

Recreational Fisheries Stewardship Initiative

Contents	Mission
Summary Introduction Existing Programs Improving our Aquatic Resources Enhancing Recreational Opportunities Reaching Out to Private Lands Promoting Partnerships Achieving Balance Conclusion	On November 1, 1993, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Mollie Beattie established select committee of the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council to develop the Recreational Fisheries Stewardship Initiative. The Committee was charged to involve a broad spectrum of stakeholders in the conservation, restoration, and enhancement of the nation's aquatic resources by recommending a unified governmental and private sector initiative. The committee was also charged with identifying major factors that impede conservation and enjoyment of aquatic resources and recommending corrective policies and actions to the Administration. The Initiative serves as a basis for discussion -- and more importantly, action -- on improving aquatic resource conservation and recreational opportunity.

Summary

Nowhere is the opportunity for partnership more pronounced than with aquatic resource stewardship and recreational fishing. The two are inextricably linked: good recreational fishing depends upon healthy aquatic resources; resources stewardship depends upon the personal and financial commitment of anglers, boaters, and other recreation lists. This partnership led to the development of the Sport Fish Restoration Program of the Aquatic Resources Trust Fund, one of the great continuing success stories in conservation.

There can be no resting on our laurels. New challenges require strengthened commitment to past efforts and innovation in developing new programs to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Many aquatic resources continue to decline. Changing social structures have limited recreational opportunities for many Americans. Changing values have led past allies into unnecessary conflict. Confronting these challenges will require vision, leadership, and dedication.

The Recreational Fisheries Stewardship Initiative offers a valuable starting point in improving aquatic resources and recreational opportunity. The goals of the Initiative are to:

- formulate, adopt, and implement actions that will improve the nation's aquatic resources;
- provide accessibility and awareness of opportunities for public participation and enjoyment of the nation's aquatic resources;
- assist private landowners and managers to improve aquatic resources and recreational fisheries on private lands;
- encourage and establish partnerships between governments and the private sector to advance aquatic resource stewardship and enhance recreational fishing opportunities; and
- achieve balance in the management and use of recreational fishery resources.

Many plans and programs are already in place to advance these goals. All stakeholders must revitalize their commitment to making these programs succeed. Additional actions will be needed to address these goals, and actions proposed by the Council are discussed in the pages that follow.

Aquatic resources management stands at a critical juncture. This can be a time of crisis and conflict, or it can be an opportunity to renew our sense of partnership in conserving and managing aquatic resources. The Council believes that this initiative will help stakeholders seize the opportunity to make a difference for America's fisheries and for recreational fishing and boating.

Introduction

The Nation's Aquatic Resources Provide Immense Social, Cultural, and Economic Benefits

Fishery and aquatic resources are an integral component of our national heritage. Native American and immigrant cultures and lifestyles were often centered around the availability and abundance of fish. Today, fisheries continue to play an important role in the social, cultural, and economic well-being of our nation:

- Fifty million Americans fished more than 510 million days in 1991. During the past decade, the number of anglers has continued to grow at a rate twice that of the U.S. population. Next to swimming, angling is the most popular form of recreation in the nation.
- In 1991, anglers spent \$24 billion on tackle, equipment, food and lodging, and other fishing--related expenditures. These expenditures generated over \$2.1 billion in federal income tax revenue and provided employment for 1.3 million people.
- Over 75 million boaters recreated in 1993, spending more than \$11 billion on boats, motors, accessories, fuel, maintenance, and other boating expenses.

Most importantly, aquatic resources are an essential and irreplaceable part of ecosystems that sustain all life, including our own. The health of fish and other aquatic resources are a direct reflection of the health of the surrounding landscape from which all waters flow.

The Nation's Aquatic Resources are Imperiled.

