

U.S. MARINE RECREATIONAL FISHERIES

DATA COLLECTION. While data on commercial fisheries have been collected for many years, detailed statistical information on marine recreational fishing is also required to support a variety of fishery management and development purposes. These include the objectives of the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act, Public Law 94-265, as amended. However, prior to 1979, the lack of a continuous and systematic collection of marine recreational fishery data prevented the accomplishment of these goals. Therefore, NMFS began a new comprehensive Marine Recreational Fishery Statistical Survey (MRFSS) in 1979. Data collected through the MRFSS show that recreational fisheries can have a tremendous impact on fish stocks. For several important management species recreational landings surpass commercial landings. Surveys have been conducted in the following areas and years:

Atlantic and Gulf, 1979 through 1995;
Pacific, mid-1979 through 1989, 1993 - 1995;
Western Pacific, 1979 through 1981;
Caribbean, 1979, 1981.

Preliminary estimates of catch and trips from the MRFSS for the Atlantic/Gulf and Pacific coasts for 1995 are presented in the following tables. Summary graphs for 1986-1995 (Atlantic/Gulf) and 1983-1995 (Pacific) catch and trips are also shown. The survey is being conducted in 1996 along the coast of the entire continental United States except the state of Texas.

The MRFSS data collection consists of an intercept survey of anglers in the field and an independent telephone survey of coastal county households. These independent components, along with census information, are combined to produce estimates of recreational catch, fishing effort, and participation. Estimates are generated by subregion, state, species, mode and area of fishing. In addition, information on catch rates and measurements of fish lengths and weights are obtained.

The MRFSS is only one of several NMFS programs which collect data on recreational fisheries. Specialized surveys which target important management species are also conducted.

DATA TABLES. The total number of fish caught is presented

for twenty commonly caught species groups on the Atlantic, Gulf, and Pacific coasts. Total number caught includes those fish which were brought ashore in whole form and were available for identification, weighing, and measuring as well as those fish which were not available for identification. This latter category includes those fish which were used for bait, discarded, filleted or released alive. Each species group may contain one or more species, genus, family.

Total catch is distributed by subregion, fishing area and mode. The fishing areas are; ocean 3 miles or less from land, ocean more than 3 miles from land, and inland (sounds, rivers, bays). However, ocean data for the Gulf coast of Florida are reported as 10 miles or less from land and more than 10 miles from land.

The fishing modes are; shore (man-made structures and beach/bank), party/charter boat, and private/rental boat. In 1995 partyboats were not sampled by the MRFSS in the South Atlantic and Gulf subregions; therefore estimated catches are given for charterboats only for these subregions.

Trip estimates and participation estimates are presented for coastal residents (generally residing within 25 miles of the coast), non-coastal residents, and non-residents fishing outside of their home state. Estimated number of trips are also shown by fishing mode.

The 1995 survey did not include the states of Texas or Washington. Sampling was not conducted during January/February in the Atlantic coast states north of Florida, or in November/December in states north of Massachusetts. More detailed information will be available in a separate MRFSS report to be published later.

PRELIMINARY 1995 MRFSS DATA. The U.S. marine recreational finfish catch in 1995 (excluding Alaska, Hawaii, Washington, Texas, and Pacific coast salmon) was an estimated 339.1 million fish. Fifty-three percent of these fish were released alive. The total marine recreational finfish harvest (excluding fish released alive) was an estimated 157.7 million fish weighing an estimated 228.7 million pounds. These fish were taken on an estimated 65.6 million fishing trips. Seventy-five percent of these trips were taken by residents of the state the fishing trip was made from.

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The Atlantic and Gulf coasts accounted for over 92 percent of the total U.S. marine recreational finfish catch by number and for 88 percent of the fishing trips.

The private/rental boat mode accounted for 62 percent of the total U.S. marine recreational finfish catch by number while shore and party/charter modes made up 26 and 12 percent, respectively.

ATLANTIC AND GULF. Commonly caught species in 1995 were herrings (primarily used for bait), spotted seatrout, Atlantic croaker, black sea bass, pinfish, summer flounder, and saltwater catfish. Top-ranked non-bait species by subregion were striped bass in the North Atlantic, summer flounder in the Mid-Atlantic, spot in the South Atlantic, and spotted seatrout in the Gulf of Mexico. By subregion the Gulf of Mexico accounted for the highest numbers of fish caught (44%) followed by the Mid-Atlantic (28%).

Thirty-two percent of the Atlantic and Gulf coast recreational fishing trips were made in South Atlantic, thirty percent in Gulf of Mexico, twenty-seven percent in Mid-Atlantic, and eleven percent in North Atlantic. Fifty-six percent of all Atlantic and Gulf trips were made from boat modes while 44 percent were shore based trips.

The most commonly caught non-bait species in 1995 by mode were spot from shore mode, spotted seatrout from charterboat mode (South Atlantic and Gulf only), black sea bass from party/charterboat mode (North and Mid-Atlantic subregions only), and spotted seatrout from private/rental boat mode. Private/rental boat trips accounted for 60 percent of all fish caught recreationally on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts.

Fifteen percent of the total marine recreational catch on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts came from the EEZ. The most commonly caught species in federally managed waters were black sea bass, Atlantic cod, red snapper, scup, and bluefish.

PACIFIC. Commonly caught species in 1995 were Pacific mackerel, kelp bass, barred sand bass, white croaker, and surf smelt. Top-ranked species by subregion were Pacific mackerel in Southern California, surf smelt in Northern California, and black rockfish in Oregon. By subregion Southern California accounted for the highest numbers of fish caught (69%) followed by Northern California (25%) and Oregon (6%).

Fifty-seven percent of the Pacific coast recreational fishing trips (excluding Washington and salmon trips) were made in Southern California. Sixty-one percent of all Pacific coast trips were taken from boat modes while 39 percent were from the shore.

Top ranked species in 1995 by mode were surf smelt from shore mode, Pacific mackerel from party/charter and private/rental mode. Private/rental boat trips accounted for 47 percent of all fish caught recreationally on the Pacific coast.

Eighteen percent of the total marine recreational catch on the Pacific coast came from the EEZ. The most commonly caught Pacific coast species in federally managed waters for 1995 were Pacific mackerel, barred sand bass and kelp bass. Sixty-five percent of the Pacific coast marine recreational catch came from the ocean within three miles from shore (state waters).