Sound, State-of-the-Art Research

This plan intends to reflect the NOAA Strategic Plan's Strategies, particularly the Understand and Describe, Monitor and Access, Manage, and Engage, Advise and Inform Strategies. These strategies work well to describe the agency's efforts in recreational fisheries. The Science Goal in the Recreational Fisheries Plan incorporates the NOAA Understand and Describe and Monitor and Access Strategies. The Management Goal in this Plan incorporates the Manage Strategy and the Outreach Goal reflects the Engage, Advise and Inform Strategy.

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## **Vision Statement**

*That the American people enjoy the riches and benefits of healthy and diverse marine ecosystems and have opportunities for a diverse array of recreational fishing experiences.*

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## **Mission Statement**

NOAA is America's trustee for marine recreational fisheries resources. Through science-based fisheries management and service to all of our Nation's recreational users, NOAA is building healthy ocean ecosystems for the benefit and enjoyment of all Americans.

**Science Goal Statement: Exceptional marine angling opportunities supported by cooperative, timely, credible, and accurate science.**

**Objective #1: Support data collection and research that matches management needs.**

NOAA Fisheries is committed to obtaining Agency and stakeholder cooperation in planning relevant science initiatives, and ensuring that our science matches the needs of fisheries managers. The Agency is devoting resources for improved data collection that address management needs, including improved recreational harvest data, and creating new procedures to promote coordination and participation by our stakeholders.

- Collect more accurate landings data through sample size increases and survey improvements to achieve a 25 percent reduction in percent standard error (PSE).
- Make survey improvements by developing testing methodologies and conducting pilot studies on alternate data collection methods, harvest mortality and the effect of catch and effort on fish stocks. Make results available to the public.
- Facilitate angler participation in the science development process through advisory committees, annual constituent data reviews and outreach meetings.
- Determine the most useful data for management process by consulting biannually with Councils and stakeholders.
- Respond to management needs for better discard data by doubling the amount of recreational at-sea sampling.

**Objective #2: Promote the use of advancing technologies in fisheries science and data management.**

NOAA Fisheries remains committed to researching and implementing advances in data collection, management and dissemination. At the forefront of this commitment is development of a Fisheries Information System (FIS), a portal that identifies the existing federal and state fisheries information systems or databases (data collections) and provides integrated business solutions for effective information sharing. The Agency plans continued collaboration with NOAA research programs, other agencies and constituent user groups.

- Fully implement the Fisheries Information System (FIS).
- Build national fisheries information expert teams to share ideas, successes and experiences in the management of fisheries information.
- Explore data collection methodologies using the latest technology (e.g. electronic reporting, verifiable self-reported data, better area fished data through GPS technology, etc.) for improved geo-spatial data collection.
- Facilitate cooperative research with anglers (e.g. Billfish Tagging Program, circle hook research).
- Conduct joint research projects with US Fish & Wildlife and NOAA Sea Grant.

**Objective #3: Ensure that data is comparable.**

NOAA Fisheries coordinates with partners to collect landings, harvest, catch, effort, participation, economic, sociocultural, and biological data on commercial and recreational fisheries through surveys, registration and reporting systems, and observation. Those data are the foundation of information upon which fishery policy and management decisions are made. The Agency plans to enhance coordination of these data collections through FIS. A key component of the FIS initiative is defining a core data set and ensuring that data definitions and information about the data are well documented in an e-Catalog, making data analysis user-friendly. Meeting this objective requires the continuation of many essential tasks, as well as the integration of angler-suggested improvements and renewed commitments from our state and federal partners.

- Establish national standards and mechanisms for ensuring consistent methodologies and data structure (e.g. units of measurement, coding systems) by integrating and harmonizing all state and federal cooperative data collection programs.
- Implement data element consistency (formats, types and labels) across all Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) MRFSS data.
- Facilitate angler participation in data review and quality assurance through annual data review meetings.

**Objective #4: Maintain and expand the collection of economic and social data and the development of policy relevant models.**

Economic and social data collection is critical to the development of models that will accurately capture the impact of changes in management policies that impact recreational fisheries. The Agency is committed to maintaining the existing database of information, while researching new methods to improve upon existing data. The Agency will also work to enhance access to data, which is critical to our constituency and to policymakers alike.

- Collect angler expenditure data, nationwide, every four years. Next collection of angler expenditures slated for 2005.
- Incorporate the Highly Migratory Species (HMS) fishery in future expenditure surveys.
- Update the NOAA Fisheries economic impact model for recreational fisheries when expenditure data is updated (every four years).
- Develop improved behavior based policy models to cover the top ten most important species nationwide and the five most important in each region that are currently covered by a Fishery Management Plan (FMP) or are being considered for coverage.
- Improve valuation models of marine resources to include consumptive and non-consumptive users

- Collect cost and earnings data from industries that support recreational fisheries such as charter and head boats, tackle manufacturers and retailers, and boat makers.
- Share data with constituents through Agency website and publications. Develop a web query engine for economic estimates within two years.
- Meet regularly with council staff to insure the incorporation of economic information in the policy process. As new models are developed, brief and train council staff on their implementation.

