

PROJECT UPDATES

Winter 2009



YOUR TRUSTED SOURCE FOR FISHING DATA

PURPOSE

As fisheries management has evolved to address competing resource demands and emerging science, so has the need for more accurate and detailed data about who is fishing, when and where they fish, and the number and species of fish they catch. For saltwater recreational fishing – which generates an estimated \$82 billion in sales and supports over 500,000 jobs annually according to the most recent data available – NOAA Fisheries is working to meet these needs through the Marine Recreational Information Program, or MRIP. MRIP's purpose is to carefully develop reliable information that managers, anglers, and other stakeholders can use to ensure that fish stocks and the ecosystems they are part of are managed sustainably and fairly for generations to come. It is a vital tool in achieving NOAA's mission of safeguarding the long-term health and productivity of our shared marine resources.

OUTCOME

MRIP will set the global standard for gathering information about recreational fishing. How that information is used will have the greatest impact on oceans and anglers. For recreational fishermen, MRIP will:

- Serve as an objective yardstick against which to measure their stewardship efforts by providing a more complete and reliable accounting of the health of fish stocks.
- Empower them with better information and a more comprehensive set of tools to engage in management, policy, conservation, economic and other issues
- Establish a greater degree of consistency and predictability in the decisions that impact them such as catch limits and fishing seasons.

APPROACH – EVALUATION, INNOVATION, ACTIVATION

MRIP is a multi-year comprehensive evaluation and redesign of saltwater recreational fishing data collection methods that uses a collaborative approach to gathering and reporting information. In developing the program, NOAA Fisheries has engaged a broad group of stakeholders to help consider key issues like how data can best be assembled, who will use the data, and for what purposes. To answer these and other questions, NOAA Fisheries established focused work groups representing a wide range of opinions and tasked them with developing the most credible estimates possible. In summary, MRIP will be working over the coming months and years to earn and maintain trust in the processes and commits to:

- ✓ Use the best available scientific information when collecting and analyzing data.
- ✓ Use resources to efficiently improve data quality in a timely fashion.
- ✓ Work collaboratively with data partners, anglers, and other stakeholders.
- ✓ Keep stakeholders informed about both progress and challenges in improving data quality.
- ✓ Seek input from stakeholders and respond to their needs, concerns, and questions.



MRIP will maximize the accuracy and utility of fishing data by employing flexible, targeted, and regionally based collection programs that adhere to a set of consistent national standards. Implementation is occurring nationwide in a process that generally involves three overlapping phases. The phases are described below and then specific projects are described. The following symbols are used throughout this update to designate which phase each project relates to:

- **Evaluation Phase** – Independent experts are being used as part of an exhaustive evaluation of existing tools to determine which are effective at meeting management and science needs. This phase began in 2006 and current results are driving the innovations being tested in phase 2.
- **Innovation Phase** – New methods of collecting and analyzing data are being developed and tested. Numerous such projects, described below, are underway and will begin yielding results by the spring of 2009.
- ◆ **Activation Phase** - As new and more reliable data collection methods are implemented, we will continue to improve survey coverage so that data are available when and where needed.

Data programs directly managed by NOAA Fisheries will implement improvements as they are identified, documented, and approved by the Executive Steering Committee. For those programs not administered and/or funded by NOAA Fisheries, MRIP will provide technical assistance and support for improvements.

The following sections provide a status report of the work being conducted by each work group as of early 2009. For more details on MRIP implementation, work group members, progress, or how to contact us to give your input, please visit www.countryfish.noaa.gov.

IMPROVED DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Key issues: *Management decisions are based on data that must be comprehensive, detailed, and accurate. Ensuring surveys and subsequent analysis meet these needs is the principal task of the **Design and Analysis Work Group**. It is working to ensure we have as clear a picture as possible of what species we're catching, how many we're catching, where we're catching them, and when we're catching them.*

Design and Analysis Work Group – Implementation milestones:

