

# **Rhode Island Saltwater Recreational Fishing License Program**

**Annual Report**

**September 2013**

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## **I. Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to fulfill the requirements set forth by Section 20-2.2-10 of the Rhode Island General Laws. In accordance therewith, this report provides an overview of the Recreational Saltwater License Program for Rhode Island, offers a brief review of the status of state-based recreational fishing assessments, and sets forth a proposed FY14 programmatic budget, drawing upon the license fee revenues projected to be received through June 2014.

## **II. Overview of License Program**

### **a. Background**

The State of Rhode Island enacted legislation in January 2010 establishing a new Recreational Saltwater License Program for Rhode Island. The program has two primary purposes:

1) It provides a state-based alternative to federal saltwater angler registry requirements, which are administered by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) pursuant to the 2006 Amendments to the federal Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Act (section 401(g)) (hereinafter referred to as the “Magnuson Act Amendments”).

2) It provides a source of state funding for programs and activities that benefit marine recreational fishing interests in Rhode Island.

The Magnuson Act Amendments mandate the establishment of a national registry program for all saltwater anglers, for use in conducting accurate marine recreational fisheries statistical surveys; those surveys serve as the backbone of marine fisheries management programs for the recreational fishing sector. In December 2008, NMFS promulgated the final rule creating the registry, and also established an option for States to develop their own state-based licensing programs as an alternative, provided that the state programs meet federal criteria.

The RI license fees -- \$7/year for residents (under age 65), \$10/year for non-residents, and \$5 for a 7-day license – are designed to both cover the administrative costs of the license program and provide additional support to programs and activities that serve the needs and interests of saltwater recreational fishermen in Rhode Island.

The statute establishing RI’s Recreational Saltwater License Program – RIGL Chapter 20-2.2 – was shaped and supported by a Recreational Marine License Study Group, co-chaired by the R.I. Department of Environmental Management and the R.I. Saltwater Anglers’ Association. The group included representatives from a variety of recreational fishing groups and interests from Rhode Island.

The statute includes a section titled *Accountability and oversight* (RIGL Section 20-2.2-10). Pursuant to that section, the RI Department of Environmental Management is charged with preparing an annual report that details the number of recreational saltwater licenses issued, the total amount of license fee revenue received, the expenditures made during the prior year from the license fee account, and how the Department plans to allocate and use the fee revenue during the next year. The report is also slated to include any additional, relevant information relating to the administration and enforcement of the licensing program, and the status of state-based recreational fishing assessments and stock assessments.

The statute calls upon the Department to submit the report to the Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council, and for the Department and Council to then conduct one or more public meetings to solicit input from recreational fishermen and the general public. The Council is then tasked with preparing an addendum to the report, setting forth its opinion on whether the licensing program is meeting its intended purpose, and offering any recommendations for modifying the program. The report and addendum are then to be submitted to the Rhode Island General Assembly.

#### **b. Status**

The RI Department of Environmental Management's Division of Fish & Wildlife, Marine Fisheries Program (hereinafter referred to as the "Division") developed the RI recreational saltwater license program early in 2010, and the program officially took effect on April 15, 2010.

As established by the statute, anyone wishing to recreationally fish or spearfish in the marine waters of Rhode Island must possess either a RI state license, a state license from a reciprocal state, or a federal registration. The requirement solely pertains to those harvesting, or attempting to harvest, finfish and/or squid for non-commercial purposes. In 2012, regulations were amended to have the requirements also include those harvesting, or attempting to harvest, squid. Exemptions are provided for the following categories:

- Children under 16,
- Anglers fishing on licensed party or charter boats,
- RI residents who are blind or permanently disabled, and
- RI residents who are on leave from active military duty.

RI residents over the age of 65, and active military personnel stationed in RI, are eligible to obtain RI state licenses at no cost.

The new federal registry requirements also pertain to for-hire vessels, requiring that they either register federally or be subject to state-based licensing. Pursuant to a previously enacted state statute – RIGL section 20-2-27.1 – Rhode Island requires for-hire vessels (charter and party boats carrying recreational fishermen) to obtain a RI party and charter boat license.

In the summer of 2010, the Division submitted the new RI recreational saltwater fishing license program, and the existing RI party and charter boat license program, to NMFS for review. On October 25, 2010, NMFS and the Division entered into an MOU, pursuant to which the Division agreed to regularly collect and transmit to NMFS the contact information generated by the two programs.

On the basis of NMFS' review and approval of the RI license programs, and the commitments set forth in the MOU, the State of Rhode Island was officially designated as an exempted state for all anglers, spearfishers, and for-hire fishing vessels on November 8, 2010 – enabling the RI recreational saltwater fishing license program, and the RI party and charter boat license program, to serve as a valid, legal substitutes for the federal registry.

During 2010, a federal registration was available at no cost. Beginning in 2011, NMFS enacted a \$15 annual fee for the federal registration.

