



United States Department of the Interior


FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
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FISHERIES - USA

RECREATIONAL FISHERIES POLICY  
of the  
U. S. Department of the Interior  
Fish and Wildlife Service

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DIRECTOR

## FISHERIES - USA

### The Recreational Fisheries Policy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

#### PREFACE

The heritage of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) recreational fisheries management program began with the founding of the U.S. Fish Commission in 1871. Over the years, organizational and philosophical changes have altered the course of the Federal fisheries management effort, but throughout this history the Service has maintained a leadership role in scientifically based fishery resource management. Motivated by tradition and the desire to elevate the stature and substance of this Nation's recreational fisheries, the Service initiated a multilateral effort to establish a National Recreational Fisheries Policy (National Policy). This National Policy, adopted in 1988, was structured to serve as a rallying point for agencies, organizations, and individuals across the Nation to enhance the vitality of recreational fisheries at the local, State, and National levels.

Under the auspices of the National Policy, the Service has identified its responsibilities and role. FISHERIES - USA, was selected as the title of the Service Recreational Fisheries Policy (Service Policy), because:

The Service's fisheries program is active within every State of the Union. Thus, the Service's recreational fisheries program is truly national in scope.

The letters U.S.A. are the first letters of three words that describe what the Service Policy is committed to accomplish.

- Usability: The Service is committed to optimize the opportunities for people to enjoy the Nation's recreational fisheries.
- Sustainability: The Service is committed to ensure the future quality and quantity of the Nation's recreational fisheries.

Action: The Service is committed to work in partnership with other Federal governmental agencies, States, Tribes, conservation organizations, and the public to effectively manage the Nation's recreational fisheries.

## INTRODUCTION

As a signatory to the National Policy, the Service endorses its guiding principles, goals, and objectives. The Service recognizes that conservation and enhancement of the Nation's fishery resources will result if the conceptual framework of ideas, principles, and strategies in the National Policy are supported, advanced, and implemented.

The number of recreational anglers in the United States has more than doubled during the past 30 years. During 1985, 60 million anglers engaged in recreational fishing in the United States. Their collective activity generated \$30 billion and 1.2 million jobs for the Nation's economy. These statistics clearly demonstrate the social and economic importance of recreational fishing in this Nation today.

As a leader in recreational fisheries since 1871, the Service directs fisheries management, law enforcement, and research through 8 Regional Offices; 75 National Fish Hatcheries and 4 Technology Centers; 12 National Fishery Research Centers/Laboratories; 41 Cooperative Fishery Units and other satellite research stations; 128 Law Enforcement Offices; the National Fisheries Academy; many of the 452 National Wildlife Refuges; 44 Fish and Wildlife Assistance Offices; and 64 Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Field Offices, and with an annual budget exceeding \$500 million. The Service also administers \$181 million (Fiscal Year 1989) through Federal grants.

During daily activities, the Service enhances fish populations and their habitats that support recreational fishing and provides information and services through functions such as technical assistance, fish production, research, technology development, public education, professional training, coordination, and professional reviews of programs and publications.

Fish and Wildlife Assistance Offices provide technical assistance both internally and outside of the Service in the scientific management and utilization of fish stocks. Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Offices provide technical evaluation and planning recommendations to other Federal agencies, States, and the public regarding environmental impacts on fishery resources and habitats resulting from land and water development projects that are sponsored, licensed, or assisted by the Federal Government. Environmental contaminant specialists carry out investigations to determine the potential impact of contaminants on fishery and habitat resources, and recommend remedial action. Federal Aid offices provide technical

assistance and guidance to the States and administer apportionments that are derived through the Sport Fish Restoration Act and the Anadromous Fish Conservation Act.

The Service operates National Fish Hatcheries that produce and distribute a variety of fish species for recovery, mitigation, restoration, and/or recreational fishing, and conducts a national broodstock program. Fishery research laboratories and technology centers provide the Service with a strong research and development capability that supports progressive management of recreational fisheries. Law Enforcement curbs illegal activities and exploitation of fish stocks.

There are approximately 14 million acres of water on National Wildlife Refuges that support or may have the potential to support quality recreational fishery resources. Recreational fishing opportunities currently are available on 216 refuges (48% of the total number).

The Service has mandated Federal stewardship authority to protect, restore, and enhance fishery resources and habitats that support aquatic life. This authority is provided by various Federal laws including the Fish and Wildlife Act, Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, Clean Water Act, Anadromous Fish Conservation Act, National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, Refuge Recreation Act, Water Resources Development Act, Endangered Species Act, National Environmental Policy Act, Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, Salmon and Steelhead Conservation Act, Great Lakes Fishery Act, Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act, Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Compact, Estuary Protection Act, Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act, the Klamath River Basin Fishery Restoration Act, Sikes Act, Columbia River Basin Fishery Development Act (Mitchell Act), Indian Self Determination Act, Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and the Russian River Basin Restoration Act.