**Objective #5: Improve understanding of habitat influence on marine life and population health.**

Improved research on all living marine resources is the best way to serve our constituencies. The Agency will continue to explore mechanisms to enhance fisheries while maintaining the health of wild stocks. This requires cooperation between our data collection and habitat teams, as well as constituent user groups.

- Facilitate research to evaluate the value and appropriate use of artificial reefs and marine managed areas.
- Understand the impact of consumptive and non-consumptive recreational use of reef species.
- Hold periodic meetings with recreational community to solicit input and encourage dialogue

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**Management Goal Statement: Improved Marine Recreational Fishing Through Better Management**

**Objective #1: Evaluate the status of recreational fisheries management and identify opportunities for improvement**

NOAA Fisheries is committed to doing a better job in managing our marine recreational fisheries. The first step is to determine how the agency currently manages and identify opportunities for improvement.

- Evaluate existing recreational data collection methods (i.e., MRFSS, LPS, For-Hire) to determine how best to calculate the impact of the recreational sector on stock abundance.
- Identify the ten most important recreational species nationwide and the 5 most important by region, using input from anglers and industry, and develop annual facts sheets for these species.
- Work cooperatively with US Fish & Wildlife, and anglers, to identify management techniques currently applied to terrestrial recreational activities (i.e., hunting) that might be appropriate for marine anglers.
- Work with NOAA economists to utilize existing data, and identify areas where additional socio-economic data is required to make fair allocation decisions.

**Objective #2: Promote the effective application of fishery management tools**

NOAA Fisheries is committed to using the most effective management tool available to manage our marine recreational fisheries; this includes the development and use of new and innovative management techniques.

- Assist States in establishing a computerized system for tracking/licensing/registering marine anglers.
- Ensure that fishery management plans and other fishery management related documents and reports provide comprehensive assessments of historical information for both recreational and commercial fisheries as appropriate.
- Provide managers with socio-economic information to make recreational management decisions.
- Develop comparable economic values for recreational and commercial fishing to assist in developing fair and equitable allocation schemes.
- Make ecosystem-based management a reality by adapting management techniques to include new data as it becomes available.
- Promote the use of marine managed and protected areas, artificial reefs, and aquaculture, where appropriate, as tools for conserving and restoring marine species and habitat.
- Incorporate interests of marine recreational users including non-consumptive activities (i.e., recreational diving and marine eco-touring) through a biennial consultation process.

**Objective #3: Make the fisheries management process more open and accessible to the public**

NOAA Fisheries believes that a more open and accessible decision-making process will lead to better management. The Agency needs to strengthen its partnership with recreational users by involving them earlier in the process, and making sure they are fairly represented on the various decision-making bodies.

- Facilitate angler participation in management through fair and appropriate marine angler representation on councils, commissions, committees, subcommittees, and working groups involved in fishery management. Representation should be balanced for geographic areas, fishery types, and between private marine anglers and commercial passenger fishing vessel operators.
- Inform marine anglers and their organizations of opportunities to participate in the management and regulatory process, and provide a way to exchange dialogue on all relevant recreational fisheries issues by developing a NMFS angler website.
- Schedule meetings to better fit times when marine anglers are available to attend.
- Promote early consultation and participation by anglers on key issues such as artificial reefs, marine managed and protected areas, and tournament observer programs through the NMFS angler website.

**Objective #4: Promote measures that reduce bycatch/discard mortality**

NOAA Fisheries has a Congressional mandate under National Standard 9 of the Magnuson-Steven Fishery Conservation and Management Act to minimize the mortality of bycatch. To achieve this mandate, the agency will work closely with the Councils and various NOAA Fisheries Offices to select measures that will minimize bycatch and bycatch mortality.

- Reduce bycatch by working with Councils and various NOAA Fisheries Offices (i.e., Highly Migratory Species Bycatch Reduction Program) on designated recreational species in each region.
- Ensure that bycatch reduction programs that impact recreational fisheries are effectively implemented.
- Investigate gear alternatives and procedures (e.g., circle hooks) to reduce marine angler discard mortality.
- Support voluntary catch-and release programs and the proper handling of fish through partnerships with marine recreational angling groups.
- Support and enhance voluntary seabird/shorebirds protection programs.

**Objective #5: Promote conservation of healthy populations and recovery of overfished stocks by improving compliance with regulations**

NOAA Fisheries believes that an important part of managing recreational fisheries is to provide an incentive for marine recreational anglers to comply with regulations being developed. The incentive is better recreational fishing opportunities.

- Develop regulations that are simple to understand and provide an incentive for compliance by including the marine recreational angling community.
- Establish priorities that will place more emphasis on recreational species where compliance is low.
- Assist marine anglers to become better conservationist by ensuring that law enforcement officers are trained and educated in the rationale behind regulations to allow the fostering of community compliance.
- Enhance cooperation between local, state, and Federal agencies to improved compliance with recreational regulations.

#### **Objective 6: Improve intra-agency marine recreational cooperation**

NOAA Fisheries believes that improving cooperation among intra-agency marine recreational science offices will lead to better management. A more coordinated effort will lead to earlier detection of marine recreational problem areas, and with participation from the public and advisory groups, a cooperative solution to these problems.

