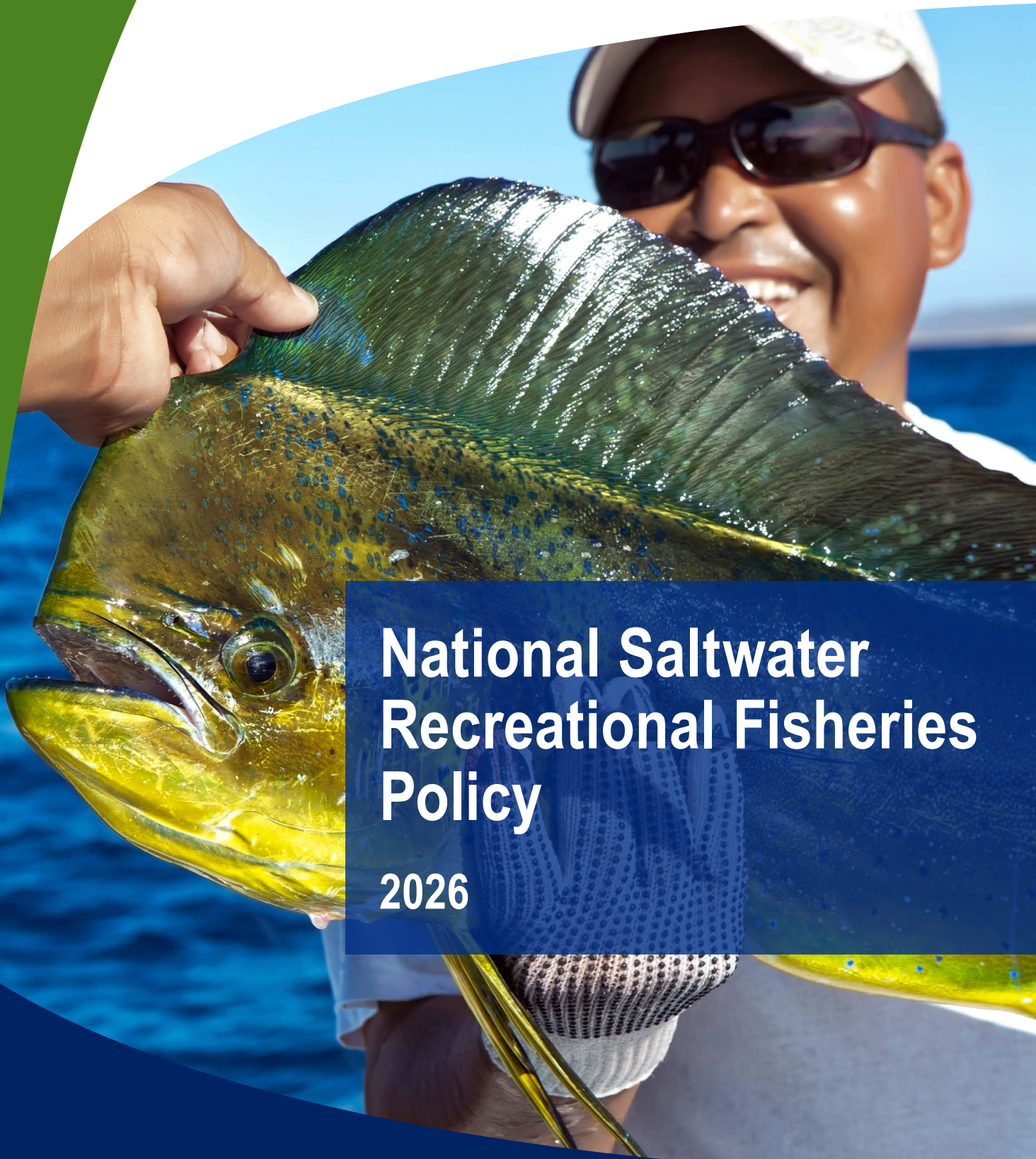




**NOAA**  
**FISHERIES**



# National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy

2026



## Introduction

Saltwater recreational fishing is a traditional American pastime and is integral to the social, cultural, and economic fabric of coastal communities across the nation. This time-honored activity is an engine of opportunity for our nation, connecting millions of people to America's great outdoors while generating tens of billions of dollars in economic value each year.

NOAA recognizes the significance of recreational and non-commercial fishing (collectively referred to here as recreational fishing) and acknowledges their roles in the overall fishing and conservation landscape. We value saltwater recreational fishing for its contributions to the American way of life, including the productive harvest of our seafood resources. We also recognize the inherent differences between recreational and commercial fisheries, and the need for management approaches that are able to best accommodate each while achieving conservation and management goals. We will continue to pursue collaborative stewardship and promote safe public access to sustainable fishery resources.

In February 2015, NOAA Fisheries released the first [National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy](#). This 2026 update was developed in consideration of the Administration's priorities, including Executive Order 14276 (Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness), and aligns the policy with recent strategic and evolving fishery interests.