Fisheries - USA serves to reaffirm the Service's commitment to the Nation's fisheries resource. The goals and strategies described in this Service Policy will be accomplished by using available resources and by expanding capabilities through new budget initiatives in areas where further opportunities are identified. The new budget and partnership initiatives will be developed in the Policy's implementation plan.

## SERVICE RECREATIONAL FISHERIES POLICY

This Policy defines the Service's stewardship role in the management of the Nation's recreational fishery resources. The Service believes that the preservation, maintenance, mitigation, and enhancement of aquatic ecosystems is one of the most important roles the Federal government can undertake to ensure high-quality recreational fisheries. In defining its role, the Service recognizes and respects the rights of other jurisdictional entities, and desires to work in partnership with them for effective management of these resources. The Service acknowledges that most existing management areas (including National Wildlife Refuges) were established for specific purposes, and that actions taken under this Policy that involves those areas must be compatible with the legislated purposes. For the purpose of this Policy, the definition of recreational fishing encompasses related recreational activities such as fish photography and fish watching.

Current estimates indicate that the demand for recreational fishing may increase as much as 40% by the year 2030. This increased demand must be met through a diversity of ways, including:

- o ensuring that recreational fisheries are given full consideration in future water resource projects,
- o identifying and remediating the affects of contaminants on fisheries,
- o developing access to waters previously unavailable for fishing,
- o restoring or enhancing depleted or declining fisheries,
- o optimizing productivity of existing fisheries through habitat and water quality improvement, and
- o utilizing angler education programs to adjust expectations of what constitutes a successful fishing experience.

The Service is committed to promote and enhance freshwater, anadromous, and coastal fishery resources for maximum long-term public benefit. Therefore, the Service's Policy is to:

1. Preserve, restore, and enhance fish populations and their habitats.
2. Promote recreational fishing on Service and other lands to provide the public with a high quality recreational experience.
3. Ensure that recommendations concerning recreational fisheries

potentials and opportunities are included as part of appropriate field studies and management assistance efforts performed by the Service on non-Service waters.

4. Serve as an active partner with other Federal governmental agencies, States, Tribes, conservation organizations, and the public in developing recreational fisheries programs.
5. Promote the conservation and enhancement of the Nation's recreational fisheries through the Service's grant in aid programs.
6. Improve and expand quantifiable economic valuations of the Nation's recreational fisheries to demonstrate the importance of this resource to the health and welfare of our society and to the Nation's economy.

The accomplishment of this Service Policy is the shared responsibility of all Service managers and employees. Current Service programs already provide and/or support recreational fishing. Opportunities exist, however, to enhance the Service's performance in the recreational fisheries arena by clearly identifying responsibilities for developing and managing recreational fisheries and delegating those responsibilities to the appropriate field managers. All Service employees are encouraged to explore innovative approaches to implement the intent of this Policy, and supervisors are directed to encourage, recognize, and reward contributions.

#### GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Collectively, the following goals and strategies provide internal guidance for program development emphasis. Additionally, they describe ways through which the Service will work in partnership with other Federal governmental agencies, States, Tribes, conservation organizations, and the public. While the strategies address ongoing and new activities, most of the ongoing activities do not have sufficient resources to adequately meet present program support needs. Consequently, new initiatives are needed to support the new activities, and to address adequately, the capabilities of many ongoing activities.

##### GOAL A. EFFECT THE PRESERVATION AND/OR INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY OF FISHERY RESOURCES

The Service recognizes that many fish populations and the quality of their habitats continue to decline while the numbers of anglers and angling effort are increasing. Providing adequate fishery resources for the enjoyment of future anglers and others will require coordinated, concerted, and diligent efforts by State and Federal agencies, and Tribes to maintain, restore, and increase the productivity of existing fish populations and their habitats.

