

**NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE POLICY DIRECTIVE 01-118**

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Fisheries Management

National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy

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***SUMMARY OF REVISIONS:***

This document supersedes the 02/12/2015 version of PD 01-118, National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy. The policy is updated to better address the priorities and needs of anglers, the communities that rely on them, and the Agency.

A number of revisions are made to the 2015 National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy, the most substantive of which are the addition of two primary policy goals:

- Advance climate-ready policies and programs to understand and respond to climate-driven changes and impacts on fishery resources and the ecosystem.
- Pursue and support equitable treatment and meaningful involvement of underserved and underrepresented communities in recreational and non-commercial fisheries and stewardship.

Additional references to climate, equity, and inclusion are integrated into the document, and it includes a strengthened focus on sustainability. Non-commercial fisheries are better integrated into the policy and references are added to the policy statement, goals, and guiding principles. Specific issues identified as priorities during the comment period are incorporated, such as wind energy, aquaculture and depredation. Emphasis is added regarding partnerships, engagement, and collaborative data collection. References to protected resources are expanded. A specific commitment to track and measure implementation of the policy is made.

I. Introduction

Saltwater recreational fishing is a traditional American pastime integral to social, cultural, and economic life in coastal communities across the nation. This time-honored activity allows millions of people access to America's great outdoors each year, while generating billions of dollars in economic value.

Traditionally shaped by commercial forces, demographic, market, and ecological shifts are changing the nature of these fisheries. Our nation's expansive coastal and ocean resources face

increasing pressure as coastal populations grow and more people rely on fishing for food, recreation, and supporting social and cultural traditions in ecologically important marine and estuarine areas.

Beginning with its roots as the Commission of Fish and Fisheries in 1871, NOAA Fisheries has continuously played a leadership role in science-based stewardship of our nation's living marine resources. We are responsible for maintaining healthy marine and coastal ecosystems capable of supporting sustainable and productive fishery resources for the long-term use and benefit of the nation.

NOAA Fisheries values the substantial benefits to the nation associated with saltwater recreational and non-commercial fishing and is committed to pursuing a collaborative stewardship approach promoting safe public access to fishery resources, fishery sustainability, and regulatory accountability suited to the unique nature of recreational fisheries. We believe it is essential to recognize the existence and significance of non-commercial fishing and acknowledge its role in the overall fishing landscape. In cases where non-commercial fishing significantly affects the local ecosystem or intersects with other fisheries management issues, we believe the needs of non-commercial fishermen can best be addressed at the local or regional level. We also recognize the inherent differences between recreational and commercial fisheries and the need for stewardship approaches able to best accommodate each while achieving conservation and management goals. NOAA celebrates and supports diverse uses of fish and ensures fisheries management includes and considers various fishing motivations and communities.

In February 2015, NOAA Fisheries released the National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy followed by a series of national and regionally tailored implementation and engagement plans. In March 2022, NOAA Fisheries and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission co-hosted the fourth National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Summit. Informed by regional conversations leading to the 2022 Summit discussions, NOAA Fisheries pursued updating the Recreational Fisheries Policy. The 2023 update addresses the changing environment and evolving fishery interests based on extensive public input.

## II. Objective

The purpose of this policy is to guide the development and maintenance of enduring, sustainable, high-quality saltwater recreational and non-commercial U.S. fisheries. This policy identifies goals and guiding principles to integrate into NOAA Fisheries planning, budgeting, decision-making, and activities. It includes examples of implementation concepts and strategies supported by NOAA Fisheries.

**Policy Statement:** It is the policy of NOAA Fisheries to foster, support, and enhance a broadly accessible and diverse array of sustainable saltwater recreational and non-commercial fisheries for the benefit and enjoyment of the nation.

**Goals:** Consistent with, and in furtherance of, the purposes of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) and other applicable federal statutes, the goals of this

policy are to:

- 1) Support, maintain, and recover sustainable saltwater recreational and non-commercial fisheries resources, including protected species, and healthy marine and estuarine habitats.
- 2) Promote inclusive and sustainable saltwater recreational and non-commercial fishing for the social, cultural, and economic benefit of the nation.
- 3) Enable enduring participation in, and enjoyment of, saltwater recreational fisheries through science-based conservation and management.
- 4) Advance climate-ready policies and programs to understand and respond to climate-driven changes and impacts on fishery resources and the ecosystem.
- 5) Pursue and support equitable treatment and meaningful involvement of underserved and underrepresented communities in recreational and non-commercial fisheries and stewardship.

**Application:** This policy pertains to the activities of those fishing for sport or pleasure, as set out in the MSA definition of recreational fishing, and non-commercially, whether retaining (e.g., consuming, sharing, cultural purposes) or releasing their catches, as well as the businesses and industries (e.g., the for-hire fleets, bait and tackle businesses, tournaments) that support them.

**Guiding Principles:** The guiding principles are a framework to evaluate agency decision-making and actions to advance the policy goals.

**Guiding Principle 1. Support ecosystem conservation, sustainability, and enhancement.**

NOAA Fisheries recognizes a wide range of approaches to restore, maintain, and build diverse, healthy, and resilient marine ecosystems that are foundational to sustainable high-quality recreational fisheries, including in response to impacts from climate change. Examples of strategies that NOAA Fisheries supports include:

- Restoration, conservation, and enhancement of habitats that benefit recreational and other fish stocks and support ecosystem health.
- Development and application of best practices to support recreational fishing communities as stewards of a sustainable ecosystem.
- Promotion of tools, practices, and management strategies that address or reduce impacts of discards in recreational fisheries.
- Improving understanding of the impacts of depredation on recreational fisheries.
- Conservation of abundant and resilient forage fish stocks integral to healthy resilient ecosystems and recreational fisheries.
- Improving understanding of impacts to protected species from recreational fishing activities.
- Development and application of aquaculture tools and technologies that support recreational fisheries consistent with existing agency policy.