Although many significant improvements have been made in the management of aquatic resources in the past 30 years, many fishery resources today are severely stressed. While 7 percent of U.S. mammals and birds are extinct or imperiled, about 20 percent of our fishes, 36 percent of our crayfishes, and 55 percent of our freshwater mussels are ranked as extinct or imperiled. As of August 1992, there were 87 species of fish on the federal threatened and endangered species list. Eighty-three of those were inland fishes.

Problems loom not only in freshwater environments, but also for marine, estuarine, and anadromous species. In the northeast Atlantic, 75 percent of the recreationally and commercially important finfish are overexploited, including many anadromous species. On the Pacific coast, 106 stocks of anadromous salmon are already extinct.

Factors contribution to the decline of fishery resources vary by geographic location and species, but general concerns can be highlighted. Habitat alteration, pollution, excessive harvests, and interactions between native and non-native species have all played a part in the decline of aquatic resources. A U.S. Forest Service assessment of fisheries management issues found that habitat degradation and loss, along with barriers to migration for anadromous species, were the issues of greatest concern to state fisheries managers.

The Past Is No Longer Ours to Influence, but the Future Holds Great Promise. We have the capability to improve the health of our aquatic resources and provide sustained public benefits. Past losses of aquatic resources do not have to continue and in many cases can be reversed through proper management. As a result of intense clean-up initiatives led by state and federal agencies, waters are being reclaimed that had become uninhabitable for fish. In Lake Erie, once proclaimed dead, thriving populations of walleye, yellow perch, and white bass sustain a recreational fishery in Ohio of nearly 7 million angler hours each year. In Colorado, greenback cutthroat trout populations that had been listed as endangered have recovered to a point that recreational fishing can be allowed on a limited basis. On the Atlantic coast, populations of striped bass once on the verge of collapse are making an astounding recovery due to an improved and coordinated management program between the states and federal government. Degraded aquatic resources and the resulting lost opportunities for enjoyment by the American people can be recaptured, but only through committed and effective resource stewardship.

Success depends Upon Government/Private Sector Partnerships

The opportunities for aquatic resource improvement on federal lands alone are phenomenal. Agencies of the Department of the Interior manage over 8 million acres of surface waters. Within the Department of Agriculture, the Forest Service manages about 2 million acres of water and 185,000 miles of streams. Elsewhere, the Tennessee Valley Authority and Army corps of Engineers manage significant aquatic resources.

However, the federal government acting unilaterally will not succeed in significantly improving America's aquatic resources. Federal agencies must strengthen partnerships with state, tribal, and local governments, industry, and most importantly, citizens, to make substantive improvements in fishery resources. State and tribal governments offer extensive technical expertise and have management responsibility for fish populations within their respective jurisdictions, and cumulatively dedicate far more fiscal resources to the management of fishery resources than all federal fishery agencies combined. Partnerships with industry are vitally important to maintaining the integrity of existing funding programs such as the Sport Fish Restoration Program and for advancing future initiatives. And, without the continued support of public interest groups and citizens for good fishery resource management, initiatives will have little impact and little support.

Anglers, boaters, and the recreational fishing industry have demonstrated their shared commitment to aquatic resource stewardship and their willingness to contribute to partnership efforts. Today, they contribute about \$700 million annually to improve fishery resources through license fees, excise taxes on motor boat fuel, and special excise taxes on fishing equipment. Additionally, they offer their time, talents, and resources to a wide range of partnership programs benefiting recreational fishery resources.

Together, federal, state, and tribal agencies working closely with the business community, anglers, and boaters can forge partnerships that will deliver improved aquatic habitat and increased opportunities for use and appreciation. A combination of new initiatives and greater commitment to existing legislation and programs will help accomplish this goal. The

Recreational Fisheries Stewardship Initiative provides a framework for fulfilling the promise of healthy aquatic ecosystems and abundant public benefits.