- Strategy 1. The Service will utilize its resources and encourage other entities to conserve and enhance the Nation's recreational fishery resource by:
- a. Ensuring that management policies on Service-managed waters promote the conservation and enhancement of existing and potential recreational fisheries and their habitats.
  - b. Providing technical assistance to Federal agencies such as Department of Defense, Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Tribal and State agencies for the management of recreational fisheries and aquatic habitats.
  - c. Assisting with the identification and inventory of significant interjurisdictional recreational fish stocks and habitat, while continuing to support State interjurisdictional coalitions.
  - d. Seeking opportunities to identify and manage unique and/or threatened recreational fisheries to ensure that they are restored and/or maintained, and continue to be managed as recreational fisheries.
  - e. Promoting recovery, restoration, and enhancement of recreational fishery resources by propagation and stocking of fish as appropriate.
  - f. Assisting in accomplishing the goals and objectives of the Service's "No Net Loss" Wetlands Policy, including quantity and quality of wetlands as they relate to fisheries initiatives.
  - g. Providing consultation on potential adverse impacts to endangered, threatened, or candidate fish species or their habitats through Section 7 consultation under the Endangered Species Act, in recognition that this effort frequently yields positive benefit to recreational fisheries.
  - h. Assisting in the restoration or recovery of seriously depleted, endangered, or threatened fish such as the Atlantic salmon, Apache trout, shortnose sturgeon, or greenback cutthroat trout with the expectation that such species could eventually contribute to recreational fishing.

- i. Ensuring that protection, mitigation, enhancement, and evaluation of recreational fisheries are addressed in Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act reports, Section 10 and Section 404 permit comments, and Service comments on Federal Energy Regulatory Commission hydroelectric licensing proposals.
- j. Conducting technical reviews of Environmental Assessments and Environmental Impact Statements developed under the National Environmental Policy Act on proposed Federal water development projects to enhance, or minimize adverse impacts on, recreational fisheries.
- k. Actively participating in the development and review of State Water Quality Standards and Certifications and other water quality issues, such as NPDES permits and non-point source control to ensure that highest protection is given to fishery habitat.
- l. Identifying recreational fishing opportunities that are limited by water quality or habitat degradation, and promoting restoration of such situations to support healthy recreational fisheries.
- m. Providing highly professional fisheries training opportunities to Service employees, other Federal and State employees, Tribes, and the private sector.
- n. Providing law enforcement assistance in accordance with appropriate authorities where illegal activities negatively impact fishery resources.
- o. Maintaining and improving, where possible, water quality and quantity on Service-managed lands in support of healthy recreational fisheries.

Strategy 2. The Service will promote, support, and conduct research and development that will support fisheries management by:

- a. Providing needed information on fish and their habitats including biological and/or ecological requirements that will have practical application to management and fish husbandry.
- b. Providing required genetics information for use in the management of recreational fisheries.
- c. Facilitating the registration of drugs, chemicals, and biological control methods required for fishery management and fish culture with careful consideration



of the possible effects of discharge of such chemicals on wild stocks and the environment.

- d. Directing research efforts concerning the co-management of migratory bird populations and other plant and animal communities, and recreational fisheries on Service-managed lands.
- e. Developing and maintaining biological data bases on recreational fish species and their ecological requirements for use by managers in planning and managing recreational fisheries.
- f. Providing a technology transfer system through which recreational fisheries information is made available.

GOAL B. ENSURE AND ENHANCE THE QUALITY, QUANTITY, AND DIVERSITY OF RECREATIONAL FISHING OPPORTUNITIES

The Service has the opportunity to increase the quality of recreational fishing on Service managed waters. These opportunities include, but are not limited to, providing additional accesses to fisheries, designating additional waters on Service lands as recreational fisheries, developing new fisheries, increasing the productivity of existing fisheries, and restoring depleted or declining fisheries and habitat through intensive management.

- Strategy 1. The Service will provide for the development, enhancement, and diversification of recreational fishing opportunities by:
- a. Inventorying all Service-managed waters to determine fish species and habitats present, and assessing existing and potential recreational fishing opportunities.
  - b. Developing and implementing management plans for fisheries on Service-managed lands with recreational fisheries potential, and revising existing plans as necessary.
  - c. Developing training programs for Service biologists concerned with the innovative co-management of wetlands for both migratory bird populations and recreational fisheries.
  - d. Establishing new recreational fishing opportunities through habitat and/or species management and through the propagation and stocking of fish, when appropriate,

on Service-managed waters. Put-and-take fishing projects (stocking catchable fish) will be considered on a case by case basis.

- e. Increasing access to recreational fishing sites on Service-managed waters and to off-site recreational fisheries when access across Service land is required.
- f. Taking action to avoid, minimize, or remediate pollution problems leading to contamination of fish and their habitats and advising the public of any advisories, restrictions, or warnings related to taking or consuming fish from Service facilities.
- g. Increasing program emphasis in promoting cooperative initiatives for the management of large reservoirs, tailwaters, large rivers, estuaries, and coastal areas.
- h. Providing enhanced capabilities to assist in the coordination of multijurisdictional fisheries.