Because the RI program did not take effect until April 15, 2010, and because the federal registration did not have a fee during 2010, it was difficult to assess the RI program, vis-à-vis participation and fee revenues, during its inaugural year. 2011 is a more telling year with regard to program status. To date, all license fee revenues not retained by the program vendors have been deposited into a restricted receipt account.

### **c. Benefits**

The key benefit associated with the new RI license program is that it provides a *affordable* alternative to the federal program. The \$7 (resident) and \$10 (non-resident) fees for the RI license compare favorably to the \$15 fee for the federal registration. The RI fees also happen to be lower than the fees charged by most other states. What's more, under the RI program, there is no fee for licenses issued to RI residents over the age of 65 and active military personnel stationed in RI. Under the federal program, the \$15 fee applies to everyone. Also, the RI program provides for a short-term (7-day) license at a reduced cost (\$5); no such opportunity is offered by the federal program.

In addition to being less expensive than a federal registration, the RI license has *broader applicability*. The Rhode Island license affords reciprocity, whereas the federal registration does not. Rhode Island resident license holders can fish in neighboring state waters without having to get a neighboring state license, and neighboring state license holders can fish in Rhode Island waters without having to get a Rhode Island license. Rhode Island license holders can also fish in federal waters without having to obtain a federal registration. Rhode Island currently enjoys reciprocity with New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Maine. Pursuant to Rhode Island's licensing statute, Rhode Island will extend reciprocity to any other state that offers reciprocity to Rhode Island.

The federal and state registry and license programs are designed to *provide both recreational fishers and fisheries managers many benefits* including:

- Improving the *quality and accuracy of marine recreational fishing data*
- Providing the first *full accounting of the scope the recreational saltwater fishing and spearfishing* in Rhode Island as well as throughout the U.S.
- Maximizing the *ease and convenience* of obtaining a license through both the internet and local vendors
- *Providing significant benefits and opportunities*, through fee revenues, for Rhode Island's marine recreational fishing community

A portion of each Rhode Island license sold -- \$2 for every license sold online, and \$3 for every license sold via a vendor – is dedicated to covering the administrative costs of the license program itself. In this way, the *program covers its own costs and is self-sustaining*. The balance of the revenues derived from license sales are deposited into a restricted receipt account, which is managed by the Department and subject to the exclusive-use restrictions noted above.

Thanks to the long-standing federal Sport Fish Restoration Program, which provides dedicated federal funding for marine recreational fishing programs, Rhode Island has an opportunity to leverage every \$1 collected via the Rhode Island license program with \$3 in federal funds, thereby strengthening the capacity of both programs to work together to provide enhanced benefits and opportunities for marine recreational fishermen in Rhode Island.

#### **d. Implementation**

##### *Web-Based System & Local Vendors*

Section 20-2.2-7 of the statute establishing the license program authorizes and directs the Department to engage the contractual services of a state-approved vendor to develop and implement a web-based system that serves as the sole means for obtaining licenses. The vendor is also responsible for servicing authorized licensing agents who can vend licenses at their establishments.

As part of the initial program development stage, the Department entered into a formal agreement with Rhode Island Interactive (RII), which administers the Rhode Island state government web portal, known as RI.gov. Pursuant to the agreement, RII is responsible for developing and implementing the web-based licensing system, known as **Saltwater.RI.Gov**. The RII webpage serves as the means for both issuing licenses, and for collecting all of the relevant contact information at the point of sale for the national registry.

As an alternative to acquiring a license via the internet, anglers and spearfishers may also acquire a license at authorized vendors – namely, bait and tackle shops and other stores that sell fishing equipment. To date, there are twenty-six (26) authorized vendors; more are expected to be added during the 2014 fishing season. RII is responsible for handling the business arrangements with each vendor, and the vendors

utilize the same web-based portal that the public uses for issuing licenses. RII handles all billing and remittance and also provides technical support. Vendors must pay an annual fee of \$75 to RII to cover service costs.

To cover the overall costs of administering the web-based license program, RII retains \$2 for each license sold via the internet. If a license is sold by a vendor, RII retains \$1 and the vendor retains \$2. Neither RII nor the vendors receive any compensation for no-fee licenses issued to RI residents over the age of 65 or active military personnel stationed in RI.

RII provides all angler contact information (name, address, phone number, date of birth – and if provided, email address) to the Division monthly via electronic transfer. The confidentiality of the data is protected via the use of encryption. The Division, in turn, provides the data to NMFS' MRIP program for incorporation into the national registry.

### ***Information & Outreach***

The rollout of the Rhode Island Saltwater Recreational Fishing License involved considerable outreach to the Rhode Island angling community. As previously noted, the Division established a webpage – [www.saltwater.ri.gov](http://www.saltwater.ri.gov) –that provides direct access to the portal where licenses can be obtained. The page includes a detailed FAQ section, covering all aspects of the license program, as well as a link to all authorized license vendors, with their contact information. Also included on the page are links to Rhode Island's recreational fishing regulations; the locations of all public boat ramps that provide access to marine waters in Rhode Island; and other information pertinent to recreational saltwater fishing in Rhode Island.

