Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Initiative

NOAA’s MRIP Initiative is designed to work with partners and constituents in addressing the need for creating a national database of saltwater recreational fishing data that will serve requirements of legislative mandates. The Operations Team for the Initiative is developing project proposals for priority issues, such as creating a saltwater angler registry and implementing the next generation of the recreational fisheries survey. Information on the MRIP Initiative and activities so far are described in the following attachments. Further information can be found at the MRIB website: http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/mrii/index.html.

Reference Materials:

1. Overview of the Marine Recreational Information Program Initiative
New regulatory mandates have led to ever-greater demands for more timely and accurate data on saltwater recreational fishing. An initiative is underway to build a new program to improve the collection, analysis, and use of recreational saltwater fishing information.

Bringing the Best Minds Together

NOAA Fisheries oversees several data collection and analysis programs to track a host of factors affecting fisheries populations, ranging from commercial discards to recreational fishing catch rates to habitat quality. The combination of all this information gives policymakers the information they need to make sound conservation decisions.

Today, NOAA Fisheries, state natural resource agencies, and community partners are working together to revamp saltwater angler surveys, which are among the most important data collection tools. Because so much has changed since NOAA Fisheries launched its original recreational fishing data program, the agency is bringing the best minds together, inside and outside the agency, to develop a new survey program to meet the needs of today’s fisheries managers. The idea is to address ever-greater demands for more timely and accurate data on saltwater recreational fishing.

Answering the Important Questions

NOAA Fisheries’ original recreational fishing data program, the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Surveys, will be phased out over the next several years. The new program is called the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). Quite simply, the new survey will better answer these fundamental questions: Who fishes? What’s being caught? How many fish are caught? Where and when are they caught? In addition, a new saltwater angler registry will give the agency a more definitive pool of survey participants to call upon, at the same time giving saltwater anglers better representation in the decision-making process.

Looking Out on the Horizon

The new Marine Recreational Information Program is designed to improve the methodology of collection and analysis of saltwater recreational fishing data. Ultimately, it will help decision-makers gain a far better understanding of saltwater recreational fishing’s relationship to fisheries conservation.

Beyond the numbers, the Marine Recreational Information Program also will help all of us who care about the health of ocean fisheries and the sport of fishing to pass on these strong conservation values to future generations.

Partnering for the Common Good

The most important federal law related to ocean fisheries is the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Under this law, NOAA Fisheries oversees a network of authorities who regularly monitor the health of hundreds of ocean fisheries. They use this information to decide how many fish can be taken commercially and recreationally without negatively affecting the long-term health of individual fisheries. They also ensure appropriate measures are taken to recover fisheries in trouble.

State governments also have an important role in conserving ocean fisheries because many saltwater fish thrive in coastal areas or migrate inland. Since many fish also migrate across state boundaries, the federal-state partnership approach is imperative in ensuring the health of these fisheries.

Countless private organizations have strong interests in protecting ocean fisheries, too. Sometimes partners’ interests conflict, creating intense debate and challenging decision-making about fisheries conservation. But this does not take away from partners’ roles as strong advocates for fisheries conservation who have valuable expertise, perspectives, and resources to share.
Executive Summary
Surveys on saltwater anglers' catch and effort give managers vital information on recreational fishing's impact on fisheries and values to our society. After nearly a year of getting the right pieces and organizational structures in place, the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) initiative got into full swing in 2007. The best minds from state and federal government and the fishing community have been assembled to develop a new program that will serve as the most trusted source of saltwater recreational fishing data.

Scientific Guidance and Congressional Mandate
Frequent calls to better address recreational data needs led to a formal scientific review and a definitive legislative mandate.

National Research Council (April 2006)
The panel of independent scientists advised NOAA Fisheries and the states to rethink the way they carry out recreational fishing surveys to improve their transparency, effectiveness, and applicability to today’s fishery management practices. Among the National Research Council’s specific recommendations was to create a comprehensive national database of saltwater anglers.

Reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act (January 2007)
This legislation, the primary fisheries law for U.S. ocean waters, outlined two ways for improving the way recreational fishing information is collected and analyzed. The first is by creating an angler registry, essentially a phonebook of saltwater fishermen, and the second is by upgrading the existing recreational fisheries surveys.

Major Activities
The MRIP Initiative was created to address the National Research Council recommendations and Magnuson-Stevens Act mandates. Over the past year, the following major activities have taken place:

1. Got the right people on the bus. Understanding the importance of working collaboratively with partners and constituents, the Executive Steering Committee appointed two prominent figures in marine fisheries management (Pres Pate and Gordon Colvin) to MRIP Initiative leadership positions. This “people first” philosophy carried over to the creation of the work groups and teams. Respected members from the scientific, management, and fishing communities representing coastal fisheries from Alaska to Florida were invited to lend their expertise to the initiative by participating on the work groups and teams.
2. **Prepared a game plan.** Working in consultation with representatives from the states, councils, commissions, and recreational fishing community, we created a Development Plan for the MRIP Initiative. The plan outlines the organizational structure and decision-making process that is inclusive and transparent.