**Guiding Principle 2. Promote inclusive public access to sustainable and abundant recreational fishing opportunities.**

NOAA Fisheries recognizes the fundamental and historic importance of broad public access to healthy and sustainable fisheries resources for recreational fishing. Examples of strategies that NOAA Fisheries supports include:

- Decision-making that fully considers social, cultural, economic, and ecological factors.
- Evaluating fishery allocations to facilitate equitable distribution of, and access to, fishing opportunities as fisheries develop, evolve, and adapt to impacts from, for example, climate change and increasing ocean uses (e.g., wind energy and aquaculture).
- Expanding and optimizing, as appropriate, fishing opportunities and accessibility to federally managed resources based on demonstrated conservation status and gains.
- Understanding and addressing barriers and constraints to participation in recreational fisheries and stewardship.

**Guiding Principle 3. Coordinate with state, tribal, and federal research and management entities.**

NOAA Fisheries recognizes that improving fisheries science and management is best achieved through collaboration and partnership with a broad spectrum of entities tied to the sustainability of recreational and non-commercial fisheries. Examples of strategies that NOAA Fisheries supports include:

- Enhancing collaboration with partners to improve recreational data collection and estimates of catch and effort.
- Aligning program goals and implementation strategies in support of inclusive, diverse, equitable, and sustainable recreational fisheries.
- Enhancing regulatory compliance by improving public awareness and understanding of recreational regulations through effective education, outreach, and enforcement.
- Reducing redundancy, leveraging resources, and exploring opportunities for complementary co-management of recreational stocks.
- Supporting diverse and equitable representation of recreational fisheries interests in decision-making forums.
- Fostering consideration of sustainable recreational fisheries in coastal and offshore industry development.

**Guiding Principle 4. Advance innovative solutions to evolving science, management, environmental, and climate-related challenges.**

NOAA Fisheries recognizes its responsibility to lead and facilitate development of innovative approaches and solutions to evolving stewardship challenges in rapidly changing fisheries environments. Examples of strategies that NOAA Fisheries supports include:

- Expanding partnerships, cooperative research, and citizen science to embrace expertise outside the agency to develop innovative tools and solutions.

- Encouraging and incentivizing development and use of new gear technology that provides conservation gains for target and non-target species (e.g., reduces harmful interactions, improves release survival).
- Supporting development of science programs and technology to anticipate fishery migrations due to climate change and other changing oceanographic conditions.
- Developing and supporting cutting-edge scientific tools, techniques, and diverse approaches to increase knowledge of recreational fisheries and marine ecosystems.
- Exploring management approaches that have the potential to better accommodate the unique nature of recreational fisheries.

**Guiding Principle 5. Provide scientifically sound and trusted social, cultural, economic, and ecological information.**

NOAA Fisheries recognizes its pivotal role in providing world class science to facilitate informed decision-making and effective stewardship. Examples of strategies that NOAA Fisheries supports include:

- Supporting transparent, inclusive, and participatory science and stewardship in federally managed recreational fisheries.
- Identifying and addressing regional and national data and science gaps in coordination with management communities.
- Collaboratively developing and implementing cooperative research activities that use established standards to ensure compatibility, scientific quality, and credibility.
- Understanding and addressing biases in recreational fishing surveys and improving estimates of catch and fishing effort.
- Considering recreational fisheries needs in the prioritization of agency science activities.

**Guiding Principle 6. Communicate and engage with the recreational and non-commercial fishing public.**

NOAA Fisheries recognizes the need to build public confidence in and expand understanding of science and management processes. Examples of strategies that NOAA Fisheries support include:

- Engage in meaningful dialogue to understand and respond to recreational community issues, including with traditionally underrepresented groups.
- Listening, understanding, and responding to recreational angler issues and perspectives.
- Communicating in multiple mediums and forums in plain, inclusive, and culturally relevant language, to improve understanding of fisheries science and management.
- Empowering recreational fishing participants to become resource stewards and effectively engage in the fishery science and management processes.
- Engaging with recreational fishing communities to understand and reduce interactions with protected species.
- Improving engagement partnerships to support inclusive and equitable fishing access for recreational anglers.

### III. Authorities and Responsibilities

**Authorities and Responsibilities:** NOAA Fisheries headquarters directorate and office directors, regional leadership (Regional Administrators and Science Directors), and the Office of Recreational Fisheries are responsible for Agency-wide implementation of this policy.

This policy is not intended to and does not create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable by law or in equity by any party against the United States, its departments, agencies, entities, officers, employees, agents, or any other person.

### IV. Measuring Effectiveness

**Implementation:** The National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy is effective upon release and supersedes the 2015 National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy. This policy will guide NOAA Fisheries' approach to saltwater recreational fisheries until such time as it is amended or rescinded by the NOAA Fisheries Assistant Administrator.

The policy will be implemented through consideration and integration of policy goals and guiding principles at all levels within the Agency including office and program level planning, budgeting, and decision-making. In addition, the Agency will develop, track, measure progress of, and update national and regional saltwater recreational fisheries implementation plans.

In implementing this policy, it is incumbent upon NOAA Fisheries to execute its stewardship responsibilities in a manner that minimizes disruptions to, and burdens on, the regulated community while improving public understanding of, and participation in, the regulatory process.

### V. References

Procedural directives will be issued to implement this policy as needed.

Signed  \_\_\_\_\_ 8/24/23  
Janet Coit Date  
Assistant Administrator for Fisheries