Front: Mahi-mahi. Credit: iStock.

Left: Fishing Reel. Credit: iStock.



## Policy Statement

This policy will guide NOAA Fisheries' mission to support and enable enduring, sustainable, and high-quality saltwater recreational fisheries for the American public. NOAA Fisheries is committed to addressing new and emerging priorities and protecting the vibrant tourism and recreation industries that depend on healthy coastal ecosystems for the benefit of the nation. The goals and guiding principles laid out in this policy inform NOAA Fisheries' planning, budgeting, decision-making, and activities.

This policy pertains to the recreational fishing activities of fishermen who fish for sport or pleasure, as per the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act's (MSA) definition of recreational fishing, whether retaining (e.g., consuming and sharing) or releasing their catches, and associated shoreside industries (e.g., for-hire fleets, bait and tackle businesses, and tournaments) that depend on them. Through implementation of this policy, NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to promoting—and growing—sustainable saltwater recreational fishing opportunities.

## Strategic Goals

Consistent with, and in furtherance of, the purposes of the MSA and other applicable federal statutes, the goals of this policy are to:

1. Maintain healthy saltwater recreational fisheries resources and the ecosystems on which they depend
2. Promote sustainable recreational fishing that maximizes economic growth and supports coastal communities, tourism, and marine recreation industries
3. Provide immediate, long-term, and accessible saltwater recreational fishing opportunities through science-based management
4. Improve the responsiveness of fisheries management to current and future ocean conditions
5. Cultivate active stakeholder engagement in the stewardship of recreational fisheries

Halibut fishing in Alaska.  
Credit: T. Sartwell.



## Guiding Principles for the Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy

NOAA Fisheries is committed to the following guiding principles as a framework to inform agency decision-making in the fulfillment of this policy's goals.

**A. Foster Stewardship** - NOAA Fisheries recognizes and supports an array of strategies to restore, maintain, and build healthy and resilient coastal and marine ecosystems that are foundational to recreational fisheries.

*Example strategies*

1. Support cost-effective community-based restoration, conservation, and enhancement of essential fish habitats
2. Communicate the best practices for handling and releasing fish encountered by recreational anglers
3. Improve our understanding of impacts to fish stocks and protected species from recreational fishing activities

**B. Improve Access** - NOAA Fisheries recognizes the importance of broad public access to sustainable recreational fisheries.

*Example strategies*

1. Expand fishing opportunities and access based on demonstrated stock status and gains
2. Support decision-making that considers social, cultural, economic, and ecological factors
3. Evaluate fishery sector allocations to facilitate equitable distribution of, and access to, fishing opportunities

**C. Promote Participation** - NOAA Fisheries recognizes the need to foster the next generation of recreational fishermen.

*Example strategies*

1. Understand and address barriers and constraints to participation in recreational fisheries
2. Improve public awareness of recreational opportunities and regulations through effective education, outreach, and compliance assistance
3. Engage the marine recreational industry and state and federal partners to promote sustainable participation and maximize economic impacts

Above: Mahi-mahi fishing. Credit: I. VanMoorhem.

**D. Increase Engagement** - NOAA Fisheries recognizes the need to build public confidence in and expand understanding of the federal science and management processes.

*Example strategies*

1. Prioritize in-person engagement and communicate across the recreational community's preferred mediums to increase transparency of federal fisheries science and management
2. Develop and ensure meaningful pathways exist for community knowledge and needs to enter the science and management process
3. Support representation of all stakeholders with recreational fisheries interests in decision-making forums

**E. Strengthen Partnerships** - NOAA Fisheries recognizes that improved fisheries science and management is best achieved through collaboration and partnership.

*Example strategies*

1. Leverage public-private partnerships to support and expand cooperative research, collaborative research, and citizen science
2. Enhance collaborations with states, anglers, and other partners to improve and modernize all facets of recreational data collection and analytical practices
3. Facilitate opportunities for dialogue regarding current and emerging issues (e.g., convene regional meetings and the National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Summit)

**F. Advance Innovative Solutions** - NOAA Fisheries recognizes its responsibility to lead and facilitate development of transformational technologies and techniques.

*Example strategies*

1. Investigate and support research of pioneering technologies and techniques (e.g., surveys, data collection, and fishing practices)
2. Develop and apply aquaculture tools and technologies that support recreational fisheries and coastal economies
3. Evaluate adaptive management strategies that have the potential to better accommodate the unique nature of recreational fisheries



## Implementation

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

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 track and report on progress toward achieving the goals of this policy.

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.

## Authorities and Responsibilities

NOAA Fisheries headquarters directorate and office directors, regional administrators, science center directors, and the Recreational Fisheries Initiative 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.

## For More Information

**Website:** [National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Program](#)

**Contact:** [Recreational.Fisheries@noaa.gov](mailto:Recreational.Fisheries@noaa.gov)

Above: Fishing lures. Credit: iStock.



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Yellowfin tuna. Credit: R. Mahler.