3. **Allocated funding.** Dr. Hogarth demonstrated his support for improving recreational data by dedicating almost $2 million to the Initiative this year.

4. **Brought people together.** In August, the Operations Team hosted a workshop of experts in St. Pete Beach, Florida. It was an important first step in planning next steps to address the NRC recommendations and the MSA mandates. Two key outputs of the workshop were identifying the highest priority issues highlighted by the scientists at the National Research Council and initiating the planning process to address these issues.

   For more information about the Development Plan, work group rosters, and the St. Pete Workshop proceedings, visit our website at: http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/mrii

**Next Steps**
The St. Pete Workshop was a major milestone marking the first meeting of the work groups and teams. After months of getting the right pieces in place, the work groups have now begun the hard work of designing what the next generation recreational information system will look like. Here are three things to keep aware of this fall:

1. **Project Proposals** – The work groups will continue to flesh out project proposals designed to address those priority issues identified at the St. Pete Workshop in August. Proposals will be submitted to the Operations Team for review by October 15. Final proposals should be approved by the Executive Steering Committee by the end of the year so work groups can begin implementation in January 2008.

2. **Proposed Rule on the National Saltwater Angler Registry** – The National Saltwater Angler Registry Team is collaborating with the states to establish criteria on national registry
requirements and state exemptions. NOAA Fisheries will release the proposed rule later this fall. A formal public comment period will follow the proposed rule’s release.

3. **Sharing Information** – It is imperative that our partners and constituents stay informed about MRIP Initiative activities. Members of the Executive Steering Committee and Operations and National Registry Teams are hitting the road this fall for a number of face-to-face meetings. Below are just a few of the places they will be:

**September**
- American Fisheries Society Annual Meeting
- Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Annual Meeting
- Maryland Saltwater Sportsmen’s Association members meeting
- Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission Meeting
- NOAA Fisheries Magnuson-Stevens Act Implementation Workshop

**October**
- Hawaii Fishing and Seafood Festival and Fishers Forum
- American Sportfishing Association’s Sportfishing Summit
- Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Meeting
- Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission Constituent Briefing
- Pacific RecFin Meeting

**November**
- Coastal Conservation Association Media Summit
- NOAA Fisheries Leadership Council Meeting

If you would like to schedule a speaker for a meeting or event in your area, please contact Forbes Darby at forbes.darby@noaa.gov or call (301) 713-9501.

**Conclusion**
We all understand that good quality information is fundamental to informed decision-making, but the types of changes being discussed right now to bring the data more in sync with management’s needs will not happen overnight. Those involved with today’s tough management choices cannot postpone decisions while this effort is underway. With that understanding, everyone involved with the MRIP Initiative is operating with a sense of urgency.

On January 1, 2009, NOAA Fisheries will deliver to Congress a comprehensive plan for the new Marine Recreational Information Program, the next generation recreational survey program. The Executive Steering Committee is committed to meeting this aggressive timetable, but not at the expense of leaving our partners and constituents behind. For the MRIP to be successful and to truly become the trusted source of information it needs to be, it will require the continued active support of our partners and constituents.
MRIP Initiative Timeline

Summer 2005
NOAA Fisheries hires the National Academy of Sciences’ National Research Council to provide an independent scientific review of the government’s saltwater recreational data collection programs.

April 2006
National Research Council releases their independent report calling for NOAA and the states to address serious flaws by redesigning the angler surveys.

September 2006
Biologists, fisheries commissioners, and state managers meet in Denver, Colorado to discuss regional and national recreational fisheries statistics requirements. NOAA Fisheries tasked with preparing a blueprint to address the National Research Council recommendations.

October 2006
The Executive Steering Committee is formed to lead the joint initiative to improve data.

November 2006
The Executive Steering Committee hosts a series of regional constituent conference calls to get angler input on how best to move forward.

January 2007
Magnuson-Stevens Act is reauthorized. The new law calls for a new data program and an angler registry to be in place by January 2009.

February 2007
The Executive Steering Committee unveils the Development Plan outlining the MRIP initiative’s inclusive organizational structure and transparent decision-making process.

March 2007
Operations Team formed to serve as the logistical and working arm of the Executive Steering Committee.

April 2007
The Operations Team identifies a preliminary list of priority issues and critical needs from the list of over 200 recommendations identified by the National Research Council.

July 2007
Five interdisciplinary work groups are established to look at various aspects of a new angler data collection program including analysis, data management and standards, design, for-hire, and highly migratory species. In addition, a team is also created to design and implement the national saltwater angler registry.

August 2007
Work teams meet for the first time at a workshop in St. Pete Beach, Florida to begin developing research projects that address the highest priority recommendations from the National Research Council and Magnuson-Stevens Act.

September 2007
Registry team completes a development plan for the Registry Program and submits a proposed registry implementation approach to the Executive Steering Committee.