● = Evaluation Phase ■ = Innovation Phase ◆ = Activation Phase

- Contracted a team of independent statistical consultants to support MRIP activities. The consultants, who come from academia and private firms, add an outside perspective and are providing the expertise to effectively develop and implement research projects. **Timeframe:** *Completed summer 2008.*
- Developed comprehensive documentation of current sampling and estimation procedures for existing recreational fishing surveys. Revised estimation procedures for the MRFSS to better match current sampling designs. The resulting catch estimates are being compared to past estimates. **Timeframe:** *New estimation procedures will be implemented in 2009.*
- As part of the license survey project, developed an estimation program that integrates independent telephone surveys of fishing effort in a dual-frame approach. Components of the dual-frame design include surveying licensed saltwater anglers (which improves the efficiency of data collection) and random surveying of coastal households, which addresses license



exemptions. **Timeframe:** *The program was implemented in the Gulf of Mexico in 2007 and in North Carolina in 2008.*

- As part of the license survey project, designed a dual-frame mail survey that will be tested as an alternative to telephone surveys of recreational fishing effort. Mail surveys could potentially provide better coverage than telephone surveys because they are not complicated by such issues as cell phone use. **Timeframe:** *Dual frame mail survey expected to be implemented in 2009.*
- Supported efforts of California Department of Fish and Game to develop and implement a panel study of recreational anglers that will test for differences in catch rates and angler behavior between private-access and public-access fishing trips. **Timeframe:** *Panel study was implemented in 2008 and will continue through 2009.*
- Conducting an analysis that compares angler reports of discarded catch to direct observations of discarded catch by trained observers. This analysis will help assess the effectiveness and accuracy of the methods currently used to collect recreational fishing discard data. **Timeframe:** *Discard analysis will be completed in early 2009.*

Design and Analysis Work Group – Projects under development:

- Expand sampling and estimation analysis to additional regions.
- Regional control of telephone surveys in Hawaii.
- Pilot study to test new access-point intercept survey sampling design.
- Further development of effort surveys that utilize angler lists as sample frames.
- Implement pilot studies to assess potential biases associated with undercoverage of angler populations in onsite angler surveys.
- Implement pilot studies to test new methodologies for collecting discard data.

IMPROVED DATA MANAGEMENT

Key issues: Proper analysis requires a clear understanding of the characteristics of data, both its strengths and limitations. *The **Data Management and Standards Work Group** is making sure that managers and scientists understand how data are generated so that the data are used properly.*

Data Management and Standards Work Group – Implementation milestones:

● = Evaluation Phase ■ = Innovation Phase ◆ = Activation Phase

- Created a comprehensive, uniform inventory of existing recreational fishing data collection programs. The inventory describes contact information, coverage, quality control, data collection protocols, data processing protocols, data access methods, and data elements for each program. This inventory is the first step in developing common standards and protocols. **Timeframe:** *Initial inventory completed Fall 2008.*
- Supporting redesign of Pacific RecFIN website to provide better access to recreational catch, effort, and field sample data for managers, stock assessment biologists, and the public. **Timeframe:** *Ongoing throughout 2009.*

Data Management and Standards Work Group – Projects under development:

- Determine requirements and scope of an integrated recreational fisheries information database.
- Document and enhance quality assurance / quality control procedures.



HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES

Key issues: *Highly migratory species provide a special challenge to fisheries managers. The total number of trips specifically targeting these fish is relatively small and difficult to accurately characterize in a broad survey so a more targeted approach is required.*

Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Work Group – Implementation milestones:

● = Evaluation Phase ■ = Innovation Phase ◆ = Activation Phase

- Surveyed the HMS private boat fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic, and the HMS charter boat fishery off Texas. Approximately 5100 interviews were conducted with HMS permit holders. Survey achieved a 75% response rate. Results will be used to develop future surveys that provide more precise and accurate information. **Timeframe:** *Final report due in early 2009.*
- Reviewed tournament operator reports from over 50 HMS tournaments in the northeast region (ME-VA). Conducted interviews with HMS tournament captains at 5 events. Data collected from tournaments will be compared to information collected through surveys to improve future catch estimation. **Timeframe:** *Final report due in early 2009.*
- Implemented survey to characterize HMS private boat fishery in Puerto Rico to improve future catch estimation for billfish and other HMS species. **Timeframe:** *Final report due in spring 2009.*
- ◆ Conducting dockside and telephone interviews with HMS for-hire captains and private anglers throughout Florida to characterize the HMS fishery and estimate HMS catch and effort. Results will be used to develop future surveys that provide more precise and accurate information. **Timeframe:** *Final report due in summer 2009.*

Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Work Group – Projects under development:

- Implementation of Phase 2 of Puerto Rico HMS project.
- Develop data collection procedures for HMS on the West Coast.