Existing Programs

Already, a myriad of federal, tribal, state, and local agencies, conservation and industry groups, and private citizens are engaged in efforts on behalf of the nation's aquatic resources. Over \$375 million in federal funds are expended annually on fisheries programs; state fisheries agencies spend more than \$680 million, nearly \$200 million of which is provided through the highly-successful Sport fish Restoration Program. Many citizens participate in ground-level work to improve aquatic resources and fishing opportunities. Several federal environmental reform initiatives are underway and offer significant potential benefits for aquatic resources.

The council commends the Administration, states, tribes, and other partners that have contributed to these ongoing efforts. We urge continued support for such programs as a central component of the Recreational Fisheries Stewardship Initiative; they provide the foundation on which future progress can be built.

State federal, tribal, and private programs and initiatives benefiting aquatic resources are numerous. The following represents a sample of the many different kinds of outstanding programs that already contribute to aquatic resource stewardship and recreational fisheries.

Sport Fish Restoration Program (Wallop-Breaux). Through this program, anglers, boaters, and industry partners contribute funds for state fisheries projects through excise taxes on boat fuel and fishing equipment. The program depends upon state design and implementation of projects, federal technical assistance, and distribution of funds for qualified projects, and stakeholder input and financial and political support. Every year, the program contributes \$200 million to state fisheries conservation efforts.

National Fishing Week. Partnerships between federal, state, tribal, and private organizations fuel this successful program. For National Fishing Week, thousands of volunteers plan, organize, and conduct over 2500 events, reaching all fifty states, the District of Columbia, and several U.S. territories. Through these events, over half a million people learn about the importance of aquatic resources and about the fun and value of fishing.

Rangeland Reform. The federal rangeland reform program features improved management of upland and riparian areas, which will significantly benefit aquatic ecosystems throughout the west. Improved federal land management under this program offers great potential for enhancing fisheries and fishing opportunity.

"A Heritage of Fishing." the National Park Service developed this Service-wide recreational fisheries program to protect, restore, and conserve fishery resources; increase the quality, quantity, and diversity of recreational fishing opportunities; improve public-private partnerships for recreational fisheries conservation; and incorporate economic opportunities into recreational fishing programs.

Pathway to Fishing. The fishing tackle industry joined with federal partners, state fisheries agencies, and private angling and conservation groups to launch this angling education program. Pathway to Fishing teaches young and new anglers about resource conservation, develops angler skills and ethics, and nurtures personal commitment to aquatic resource stewardship. The result has been increased angling opportunity and increased support for aquatic resource conservation.

Angler Conservation Education Plan (ACE). The Southeast Regional Office of the National Marine Fisheries Service (and other federal agencies), state fisheries agencies, Sea Grant programs, and conservation groups joined in developing the ACE plan to enhance angler involvement in marine fisheries conservation. The plan is designed to improve angler understanding of their impacts on fishery resources, encourage angler involvement with fisheries management, promote conservation measures such as catch-and-release, and generally increase angler awareness of aquatic resource conservation.

FishAmerican Foundation. This program was created by the recreational fishing industry to provide a mechanism to invest industry dollars in grassroots fishery improvement projects. FishAmerica combines the financial resources of the industry and state and federal agencies with the sweat equity of volunteer grassroots organizations to conduct fishery enhancement projects designed in cooperation with government agencies.

Extension Services. State Cooperative Extension Service employees, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Extension Service, conduct recreational fisheries programs providing on-site technical and educational assistance to private landowners who are interested in fisheries conservation and management on their lands and to 4-H youth across the nation.

Bring Back the Natives. The U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the National Fish and Wildlife foundation, joined by state, industry, and conservation group partners conduct watershed-scale restoration projects to restore and conserve native fish communities. Restoration results from both direct habitat rehabilitation work and changes in land use practices.

Mississippi Interstate Cooperative Resource Agreement (MICRA). The 29 states wholly or partially located in the Mississippi River Basin, along with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, signed the MICRA agreement to coordinate management of inter-jurisdictional fishery resources in the Basin. The agreement has provided an impetus for greater cooperation, including sharing of facilities and funding, in achieving shared goals for interjurisdictional fisheries management.