Strategy 2. The Service will develop and maintain social and economic data bases on recreational fisheries by:

- a. Conducting studies as needed to obtain information on angler preferences, opinions, and satisfaction.
- b. Conducting the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation to ensure that adequate information is obtained on the use and value of recreational fisheries.

**GOAL C. DEVELOP AND ENHANCE PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN GOVERNMENTS AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR FOR CONSERVING AND MANAGING RECREATIONAL FISHERIES**

The Service will participate in coordinating, cooperating, and forming partnerships with other Federal governmental agencies, States, Tribes, conservation organizations, and the public to determine recreational fishing needs, and to maintain, enhance, or develop effective recreational fisheries management programs.

Strategy 1. The Service will develop specific forums for exchange of information and program coordination by:

- a. Consulting with constituency organizations to obtain their assistance in scoping, planning, and reviewing Service initiatives to maintain, enhance, and develop recreational fisheries.

- b. Developing and implementing forums, workshops, and symposia for the exchange of information on effective management methods and program coordination.
- c. Making Service scientific and technical resources available to further the development of aquaculture in the United States to include technical fish health assistance and disease certification services to State agencies and private aquaculture.
- d. Assisting, when requested, with the inventory, assessment, management plan preparation, implementation, facility design, and management of fish populations and habitats on waters owned and/or controlled by non-Service entities.

Strategy 2. The Service will develop and promote mechanisms for the private sector to participate in recreational fisheries programs by:

- a. Encouraging challenge grant opportunities for private sector partnerships in managing and developing recreational fisheries on Service-managed waters.
- b. Encouraging representatives from constituency organizations to participate in Service recreational fisheries programs.
- c. Creating opportunities that will encourage volunteer participation in activities, such as those that take place under the Take Pride in America Program, that support recreational fishing and enhancement of aquatic habitat.
- d. Developing regional outreach programs to provide Service technical assistance to angler constituency groups in support of their efforts in recreational fisheries conservation and restoration.

Strategy 3. The Service will support a major aquatic resource education/information program to encourage public participation in recreational programs, to promote ethical use of fishery resources, and to emphasize the importance of conserving and restoring healthy aquatic habitats by:

- a. Enhancing information endeavors that will increase public awareness and understanding of fishery management practices and problems.

- b. Providing information through the media, technical publications, informational pamphlets, and other sources, to anglers and the public on how their activities related to fishing, waste disposal, land use, etc., impact fisheries conservation and management.
- c. Identifying and publishing the effects of environmental contaminants on fish populations, habitats and assisting the angling community in finding solutions to habitat contamination problems.
- d. Promoting recreational fisheries as re-usable resources by encouraging non-harvest (i.e., catch-and-release fishing) where appropriate.
- e. Promoting improved outdoor ethical behavior among recreational anglers and encouraging the development and acceptance of a national code of angler ethics.

Strategy 4. The Service will administer effective and efficient grant programs to enhance the ability of States, territories, and Tribes to manage sport fish resources and conduct aquatic educational programs by:

- a. Assisting the States desiring to participate, to maintain their eligibility.
- b. Working with the Treasury Department to ensure that funds are promptly and accurately apportioned to the States.
- c. Documenting that Service research projects funded with with administrative or reverted funds, and State projects, provide recreational fishery resource and user benefits.
- d. Maintaining records of costs, assets, and accomplishments, and provide such information to the public.
- e. Disseminating information and plans generated by the States and the Service to facilitate effective and cooperative management of fishery resources.
- f. Continuing to provide technical support and guidance to Tribal recreational fisheries programs.

GOAL D. COOPERATE TO MAINTAIN A HEALTHY RECREATIONAL FISHERIES INDUSTRY

The recreational fisheries industry is uniquely dependent on healthy

aquatic habitats capable of supporting an abundant supply and variety of fish. Therefore, fostering sound aquatic conservation endeavors is in the industries best interest to ensure the potential for future recreational fisheries. Effective management of existing and judicious development of new fisheries are critical to maintain a prosperous recreational fisheries industry.

Strategy: To ensure that sound management percepts are available to the industry, the Service will work toward maintaining a healthy recreational fisheries industry by:

- a. Developing cooperative projects, such as habitat improvement projects, with the recreational fisheries industry for the mutual benefit of recreational fishery resources.
- b. Working cooperatively with the recreational fisheries industry, such as through the promotion of National Fishing Week, to promote enhancement of recreational fisheries.
- c. Promoting the use of the sport fish restoration logo on fishing tackle and equipment, and at the site of field projects, to emphasize that the fishing public is contributing to sport fish restoration through the Federal Aid program.