The Division issued a major press release when the license program first went into effect, and has since issued periodic press releases reminding anglers and spearfishers about the program.

The Division also developed a fact sheet, informational cards and brochures for dissemination at public events, such as the Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association annual New England Saltwater Fishing Show. During the 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 shows, the Division joined forces with RII at a booth to provide information on the new license program, answer questions, and issue licenses on the spot. This cooperation will be continued for the 2014 show. The shows offer a great opportunity to interact directly with the recreational fishing community, and the Division intends to maintain a presence at this show for years to come. Also, in 2012, the Division began supplying local vendors with signs to place in their windows that promote awareness and advertise the recreational license.

To help increase awareness regarding the license program in the field, the Division created weatherproof vinyl signs that were placed at fishing access points

throughout the State. The signs feature an illustration of the license and clear text informing the public that the license is required and how it can be obtained.

During the 2012 fiscal year, funds from the restricted receipt account were used for advertising on RIPTA buses, to increase the awareness of and compliance with the recreational license program. During the 2013 fiscal year, the Division also created a recreational fishing guide magazine for the 2013 fishing season. Working with the publishing company, J.F. Griffin, the Division produced the 2013 Rhode Island Recreational Saltwater Fishing Guide. This annual guide will continue to be created to promote recreational fishing in RI as well as to provide information on recreational regulations, fishing advice, and any current issues or happenings in the recreational fishing community. The Division is also looking in to developing an annual fishing tournament/derby in Rhode Island, for the near future. These events will promote recreational fishing in Rhode Island and encourage the public to take advantage of the wonderful recreational fishing opportunities found throughout the State.

### ***Free Fishing Day***

In accordance with the statutory allowance for one free fishing day a year, during which all license requirements are waived, the DEM Director declared a free fishing day on Governor's Bay Day in 2010. This declaration is intended to occur annually. Although it was inadvertently missed in 2011, it was continued in both 2012 and 2013.

### **e. Changes to Report Layout and Completion Date**

Previous RI Saltwater Recreational Fishing License Program reports used calendar year (January through December) for the numbers of licenses issued and revenues received, then switches to fiscal year (July through June of the next year) for budget and expenditure reporting. In early 2013, the Division proposed changing the finalization date and layout of the Rhode Island Recreational Saltwater Fishing License Program Annual Report to follow fiscal year instead of calendar year. The report will be finalized by September/October, each year, to account for the previous fiscal year. This change allows the report and budget to be in sync and reduces confusion when reading the report and developing budgets. The change in the report layout and completion date was approved by both the Recreational Marine License Study Group and the Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council.

### **f. Licenses Issued, Revenues Received: Fiscal Year 2011-2013**

During the 2011 fiscal year (July 1, 2010 – June 30, 2011), a total of 29,615 Rhode Island Saltwater Recreational Fishing Licenses were issued which resulted in \$189,946 in total license fee revenues (Table 1). During the 2012 fiscal year (July 1, 2011 – June 30, 2012), a total of 42,438 licenses were issued, which resulted in \$275,517 in fee revenues (Table 2). During the 2013 fiscal year (July 1, 2012 – June 30, 2013), the number of licenses issued increased again to 41,325 which resulted in \$264,983 in fee revenue (Table 3).

Table 1. RI Saltwater Recreational Fishing Licenses Issued During the 2011 Fiscal Year.

License Type	# of Licenses Issued	Fee Revenues	Amount Deposited Into License Fund
Resident Full Year	18,658	\$130,606	\$88,462
Non-Resident Full Year	5,249	\$52,490	\$40,702
Resident 7-Day	60	\$300	\$174
Non-Resident 7 Day	1,310	\$6,550	\$3,605
Resident Over 65	3,635	\$0	\$0
Active Military Duty	703	\$0	\$0
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>29,615</b>	<b>\$189,946</b>	<b>\$132,943</b>

Table 2. RI Saltwater Recreational Fishing Licenses Issued During the 2012 Fiscal Year.

License Type	# of Licenses Issued	Fee Revenues	Amount Deposited Into License Fund
Resident Full Year	26,556	\$185,892	\$124,413
Non-Resident Full Year	7,649	\$76,490	\$58,566
Resident 7-Day	122	\$610	\$352
Non-Resident 7 Day	2,505	\$12,525	\$6,528
Resident Over 65	4,613	\$0	\$0
Active Military Duty	993	\$0	\$0
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>42,438</b>	<b>\$275,517</b>	<b>\$189,859</b>

Table 3. RI Saltwater Recreational Fishing Licenses Issued During the 2013 Fiscal Year.

