



NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



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National Saltwater Angler Registry Opens on New Year's Day

New program, part of improved data collection system, to help protect nation's ocean resources

Saltwater recreational fishermen have long expressed concerns about the data used to estimate the effects of recreational fishing on ocean resources and the nation's economy. The National Saltwater Angler Registry, which launches on Friday, will help address that concern by providing a comprehensive list of the nation's saltwater anglers that will be used to improve surveys of fishermen. These surveys are used by NOAA scientists to assess the health of fish stocks and to estimate the economic contributions of anglers.

Many saltwater recreational fishermen will be required to register before fishing in 2010. The registry is open for registrations starting Friday, January 1. But if you have a state saltwater fishing license, you may already be part of the registry.

"By registering, recreational anglers will make their catch count," said Jim Balsiger, acting NOAA assistant administrator for NOAA's Fisheries Service. "The National Saltwater Angler Registry is an important tool that will enable us to better estimate the health of marine fisheries so that we're able to preserve the pastime of recreational saltwater fishing for generations to come."

"Recreational fishers need the registry," says Capt. Monty Hawkins, a party boat operator and recreational fishing advocate based in Ocean City, Md. "People's lives depend on the quality of the government's information. It's the basis for management decisions on everything from creel limits to whether to shut down whole sections of the coast. I've been harshly critical of recreational fishing data in the past, but I welcome the registry as a way to improve upon the current system."

Gordon Colvin, a biologist with NOAA's Fisheries Service and interim senior policy advisor on recreational fishing to Balsiger, who has spearheaded the registry implementation, said that many anglers will not need to take any action to register, because their coastal states already have agreements in place with NOAA to share state saltwater fishing license information.

Who Needs to Register:

Recreational saltwater fishermen will need to register if they:

- Hold a license from one of 10 coastal states or territories which do not currently have comprehensive saltwater angler license or registration requirements—Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, Virginia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.
- Fish for or are likely to catch anadromous species in tidal and salt waters; these are fish like river herring, shad, smelt and striped bass that live in the oceans but spawn in fresh water, OR
- Fish in the federal waters more than three miles from the ocean shore or from the mouths of rivers or bays

Who Doesn't Need to Register

Some anglers don't have to register if they:

- Hold a license from one of 15 coastal states with comprehensive licensing or registration — Alabama, Alaska, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas, Washington;
- Are not required under state law in one of these 15 states to hold a fishing license as is sometimes the case with seniors or active-duty military;
- Are under age 16;
- Pay to fish on licensed charter, party or guide boats;
- Hold a Highly Migratory Species Angling permit or subsistence fishing permit;
- Fish commercially under a valid license.

National Saltwater Angler registration is free in 2010. To register beginning Friday, anglers can visit <http://www.countmyfish.noaa.gov> and click on the Angler Registry link, or call the toll-free registration line at 1-888-MRIP411 (1-888-674-7411) from 4:00 am to 12 midnight EST daily.

Anglers will need to provide their name, date of birth, address and telephone number, and will receive a registration number that will allow them to begin fishing immediately. They will receive a registration card in the mail in about 30 days.

Steve Medeiros, executive director of the Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association and a leading advocate for a saltwater fishing license in his state, said the registry is an important step. “While it’s true that some fishermen don’t like the idea of having to register to participate in a sport they’ve taken for granted their whole lives, anyone fishing today knows that increasing pressures on the ocean are having a real effect,” he said. “If we’re going to pass the sport down to our children and grandchildren, we’re going to need sound management based on good data.”

The registry will be used as the basis for conducting surveys of saltwater recreational fishermen to find out how often they fish. It will eventually replace the use of random-digit dialing to coastal households, a system NOAA has had in place since the 1970s. The goal is to improve survey efficiency and reduce bias by making calls only to homes where people fish, and reaching saltwater anglers who live outside coastal counties.

While the registry is among the most visible aspects of NOAA’s Marine Recreational Information Program, it is only one component of this rigorous multi-year, multi-phased overhaul of the system NOAA uses to collect and report recreational fishing data. Each piece of its design and implementation has been guided by close working relationships among NOAA personnel, fisheries managers, state partners, independent scientists and the recreational fishing community.

Recreational fishermen should also remember that regardless of whether an individual is registered with NOAA, they must obey all state regulations and licensing requirements where they are fishing.

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