"Hooked on Fishing -- Not on Drugs." The Future Fisherman Foundation has joined with state and federal agencies to promote recreational fishing as a positive alternative to drug use among young people. The program depends upon not only industry and resource agency partners, but works with others interested in education and drug prevention including the Departments of Education, Justice, Housing and Urban Development, and Health and Human Services.

"Rise to the Future!" The U.S. Forest Service fisheries program, conducted in cooperation with state, tribal, and private-sector partners, focuses on protection of aquatic ecosystem health, restoration of degraded habitats, recovery of threatened, endangered, and sensitive aquatic species, and enhancement of opportunities for public use and appreciation of aquatic resources on over 190 million acres of public land in 44 states and Puerto Rico.

Fisheries Across America. A partnership effort between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, public and private sector organizations, state fish and wildlife agencies, tribes, and other governmental agencies focuses on aquatic habitat management, watershed management, restoration of depleted fishery resources, and aquatic resource and angler education.

Action for Angling. the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service developed this plan for implementing their "Fisheries U.S.A." policy. The plan provides guidance to Service units to take actions to ensure and improve the quality, quantity, and diversity of recreational fishing opportunities, and to develop and enhance partnerships between governments and the private sector for the conservation of recreational fisheries.

Aquatic Resource Education Council. the Council is a group composed of state, federal, industry, and private conservation organization with an interest in promoting and enhancing aquatic resource education. The Council has been instrumental in convening national symposia, as well as pioneering programs and techniques for aquatic resource education.

National Safe Boating Week. Sponsored by National Safe Boating Council, Inc., this annual national media event launches the recreational boating season in the United States and introduces a year-long media campaign designed to enhance boating safety and encourage proper boat operations.

North American Fisheries Action Agenda. Fisheries administrators across North America developed this action agenda through a facilitated workshop in 1991. The agenda addresses management and protection of fisheries habitat, management of the fisheries resource, information requirements, access control in fisheries management, communication and education, and administration. The proposed actions have served as a basis for long range planning by several states and provinces.

State Fisheries Management. State fish and wildlife agencies are responsible for almost all of the fishery management programs and projects which the average angler encounters. Every agency has its own unique approach to fisheries management and this is mirrored in the programs and projects that benefit the nation's anglers. Far too many to list in number, it is safe to say that the vast majority of fishery management programs and projects are state responsibilities.

Improving Our Aquatic Resources

GOAL: Formulate, adopt, and implement actions that will improve the Nation's aquatic resources.

Healthy aquatic systems provide the foundation for conservation of aquatic biological diversity and sustained use and appreciation of those resources by the American public. Despite their importance, the health of our nation's aquatic ecosystems continues to decline. The 1982 Nationwide Rivers inventory found that fewer than two percent of streams in the contiguous 48 States remained at "high natural quality." During the past decade, there has been a 45 percent increase in the number of freshwater North American fishes at risk of extinction, many as a result of habitat modification.

With some exceptions, the necessary laws and regulations are in place to improve our aquatic resources. What has been lacking includes adequate leadership, coordination among management agencies, public involvement, and dedication of adequate fiscal and human resources. To make improvement of aquatic resources a reality, the Council recommends:

An Executive Order implementing a national policy for aquatic resources. Such an order would demonstrate top-level commitment to improving the quantity, function, sustainable productive capacity, and distribution of the nation's aquatic resources. The policy would:

direct all federal agencies to ensure their actions are consistent with the national policy, and document that conclusion as part of all NEPA analyses;

require all federally funded, permitted, or otherwise authorized actions to provide for adequate fish passage, and flows that promote the sustained productivity of aquatic ecosystems for ecological and public benefit;

establish the PACFISH watershed analysis approach as a model for management of aquatic ecosystems on all federally managed lands;

through existing programs, encourage retention and acquisition of lands important to conservation of significant aquatic resources;

give priority to the use of non-structural approaches to limit flood damage;

direct vigorous application of Clean Water Act and Reclamation Act authorities to protect and improve aquatic resources;

continue research on genetics, fish health, and conservation biology to provide a sound basis for continued improvement in federal hatchery production of fish and associated management activities (see section on "Achieving Balance");

encourage interagency coordination to develop and implement a recurring national aquatic resources inventory to obtain status and trend information needed for effective management; and

require federal agencies to identify cost-saving opportunities and reductions within existing programs to fund these actions.