License Type	# of Licenses Issued	Fee Revenues	Amount Deposited Into License Fund
Resident Full Year	25,864	\$181,048	\$120,880
Non-Resident Full Year	6,975	\$69,750	\$53,340
Resident 7-Day	107	\$535	\$304
Non-Resident 7 Day	2,730	\$13,650	\$6,988
Resident Over 65	4,653	\$0	\$0
Active Military Duty	996	\$0	\$0
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>41,325</b>	<b>\$264,983</b>	<b>\$181,512</b>

The tables illustrate that there has been an increase in the number of licenses issued since the license program was established, resulting in an increased amount of funds being added to the restricted receipt account. While the number of licenses issued in fiscal year 2013 was lower than fiscal year 2012, it is anticipated that the numbers of licenses issued, and the total revenues deposited, will remain relatively constant for the next several years.

### III. Status of State-Based Fishing Assessments

Rhode Island’s recreational catch and effort data is currently collected via the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). The MRIP has replaced the previously used Marine Recreational Fishing Statistical Survey (MRFSS). The MRIP system improves recreational data collection as calls will be made to known Rhode Island saltwater anglers, via the registry of licensees, rather than random calls to numbers from Rhode Island phonebooks. The MRIP houses the survey data in a database used for estimating catch and effort statistics related to marine recreational fishing. The data is collected by two independent, but complementary, surveys. Effort data are collected by telephone sampling from the registry of licenses. Catch data are collected by intercept interviews with anglers at fishing access sites. Data from the two independent surveys are combined to produce estimates of fishing effort, catch, and participation. The Division has a contract in place with RTI International to carry out the intercept surveys of the MRIP. RTI International, which has been approved by NMFS, conducts the angler intercept surveys. ICF International, also approved by NMFS, conducts the telephone survey. The data collected is then relayed to the Division for review, and then once approved, the data is then provided to the MRIP. The number of phone and intercept interviews and related statistics collected by ICF International and RTI International are displayed, by calendar year, in Tables 4 and 5 respectively. The data provided to the Division was only available by calendar year, not fiscal year. For the 2014 fiscal year, the Division will be continuing to purchase additional add-on intercept surveys for the MRIP sampling in Rhode Island. This increase in sample numbers will result in more accurate and precise recreational catch and effort data which will in turn help the Division create fair and accurate recreational fishing regulations.

Table 4. 2010 – 2012 RI Phone Interviews Conducted by ICF International.

Category	2010		2011		2012	
	Number of Calls	Percent of Calls	Number of Calls	Percent of Calls	Number of Calls	Percent of Calls
<b>Non-Response</b>	<b>71707</b>	<b>39.23%</b>	<b>25039</b>	<b>34.38%</b>	<b>25978</b>	<b>34.75%</b>
No Contact	61380	33.58%	21096	28.96%	21703	29.03%
Contacted, No Response	10327	5.65%	3943	5.41%	4275	5.72%
<b>Response</b>	<b>111080</b>	<b>60.77%</b>	<b>47795</b>	<b>65.62%</b>	<b>48775</b>	<b>65.25%</b>
Respondent Ineligible	99123	54.22%	43356	59.53%	44249	59.19%
Eligible Non-Fishing Households	11235	6.15%	4185	5.75%	4282	5.73%
Eligible Fishing Households	722	0.40%	254	0.35%	244	0.33%
<b>Total Calls</b>	<b>182787</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>72834</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>74753</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Table 5. 2010 – 2012 RI Intercept Interviews Conducted by RTI International.

<b>Months</b>	<b>Successful Interviews</b>	<b>Refused Interviews</b>	<b>Percent Refused</b>
<b>2010</b>			
March – April	46	9	16.40%
May – June	395	108	21.50%
July – August	527	415	44.00%
September - October	432	214	33.10%
November - December	100	54	35.10%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1500</b>	<b>800</b>	<b>34.80%</b>
<b>2011</b>			
March – April	35	11	23.91%
May – June	273	85	23.74%
July – August	428	126	22.74%
September - October	323	103	24.18%
November - December	163	41	20.10%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1222</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>23.05%</b>
<b>2012</b>			
March – April	65	14	17.72%
May – June	285	79	21.70%
July – August	716	219	23.42%
September - October	598	163	21.42%
November - December	124	23	15.65%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1788</b>	<b>498</b>	<b>21.78%</b>

During the 2012 calendar year, a total of 74,753 phone interviews were attempted. Of that total, 25,978 calls or 34.75% resulted in a non-response (either no contact or no response) and 48,775 calls or 65.25% received a response. Of the calls with a response, 44,249 calls resulted in the respondent being ineligible for the survey and 4,526 calls reached an eligible respondent. By transitioning to the new MRIP system, whereby calls will be made to known Rhode Island saltwater anglers, via the registry of licensees, rather than random calls to numbers from Rhode Island phonebooks, the Division expects to see an increase in response and eligibility in the near future.

Regarding the intercept interviews, note the relatively high refusal rate, as well as the fact that no intercept interviews were conducted in January or February. The new MRIP system is designed to improve the spatial and temporal distribution of interviews (e.g., conducting more at night, and during the winter months, and in locations other than major access sites and marinas), which will help to improve the precision of the estimates. That initiative, combined with the State-supported initiative to increase the number of intercept interviews conducted, promises to vastly improve the quality and accuracy of Rhode Island’s recreational catch and effort data.