- Facilitate intra-agency cooperation by establishing a formal NOAA Recreational Fisheries Team. This interdisciplinary team should include representatives appointed from each of the NOAA Fisheries Program Offices, Regional and Science Centers, the NOS Sanctuaries and MPA programs, and the National Sea Grant College Program. This team will be led by the Office of Recreational Fishing Services (RFS) in Constituent Services.
- Appoint a Recreational Fisheries representative for the NOAA Ecosystems and Fisheries Management Goal teams, for better representation of recreational fishing issues in NOAA's planning processes.
- Involve the Marine Recreational Advisory Subcommittee of the MAFAC more, and earlier on, in providing advice on marine recreational issues.

**Outreach Goal Statement: Promote recreational fishing opportunities, heighten awareness of marine recreational fishing issues, and advance marine conservation principles.**

**Objective #1: Increase the awareness of NOAA's conservation partnership with individual anglers by promoting environmental stewardship practices and educating anglers on NOAA's role in supporting healthy and viable marine recreational fisheries.**

The success of NOAA's efforts to improve science, recreational fisheries management and conservation depends upon the strength of NOAA's partnerships with recreational anglers. Our work is intricately tied to a matrix of efforts that range from huge government initiatives to the work of individual anglers. Therefore, our outreach must address this diverse audience and engage them in NOAA's mission to improve recreational fishing.

- Engage our youth by continuing to promote, develop, and budget for youth fishing programs and increase the number of youth participating in fishing programs.
- Provide easy to understand information on the status of stocks for fisheries of interest to anglers in brochures and on web sites, starting with regional publications (print and web) on top species in 2005.
- Promote public education and outreach through hands-on angler involvement in living marine resource and fisheries habitat conservation and restoration projects through ongoing support and expansion of "Take a child fishing", "NOAA Restoration Day", and other efforts to engage and involve anglers to improve public awareness.
- Develop new multi-lingual educational materials on recreational fisheries stewardship with the annual publication of multi-lingual materials.
- Educate anglers on the benefits of the Essential Fish Habitat program, Marine Mammal Protection Act, and Endangered Species Act on recreational fisheries through increased numbers of publications for anglers.
- Coordinate with industry and fishing groups an annual recreational fishing symposium starting in 2005 as a forum for the most current science and policy related to recreational fishing to include feedback from anglers.
- Enhance working relationships with outdoor media, Fishery Management Councils and State Marine Resource Commissions regarding marine angling to articulate science, management and conservation themes and establish quarterly outreach activities starting in 2004
- Create educational materials for anglers on NOAA's role in improving the collection of economic and scientific information for important recreational fisheries.

**Objective #2: Ensure that marine anglers and appropriate agencies are informed in a timely manner regarding information and issues relevant to marine anglers.**

The family of federal, tribal and state agencies with a role in the management of recreational fisheries will benefit from improved communication with recreational fishing groups. Our information must be delivered to this vast constituency quickly, and must provide access for dialog, organized input, and evaluation.

- Enhance working relationships with marine angling groups for better coordination of policy and regulatory issues that impact anglers through regular attendance at recreational fishing group meetings.
- Ensure that NOAA recreational fisheries reports, management actions, presentations and websites are designed for easy access by the general public/anglers.
- Establish partnership programs with angling organizations and related groups to enhance all aspects of the implementation of the NOAA Fisheries Strategic Plan for Recreational Fisheries.

**Objective #3: Improved interagency function and collaboration with Tribal, State, and Federal partners on issues related to recreational fisheries.**

NOAA's past recreational efforts have been characterized by many individual program efforts without central coordination. By coordinating our internal efforts and combining them with the complex network of other recreational fisheries management and science authorities and jurisdictions, NOAA will enhance the work of recreational fisheries management and conservation. Our individual work will be enhanced by the experience and advice of our partners.

- Provide a focused in-reach initiative to NOAA Fisheries and other appropriate components of NOAA to ensure that staff are aware of the NOAA Fisheries Strategic Plan for Recreational Fisheries and are fully engaged in its implementation where appropriate.
- Participate in recreational fisheries related programs set up under the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act
- Develop annual communications plans for information exchange with State, Tribal and Federal natural resource managers.
- Establish a NOAA role representative to inter-agency recreational fishing groups.

**Objective #4: Expand the use of technology to streamline the consultation and education process, improve the efficiency of information exchange, and increase the timely distribution of recreational fisheries information.**

Advances in technology are allowing more streamlined, immediate, and efficient communications with recreational anglers and groups. To take full advantage of emerging technologies, NOAA proposes to improve its service to anglers via the web, to

create a new constituent database for recreational fishing, and to provide email subscription-services to announce important recreational fisheries issues.

- Create a one-stop NOAA website for the recreational anglers community.
- Develop a real time web site based reporting system for the Atlantic recreational fishery billfish reporting system.
- Develop a recreational fisheries constituent database for subscription based information exchange.
- Provide breaking recreational fisheries regulation information via email/listserve

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