Development and enactment of an aquatic ecosystem restoration and enhancement law.
The law would:

establish as national policy that federal, tribal, state and local agencies, in cooperation with the public, would plan and implement activities designed to achieve specific restoration goals for aquatic environments by the year 2010;

establish a Presidential task force to develop regulations necessary to implement a national aquatic ecosystem restoration and enhancement strategy to achieve the specific goals referenced above;

provide incentives for development and implementation of complimentary state based aquatic ecosystem restoration and enhancement strategies;

establish a trust fund -- similar in concept to the Sport Fish Restoration Fund -- to be used exclusively for restoration and enhancement of the nation's aquatic ecosystems. The fund would be financed by those who alter or degrade aquatic ecosystems; and

provide for federal technical, educational, and financial assistance (e.g., through tax incentives) for private landowners to contribute to achievement of aquatic ecosystem restoration goals (see section on "Reaching Out to Private Lands").

Amendment of the Clean Water Act to require flexible management measures on private lands to control non-point source pollution in waters impaired by, or threatened with impairment by, polluted runoff. Non-point controls for lands in coastal zones were enacted in 1990 Coastal Zone Management Reauthorization Act; the same must now be done for impaired and threatened watersheds nationwide.

Establishment of a special task force, including federal, state, tribal, industry, and conservation groups, to undertake a study of the needs, priorities, and opportunities for new user-pays/user-benefits programs and other funding mechanism established for the purpose of funding aquatic habitat conservation.

Enhancing Recreational Opportunities

GOAL: Provide accessibility and awareness of opportunities for public participation and enjoyment of the nation's aquatic resources.

Long-term aquatic ecosystem health is best assured by supporting sustainable management and care for aquatic resources while providing compatible recreational, cultural, and other use opportunities. People appreciate and place value only on what they understand and respect. This relationship applies directly to caring for the nation's natural resources. Since direct experience is the best learning activity, Americans must be "connected" to the natural world to become personally committed to resource stewardship. Anglers and boaters have been among the first and most effective advocates for aquatic resource conservation efforts. Public access for enjoyment of aquatic resources is crucial to attaining conservation goals.

The opportunity to participate in aquatic recreation and stewardship activities is often unattainable, either due to a lack of information or the unavailability of access and support facilities. The decline in rural population and commensurate increase in urban population has contributed to the loss of traditional pathways for public contact with recreational activities involving the natural environment. Changing family structures have also altered personal contact with aquatic recreational and stewardship activities. New ways must be created and nurtured to preserve the vital link between people and the natural world.

The introduction to aquatic resources as a life-long source of recreational enjoyment and as a source of fulfillment from personal stewardship involvement has fostered a number of national programs, including National Fishing Week, National Safe Boating Week, Hooked on Fishing -- Not on Drugs, and Pathway to Fishing. Many outstanding local programs are also in place, but a central national vision is lacking -- an umbrella under which these programs can be coordinated, with each being strengthened through ties to others. Other common-sense opportunities for enhancement have yet to be pursued. To address these unmet needs, the Council recommends:

Encouraging the Department of Defense, Department of Agriculture, Department of the Interior, and other applicable agencies to open their lands to angling and boating opportunities and stewardship education programs.