#### **IV. Issues & Initiatives**

##### **a. Increasing the Number of Local Vendors**

Although the internet remains the most convenient means for obtaining a license for most people, it is apparent that a significant number of people would prefer to obtain a license, in-person, at a local store or shop. Such individuals may either not have, or not be comfortable utilizing, a home computer and printer; or have the need to pay for their license using cash, instead of a debit or credit card.

As of the date of this report, there are twenty-six local vendors authorized to issue licenses at their places of business (up from just seven vendors at the start of the 2011 fishing season). The locations of the twenty-six vendors cover the major population areas of Rhode Island, including Block Island, but it is recognized that adding more vendors to the program will make it easier for more people to get their licenses, thereby helping to increase compliance with the program.

The Division applied for and was awarded a grant from the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to administer a vendor-incentive program. This program provides incentives to local businesses to become vendors of the RI saltwater recreational license. Pursuant to the program, the Division is offering to loan computers and printers to any establishment that is willing to vend licenses for a period of five years. The project began in March of 2011. All bait and tackle shops throughout RI were mailed an announcement detailing the program and informing them of the opportunity to apply. Several have responded, and the Division is continuing to accept applications. The Division has enough funds to provide equipment for up to 50 vendors.

##### **b. Developing Regulations for the License Program**

The Division has developed and enacted comprehensive regulations for the recreational license program. The Division intends to continue to update and amend regulations as situations and issues arise. The current regulations largely codify the key statutory provisions governing the license program, such as:

- Licenses are required for anyone who fishes or spearfishes recreationally in Rhode Island waters for finfish, with such activities defined;
- Licenses may include a valid Rhode Island license, a valid license from a reciprocal state, or a federal registration;
- Reciprocal states identified;
- Anglers and spearfishers must be in possession of a valid license when angling or spearfishing, or have it in close proximity; and
- Licenses are not required for anyone who is exempt, per the prescribed exemption categories, as long as anglers and spearfishers who are exempt carry applicable proof.

Additional provisions set forth by the regulations include:

- Licenses are required for anyone fishing for squid; and
- Licenses are not required for anyone holding a federal Highly Migratory Species Angling Permit, issued under the angler's name.

The regulations also included a provision requiring all license holders to carry a photo ID, but the Department decided to drop that proposal, based on comments received at public hearings.

**c. Meeting with the Recreational Marine License Study Group**

The Division is planning on annually holding an ad-hoc meeting with the members of the Recreational Marine License Study Group – the group that worked closely with the Division on the development of the original saltwater license bill. The purpose of these annual meetings is to review and get input on the draft budget for the saltwater license restricted receipt account. This meeting process is in addition to, not in lieu of, the Council and public comment processes set forth by the license statute.

**d. Addressing Additional Options for Obtaining Licenses**

Although the internet and the increasing number of local vendors throughout the State offer convenient opportunities for anglers and spearfishers to obtain a license, it is recognized that there are still a large number of people who either don't own a computer and printer or don't have a convenient means of accessing a local library or local vendor. While this constituency may be a minority, it apparently constitutes a significant portion of the recreational fishing community in Rhode Island. If too many people perceive the process of obtaining a license as a roadblock, it will turn people away from fishing, which is clearly counter to the spirit and intent of the license program.

The Division is committed to exploring options that would make it easier for people without a computer and printer or a convenient means for getting to a local library or vendor to obtain a license. Such options could include a mail-in or call-in option, but either option would entail additional administrative costs and a policy decision must be made as to whether funding from the budget for the license fee account should be redirected to cover the costs.

**e. Allowing Volunteer Contributions to the Restricted Receipt Account**

There have been suggestions made that some anglers and spearfishers would welcome the opportunity to make an additional, voluntarily contribution to the restricted receipt account associated with the license program at the time they purchase their license. It is unclear whether this could be done without additional statutory authority, but if there is enough interest in the part of the Rhode Island recreational fishing

community to pursue the initiative, the Division would be more than willing to further explore it.

#### **f. Streamlining the Online License Renewal Process**

Currently, the Division is coordinating with RII in an effort aimed at streamlining the renewal process, namely, by having prior contact information recalled and re-inserted, with an onus on the licensee to verify that it is up-to-date and accurate. Since phone numbers are the most important data field, the system may still require phone numbers to be re-entered every year, to help ensure that they are up-to-date and accurate.

### **V. FY14 Program Budget**

#### **a. Preface**

As noted previously, in accordance with the provisions of the RIGL Chapter 20-2.2, all monies from the saltwater license fees are deposited into a restricted receipt account and can only be used for the following purposes:

- Administering and enforcing the Rhode Island license program;
- Managing Rhode Island's marine recreational fisheries, with particular reference to improving state-based recreational fishery catch and effort statistics and stock assessments; and
- Enhancing recreational fishing opportunities in the State.