FOR-HIRE VESSELS

Key issues: *The for-hire sector – charter boats, 6-packs, guide boats, party boats, and head boats are a mix between commercial and recreational fisheries as far as data is concerned because each state has its own licensing and reporting requirements. Since a significant number of fish are taken by for-hire boats, getting an accurate accounting of this sector is a critical management need.*

For Hire-Work Group – Implementation milestones:

● = Evaluation Phase ■ = Innovation Phase ◆ = Activation Phase

- Created a detailed inventory of current for-hire data collection programs and protocols. **Timeframe:** *Completed in Fall of 2008.*
- Hired independent statistical consultants to review and provide recommendations specific to for-hire data collection programs on a region-by-region basis. For-Hire work group will work to implement pilot projects and methodology changes based on the consultants' recommendations. **Timeframe:** *Final report due in early 2009.*



- Developed and implemented an electronic data collection program for the Puerto Rico for-hire fleet. **Timeframe:** *Implemented February 2009.*

For Hire-Work Group – Projects under development:

- Develop and implement recommendations from for-hire review.

NATIONAL SALTWATER ANGLER REGISTRY

Key issues: *To more effectively target catch and effort surveys, and to help measure the social and economic impacts of recreational fishermen, NOAA Fisheries is creating a National Saltwater Angler Registry. This “phone book” of saltwater anglers will improve our ability to contact anglers and help to generate a more detailed and comprehensive picture of recreational fishing. In addition, improved information that is viewed as reliable by all parties will empower anglers to engage more effectively on decisions impacting recreational fishing.*

Angler Registry Team – Implementation milestones:

● = Evaluation Phase ■ = Innovation Phase ◆ = Activation Phase

- Developed Proposed Rule for national angler registry. Submitted Final Rule with responses to public comments. **Timeframe:** *The Final Rule was published on December 23, 2008 with an effective date for the Registry of January 1, 2010.*
- ◆ Initiated state exemption process. States and NOAA Fisheries will enter into Memoranda of Agreement whereby exempted states will submit data consistent with the requirements of the final rule and NOAA Fisheries will designate them as exempted states. Coastal states were notified of the final rule and invited to submit a designation proposal. **Timeframe:** *Memoranda of Agreements will be adopted as states submit proposals.*

Angler Registry Database Work Group – Implementation milestones:

- Worked with state license program managers, regional data collection partnerships, and Data Management and Standards Work Group on the requirements for and the ultimate design of the federal-regional registry database or system of databases. **Timeframe:** *Initial requirements, design, and development completed in early 2009.*
- ◆ Implementation of state data transmission and national registration. **Timeframe:** *Ongoing as Memoranda of Agreements with states are established.*
- Establishment of quality assurance / quality control and data reconciliation processes. **Timeframe:** *Initial analyses and requirements definition in early 2009. Documentation and implementation to be completed by end of 2009.*
- Establish requirements for sample generation, reporting, and survey feedback. **Timeframe:** *End of 2009.*
- ◆ Create interfaces for sample generation, reporting, and survey feedback. **Timeframe:** *Ongoing beginning in 2010.*



COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH

Key issues: *Effective communications among those who collect, analyze, and rely on data for making critical decisions is a fundamental component of MRIP. The long-term success of the program will be built upon open dialogue and continued engagement among all stakeholders.*

Communication and Education Team – Implementation milestones:

- ✓ Generated 100+ articles in 2008 on MRIP in both trade publications and the general media.
- ✓ Placed several op-eds and targeted articles in trade publications and daily/weekly newspapers.
- ✓ Ran Public Service Announcements encouraging public comment on the angler registry.
- ✓ Coordinated with the Operations Team, the Executive Steering Committee and work groups to develop targeted information – such as brochures, presentations and Web content – to keep stakeholders informed of the MRIP development process and encourage input.
- ✓ Engaged with a broad range of stakeholders through listening sessions in each region of the country and informational briefings at more than 50 local and regional events.
- ✓ Developed MRIP website (www.countmyfish.noaa.gov) to enable the public to quickly and effectively track MRIP progress.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about what the MRIP team is doing to improve data for managing saltwater fishing, or for questions or comments, please visit www.countmyfish.noaa.gov. Your feedback is indispensable to the success of the program.