Partnerships among federal agencies, state natural resource agencies, tribal governments, private sector stakeholders, and local parks and recreation personnel to enhance community fishing. These partnerships could offer the means to:

Provide materials, technical assistance, and funding to innovative pilot programs for communities interested in initiating community fishing programs; and

A "President's Council on Recreational Fisheries." The Council, consisting of representatives of federal departments with fisheries programs; state representatives; tribal officials; and

private sector participants (including non-governmental organizations and industry representatives), would:

serve as a coordination and communication point for the community fishing efforts of federal agencies, including those that have not traditionally been involved in fisheries (such as HUD, HHS, Education);

encourage use of existing curricula for youth fishing and aquatic education, and recommend standards for achievement and recognition, similar to those used by the Council on Physical Fitness in partnership with angling, boating, and industry organizations, coordinate a national fishing mentors program to connect those interested in angling with experienced mentors who can share their knowledge and appreciation of fishing and aquatic resource conservation;

serve as an "umbrella" for recreational fisheries stewardship projects (e.g., with FishAmerica, Trout Unlimited, Anglers United, B.A.S.S., Izaak Walton League, federal challenge grant programs such as Bring Back the Natives, etc.), recognizing all projects in a manner similar to "All-American" Cities;

recognize outstanding contributions to recreational fishing and fisheries conservation on both public and private lands through annual awards;

develop partnerships to produce a national series of state guides on fishing, boating, and aquatic education sites;

contribute to National Fishing Week and National Safe Boating Week efforts through the National Fishing Week Steering Committee and National Safe Boating Council; and

advise the President on additional needs and opportunities for recreational fishing and associated conservation efforts.

Increase federal support for community fishing programs in metropolitan areas. Regional offices of federal resource agencies (including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, and National Marine Fisheries Service), in cooperation with state fisheries agencies, should assist urban, municipal, and county departments of parks and recreation to identify, evaluate, and enhance local waters for aquatic recreation and aquatic resource conservation, establishing programs where they are not currently present or enhancing programs where they have been limited by funding and other factors.

Reaching Out To Private Lands

GOAL: Assist private landowners and managers to improve aquatic resources and recreational fisheries on private lands.

Private land stewardship is a critical element of this initiative because the health of fisheries habitat is inextricably tied to private land management. Over two-thirds of the nation's land mass is privately owned. About 75 percent of the nation's wetlands are on private lands.

Therefore, the manner in which landowners manage activities conducted on their lands directly affects fish productivity. If landowners within a particular watershed provide good stewardship, recreational fisheries prosper. For example, The Nature Conservancy owns and protects riparian zones along Silver Creek, Idaho, nourishing a splendid trout fishery that attracts anglers from around the world. In another example, the Hancock Timber Resources Group has joined in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Pacific Rivers Council to reintroduce large, woody debris that will enhance salmon habitat in Knowles Creek, both on Hancock's private lands and on adjoining federal lands.

Conversely, national water quality inventories highlight the problems associated with inadequate management of private lands that damage riparian zones and aquatic ecosystems. For example, non-point source pollution now accounts for over half of the waters determined to be impaired (i.e., not meeting state/federal water quality standards). Of the causes of this impairment, sedimentation and excessive nutrient runoff from agricultural lands account for more than half.

The federal government already has several excellent programs for promoting private land stewardship. Unfortunately, these programs are generally either vastly under funded or not funded at all. Even the successful Conservation Reserve Program must be reauthorized in 1995 or it will cease to exist. To enhance aquatic resource stewardship on private lands, the Council recommends:

Reauthorization and increased funding for existing federal programs that are designed to improve private land stewardship. This includes:

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) provides annual rental payments to farmers who voluntarily retire highly erodible and other environmentally critical lands (e.g., riparian areas) from crop production for 10 years. CRP has been well-funded, resulting in enrollment of 36 million acres of land since 1985. However, its authorization expires in 1995, jeopardizing continued farmer participation in the program.

The Wetlands Reserve Program pays farmers for permanent easements on wetlands and riparian areas that are protected or restored on their lands. Authorized to provide \$250 million per year since 1990, the program has only actually provided \$100 million to date for 80,000 acres of wetlands protection and restoration.