The Division undertakes a range of programs that address and support recreational fishing interests in Rhode Island. Those programs are largely funded via federal sources, namely: the US Fish & Wildlife Service through the Sport Fish Restoration (SFR) Program; and grants received from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The SFR Program, which is derived from excise taxes on fishing and boating equipment and is structured as a user-pay/user-benefit program, is the bedrock, providing some \$2 million annually; however, that grant required a 25 percent non-federal match (i.e., nearly \$700,000). The annual NMFS funding amounts to about \$200,000. The Division receives a very modest amount of state general funds each year – approximately \$150,000 for all marine fisheries-related programs and activities. And there is only one other source of non-federal funding: that relates to recreational interests: the receipts from annual sales of non-resident recreational shellfishing licenses and recreational lobster fishing licenses (totaling about \$120,000/year).

The primary state programs pertaining to sport fishing fall into the following general categories:

- Fish stock assessments
- Recreational catch and effort estimates
- Management plans and regulations

- Boating and fishing access
- Artificial reefs and habitat protection/enhancement
- Public information, outreach, and education
- Enforcement

It behooves Rhode Island to utilize the revenues from the saltwater fishing license program in a way that a) is consistent with the licensing statute, b) addresses the priority needs and interests of the recreational fishing community in Rhode Island; and c) maximizes opportunities and benefits by leveraging federal SFR funds.

## **b. Expenditures**

During the 2013 fiscal year, a total of about \$102,769 was used for the Rhode Island Marine Recreational Fishing Program. Of that total, about \$53,788 was used for personnel and equipment costs in support of the Division's finfish surveys for stock assessments. About \$10,542 was used for the management of the Marine Recreational Fisheries Program. About \$21,922 was used to enhance the Division's boating/fishing access site maintenance program as well as engineering work on the Galilee boat ramp improvements. Around \$2,999 was used to develop and create the first annual Rhode Island Recreational Saltwater Fishing Guide magazine which promotes recreational fishing in Rhode Island and contains several informative articles and current RI regulations. Also during fiscal year 2013, the Division used about \$12,433 for the purchase of additional MRIP intercept interviews to improve the precision of MRIP estimates for Rhode Island. An additional \$861 was used to improve and support RII and local vendors with the sales of the recreational license. It is anticipated that the account will receive another \$180,000 from FY14 license sales, and the proposed FY14 Programmatic Budget is based on that amount.

The Division recommends making the following expenditures during FY14:

### **1. Enhanced MRIP Data Collection (\$43,375)**

***Proposal.*** Expand the recreational catch and effort data collection program for Rhode Island (under the MRIP/MRFSS sampling umbrella) by providing funding for add-on intercept surveys to increase the overall precision of the State-based estimates and better enable mode-specific (e.g., shore-based) estimates. The \$43,375 investment will leverage an additional \$130,125 in federal (SFR) funds to provide \$173,500 in total programmatic benefits. The \$173,500 will supplement the existing contract Rhode Island has with RTI International, which conducts the angler intercept surveys.

***Rationale.*** The MRIP program is the major source for marine recreational catch and effort fishing assessments. Data collected via the program is used to estimate catch (landings and discards) and effort by species/state/mode/wave. Estimates of catch and effort are used to develop status of the stock for all species, including striped bass, summer flounder, scup, tautog, bluefish, winter flounder, cod, black sea bass, and weakfish. In addition, indices of abundance using catch per unit of effort are

incorporated into age-structured models to track abundance in comparison to other fisheries independent surveys. Estimates of catch and effort are quite variable due to sampling levels, which are directly correlated to the level of funding for each survey.

The marine recreational catch and effort fishing assessments yield fishery-dependent information which, coupled with the non-fishery dependent trawl and seine surveys, serve as the basis for marine recreational fishing regulations. The accuracy and fairness of recreational fishing regulations is directly related to the quality and precision of the assessments. What's more, to the extent that the Division can increase the surveys and sampling of fishermen in Rhode Island, the Division will have a better ability to tailor Rhode Island regulations in a way that best supports the interests of the Rhode Island fishing community. Of particular interest is the ability to pursue mode splits – e.g., differential regulations for shore-based fishermen versus boat-based fishermen. That can only be done if there is enough survey and sampling done of the two modes to enable relatively precise estimates of respective catch and effort.

The proposed enhanced data collection initiative will restore sampling to prior levels (2002-2005), and in conjunction with the vastly improved MRIP program, help to significantly boost the quality and accuracy of the data used to assess Rhode Island's marine recreational fisheries.

## **2. Boating/Fishing Access I (\$100,000)**

***Proposal.*** Undertake improvements to the Galilee Boat Ramp. The \$100,000 investment will leverage an additional \$300,000 in federal (SFR) funds to provide \$400,000 in total programmatic benefits.

***Rationale.*** The ramp in Galilee is one of the most popular and important ramps in the State, providing direct access to the salt ponds and south shore, as well as Block Island. The ramp is heavily utilized and in need of rehabilitation.

