

August 13, 2014

Eileen Sobeck
Assistant Administrator
NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service
1315 East West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Ms. Sobeck,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments to the development of the NOAA Fisheries National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy. As Board chair of the National Fish Habitat Partnership (the Partnership), I believe the underlining tenets of the Partnership are consistent with NOAA Fisheries approach to habitat conservation. The Partnership seeks to protect, restore, and enhance the nation's fish and aquatic communities through partnerships that foster fish habitat conservation and improve the quality of life for the American people.

As the Policy is being crafted and implemented, we encourage NOAA Fisheries to take into consideration existing programs to which it currently provides a support or leadership role, making connections where appropriate. In particular, we draw your attention to programs under the NOAA Habitat Blueprint such as the Habitat Focus Areas, and the National Fish Habitat Partnership, both of which can play an important role in implementing habitat components of the National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy.

Under Draft Goal #3: Encourage Partnership, Engagement and Innovation, we encourage NOAA to incorporate the suggested "Partnership on conservation and enhancement projects (e.g. habitat restoration) to further fishery management goals." And support an additional action item/principal: "seek collaboration with existing partnership groups that are currently working to protect, restore, and enhance habitats benefiting recreational fisheries."

I am also forwarding the attached comment letter on behalf of the Coastal Fish Habitat Partnerships. These Fish Habitat Partnerships are successfully addressing marine and coastal issues, and can be an avenue through which to take action to achieve NOAA's Saltwater Recreational Fishing Policy goals.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kelly R Hepler".

Kelly Hepler
Chair, National Fish Habitat Board