The Water Quality Incentive Program provides for annual incentive payments to farmers who implement Soil Conservation Service-approved water quality protection plans on their properties. This program has not been funded since its inception in 1990.

The North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant program makes funds available for important wetlands conservation work. Although traditionally viewed as a waterfowl conservation program, this program makes valuable contributions to many marine fish species that live for some period of their lives in estuarine wetland environments.

Other programs through the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior provide educational, technical, and financial assistance to private landowners to construct or enhance ponds, streams, and wetlands, and manage them for recreational use.

Provide funding and technical assistance to private landowners as part of watershed-based aquatic ecosystem restoration and enhancement efforts (see section on Improving Our Aquatic Resources). To achieve ecosystem improvement goals, funding and the technical expertise to ensure its effective use must be made available for private as well as public lands.

Promoting Partnerships

GOAL: Encourage and establish partnerships between governments and the private sector to advance aquatic resource stewardship and enhance recreational fishery opportunities.

Although governments are vested with respective stewardship responsibilities for aquatic resources, partnerships between and among governments and the private sector provide greater opportunity for achieving these stewardship goals. In these times of diminishing budgets and increasing public demand, partnerships are critical to achieving aquatic resource conservation goals. Partnerships also provide the advantage of addressing issues and initiatives across agency and organizational boundaries, maximizing effectiveness and avoiding conflicts.

Partnerships provide a sense of shared pride and responsibility for conservation and restoration of aquatic resources. Partnerships should be encouraged by such mechanisms as volunteerism, technical assistance, and financial support. For more than a century, anglers and boaters have demonstrated their willingness to conserve and restore recreational fisheries through licenses, excise taxes, and user fees. This tradition of public support provides a solid foundation on which to build new partnerships to increase public concern for and participation in fisheries conservation and improved angler ethics. Through these partnerships, aquatic resources can be managed successfully and private interests can be accommodated.

Used successfully, partnerships can build synergistically on the time, talent, and support of all partners to mutually benefit each interest. Partnerships, in practice, are win-win situations where everyone feels rewarded by participating. To encourage partnerships for aquatic resource conservation, the Council recommends:

Identifying and amending federal regulations and policies that discourage government/private sector partnerships.

Encouraging development and funding of Challenge Cost-Share Programs.

Establishing an annual forum (Fisheries Summit) for fisheries managers and public stakeholders to communicate and discuss ongoing activities and emerging issues.

Enhancing funding of Sport Fish Restoration and related partnership programs to support outreach programs designed to stimulate public participation in the conservation and restoration of aquatic resources (see section on Improving Our Aquatic Resources).

Developing a coordinated strategy to generate public support for fishery management in accordance with conservation and use principles and goals. The strategy should be based on sound biological principles, and should stress the value of native species, demand care in introduction of exotic species, and emphasize respect for habitat integrity, biodiversity, and the stability of natural ecosystems. Establishing effective cooperative mechanisms among

policy makers, planners, implementers, and other stakeholders to benefit aquatic resources and recreational fisheries.

Developing a national umbrella program in support of new and existing fishery resource conservation programs. The program could provide:

a clearinghouse of information pertaining to the resources and programs available to citizens desiring to become involved in enhancing aquatic ecosystems;

assistance in aligning grassroots organizations with potential state, federal, and private partners.

Assembling a task force of federal, state, and private stakeholders in aquatic resources to develop ideas for citizen action in support of fisheries. Private groups should then contribute their marketing skills to developing a national campaign (as with Smokey Bear on forest fires) to encourage fisheries-friendly citizen actions.

Encouraging state natural resource agencies to consider conservation and fishery management programs in all grant-in-aid programs as well as with federally supported activities such as highway construction, dam construction, and flood control.