The Galilee ramp ranks high on the Division's list of priority boating/fishing access sites in need of upgrade or improvement, and is a worthy candidate for funding via the license fee account. In 2010, the Division completed work on one of the largest boat ramps in Rhode Island, the Mt. Hope Boat Ramp in Bristol. Three other projects are slated to be undertaken, under separate funding:

- New boat ramp at East Transit Road in Providence
- Improvements to ramp and parking at Marina Park Boat Ramp in South Kingstown
- Improvements to ramp and parking at Third Brach Boat Ramp in Middletown

Other boating/fishing access projects that are on the Division's priority list, and will be targeted for future funding, include:

- Goddard Park Boat Ramp, Warwick

- Weaver Cove Boat Ramp, Portsmouth
- Bold Point Boat Ramp, East Providence
- Pawtucket Boat Ramp, Pawtucket

### **3. Boating/Fishing Access II (\$18,700)**

*Proposal.* Enhance the Division’s boating/fishing access site maintenance program. The \$18,700 investment will leverage an additional \$56,100 in federal (SFR) funds to provide \$74,800 in total programmatic benefits.

*Rationale.* The Division has over 60 state-owned and operated boating/ fishing access sites used by an estimated 28,000 boats that are less than 24 feet in length. The Division is responsible for maintaining these areas, but lacks adequate resources to undertake all of the work that’s needed on a regular basis. The proposed allocation of funds from the license fee account, particularly when leveraged with federal funds, will significantly boost the Division’s ability to properly maintain state-owned boating/fishing access sites throughout Rhode Island.

### **4. Recreational Fisheries Management Support (\$26,000)**

*Proposal.* Maintain a fulltime staff person in the Division’s Marine Fisheries Program who will be responsible for coordinating a range of projects and activities that relate directly to priority marine recreational fishing issues. The \$26,000 investment will leverage an additional \$78,000 in federal (SFR) funds to provide \$104,000 in total programmatic benefits.

*Rationale.* In the past, the Division has never had a staff person dedicated to marine recreational fishing programs. In 2012, the Division hired a fulltime staff person dedicated to RI’s marine recreational fisheries program and proposes maintaining such a position, to focus solely on some or all of the following issues:

- Coordinating the overall license program, in concert with Rhode Island Interactive and local vendors; and serving as the conduit for data management between the program and NMFS, pursuant to the Division’s MOU with NMFS.
- Coordinating recreational fishing assessments (i.e., coordinating and maintaining the RTI International contract); serving on the ACCSP’s Recreational Technical Committee; advancing Rhode Island’s eLOGBOOK (formally eREC) logbook program.
- Coordinating the development of marine recreational fishing management programs in Rhode Island; applying recreational fishing assessments to recreational management programs; developing mode-specific recreational fishing management programs and other recreational fishing alternatives for important ASMFC-managed species (e.g., bonus fluke for shore-based anglers; extended seasons for scup; increased bag limits for black sea bass).

- Serving as a principal point of contact for recreational fishing groups and organizations throughout Rhode Island.
- Assisting with the coordination of the Division's boating/fishing access program – including assessment, maintenance, and management of existing sites; pursuing grants to upgrade/improve existing sites and develop new sites; and conveying information on access opportunities to the Rhode Island recreational fishing community.
- Assisting with the coordination of Rhode Island's artificial reef program.

## **5. Fish Stock Assessment Support (\$65,450)**

**Proposal.** Support the continuation of finfish stock assessment surveys of recreationally important species in Rhode Island waters. The \$65,450 investment will leverage an additional \$196,350 in federal (SFR) funds to provide \$261,800 in total programmatic benefits.

**Rationale.** The key programs funded via the federal SFR grant are the continuation of the Narragansett Bay trawl survey, the juvenile finfish seine survey conducted in the coastal ponds, and the newly developed fish pot survey. These projects are some of the most important annual finfish fisheries surveys in Rhode Island waters conducted by the Division. To date, these programs have been funded by the State's federal SFR grant, and matched entirely with commercial fishing license fee revenues. Given the importance of these programs to the recreational fishing community, it makes sense to use a portion of the recreational fishing license fees to cover the non-federal match requirements of the SFR grant pertaining to these projects.

## **6. Artificial Reef Support (\$9,350)**

**Proposal.** Support the continuation of the collaborative 5-year artificial reef project. The \$9,350 investment will leverage an additional \$28,050 in federal funds to provide \$37,400 in total programmatic benefits.

**Rationale.** Due to public input and interest, the Division, in collaboration with the Nature Conservancy, began a 5-year artificial reef project. The project is designed to test the feasibility and performance of artificial reefs in Rhode Island waters. The main goal of the project is to determine if artificial reefs actually produce more biomass or if immigration of fishes from surrounding areas occurs. The outcome of this study should help determine if permanent artificial reefs should be placed in Rhode Island waters. This project was initiated by recreational fishermen's requests for the placement of artificial reefs in RI, so it makes sense to use funds from the recreational saltwater license to fund and support the project.