Develop a coordinated recreational fishing and aquatic resources education program among the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other federal resource agencies, state natural resource agencies, U.S.D.A. extension services and 4-H, state departments of agriculture, EPA, the U.S. Department of Education, state departments of education, and non-governmental organizations. The program would:

increase the public's awareness of their ability to improve and enjoy the nation's aquatic resources through conservation and angling education;

feature a national code of angling ethics highlighting the importance of personal commitment to aquatic resource conservation; and

provide materials on aquatic habitat protection and stewardship that could be adapted to address local conditions through community fishing programs and other educational programs.

Achieving Balance

GOAL: Achieve balance in the management and use of recreational fishery resources.

Recreational fisheries have historically been conserved, restored, and enhanced using a wide variety of management tools, including the use of hatcheries and the introduction of non-native species. These management efforts have often resulted in spectacular recreational opportunities, often in areas that because of ecosystem alteration would not have supported viable recreational fish populations. The value of some of these management efforts has been questioned by those concerned with the impact they have on biodiversity and on the preservation of native fishes and wild stocks. The ongoing debate, while valuable in bringing needed attention to fishery management practices, is pitting historical allies against each other.

A balanced approach to fisheries restoration is needed. Trying to turn back the clock to when aquatic ecosystems were unaltered ignores the reality that some ecosystem components are no longer present and probably can never be restored. The rate and extent of change that have occurred in many aquatic ecosystems has far outstripped the capability of those systems to adapt. In these cases, active fisheries management is required to maintain biological diversity, restore ecosystem function, and provide public benefit. However, in other aquatic ecosystems, efforts should be made to maintain and restore productive natural ecosystems. In some instances, this may require altering fishery management practices.

The choice does not have to be between fishing and recovering endangered species or between stocking cultured fish and maintaining biodiversity. Often, these activities can be fully complementary. While maintaining healthy aquatic ecosystems may not always be fully compatible with recreation, acceptable compromises are possible. Solutions are needed to avoid conflicts, maintain quality recreational opportunities and high levels of participation, and at the same time maintain the diversity and health of the Nation's aquatic ecosystems. The Council recommends the following actions that would help strike this balance between optimum use and maintaining biodiversity: Require federal land management agencies to consider the public benefits of recreational fisheries in making decisions relative to ecosystem management;

Establish a national recreational mitigation policy. This would ensure that when recreational opportunities must be curtailed to conserve natural ecosystems, other recreational sites will be enhanced in order to meet public demand for fishing;

Develop habitat conservation plans to reach a balance between endangered species recovery and recreational fisheries management. This would be done under existing laws and authorities, with NMFS, FWS, state agencies, and angling and industry partners all taking part.

Develop quantitative population genetics data to allow for evaluation of wild stock/hatchery stock and hatchery breeding practices, and to provide a better understanding of the genetic relationships between wild and hatchery fishes.

Restore and enhance depressed fish stocks through carefully considered fish stocking programs and development of adult spawning stocks in biologically appropriate areas.

Establish a short-term Aquatic Biodiversity Task Force, including representatives from industry, angling groups, environmental groups, and state, tribal, and federal agencies, to develop recommendations for an aquatic biodiversity policy that balances the conservation of natural systems and endangered species with active management for recreational fishing opportunities.

Conclusion

"Economic health versus environmental health" is a paradigm of the past. The key to long-term economic prosperity is a healthy environment. The tremendous social, cultural, ecological, and economic values of the nation's aquatic ecosystems are at risk. However, through the combined efforts of federal, tribal, state and local governments, industry and conservation groups, anglers, boaters, and other private citizens, we can make a difference by:

improving the condition of our aquatic resources;

enhancing opportunities for public enjoyment of those resources;

encouraging improved aquatic resource conservation on private lands;

fostering partnerships for better aquatic resource conservation; and

developing a balanced approach for fisheries management that reflects the needs of both aquatic ecosystems and users.

These actions will provide benefits today, and more importantly, sustain a legacy of aquatic resource stewardship and enjoyment to pass on to our children, grandchildren, and those that follow. Together, we can -- and must -- take decisive action.