## **7. Public Education, Information, and Outreach (\$16,428)**

**Proposal.** Conduct a public outreach campaign, pertaining to the license program, including but not limited to bus advertisements, radio/print advertisements, and

the use of social media. Also, development and distribution of an annual Rhode Island Recreational Fishing Guide, modeled after the guide that Massachusetts developed in 2011.

***Rationale.*** Although compliance with the new license program has generally been good, it is clear that a number of recreational fishermen and spearfishers remain unaware of the program, not only in terms of the need to obtain a license, but also with regard to the purpose of the program and the benefits it provides to the recreational fishing community. Since the primary purpose of the license program is to develop a comprehensive database of contact information for all recreational fishermen and spearfishers, it behooves the State to make a modest investment in a PR campaign, aimed at increasing awareness among the recreational fishing community regarding the license program, particularly during the summer season, thereby enhancing compliance and bolstering programmatic support.

In 2013, the Division published the 2013 Rhode Island Recreational Saltwater Fishing Guide. The publication, done in a colorful and appealing magazine style, offers a wealth of information of interest to the marine recreational fishing community in the State. While the Division continues to provide information to the Rhode Island recreational fishing community via the Division's website and an annual abstract that features recreational and commercial fishing regulations, the magazine enhances the Division's ability to connect with and inform recreational fishermen, and promotes recreational fishing in Rhode Island. The Rhode Island guide informs fishermen on the issues associated with the licensing program and the benefits associated therewith – drawing upon some of the information set forth in this report – as well as other issues of priority interest to the community, including current regulations, informative articles, and lists of local bait and tackle shops and party/charter boat services.

## **VII. Looking Ahead to FY15**

It is reasonable to expect that the license program, and associated receipts received, will continue to grow at a modest pace over the next several years. As previously noted, the total number of licenses issued during the 2013 fiscal year was 41,325, and total revenues deposited into the license fund for the calendar year were \$181,512. ***For planning purposes, the FY15 Programmatic Budget is conservatively projected to be around \$200,000.***



# Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council

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Meetings are open to the public. The room is accessible to the disabled and interpreter services for the hearing impaired will be provided if requested at least 3 business days prior to the meeting date. Requests for this service can be made in writing or by calling TTY (711) or (401) 222-5300.

For the most up-to-date meeting information and copies of minutes, please visit <http://www.dem.ri.gov/topics/mftopics.htm>, under the public meeting heading on the left side of the page.

## Addendum

to the

## Rhode Island Saltwater Recreational Fishing License Program Annual Report for FY 2013

In accordance with RIGL section 20-2.2-10, the Rhode Island Division of Fish and Wildlife (Division) presented the draft Rhode Island Saltwater Recreational License Program Annual Report for FY 2013 to the Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council (Council) and attending members of the general public, at the Council meeting on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Prior to the meeting, the draft report was provided to the Council members and posted on the Division's Marine Fisheries website; also, a press release and listserve notice were issued, alerting interested members of the public about the report and the opportunity to comment on it. At the Council meeting, Kevin Smith, Principal Biologist with the Division, provided a PowerPoint presentation covering the major points of the report. After the presentation, the meeting was opened up to allow for questions, comments, and discussion. Below is a summary of the questions and comments offered by the Council, Division, and members of the public who were in attendance.

- Members of the Council inquired about the trends in licensing and why the numbers of licenses issued seem to have leveled off to around 42,000; they asked if the rate of compliance in Rhode Island was known or could be determined.
- The Division stated that the current compliance rate is unknown, but an effort will be made next year to work with the Division of Law Enforcement (DLE) to begin tracking the compliance rate, based on DLE's interactions with anglers and spearfishers. The Division also noted that reciprocity with CT, MA, NY, and ME may be a factor contributing to the lower-than-expected number of RI licenses. The Division will continue to pursue increased outreach and enforcement to bolster compliance with the license program, particularly with regard to fishers who only fish occasionally.
- A DLE officer who was present at the meeting noted that, based on his own experience, most anglers are compliant, but many hold out-of-state (i.e., reciprocal) licenses.

- A member of the Council suggested that the Division could look towards neighboring states' programs to see if and how they calculate compliance rates.
- A member of the Council commented that as a restricted receipt account, it is important to ensure that all expenditures from the account remain dedicated solely to the intended purposes of the license program. The Council member noted that the Division has been doing an excellent job to date, and simply wanted the record to reflect the importance of the issue vis-à-vis the integrity of the program.
- A member of the Council offered that the expenditures on public education seemed low relative to other years and the upcoming year, and also added that it might be useful to have additional enforcement capabilities to help improve compliance.
- A member of the public offered support for the enhanced MRIP data collection element of the program, but noted that MRIP is too dynamic at this time; thus, a very large investment in state-purchased add-ons may not be warranted at this time.
- The Division also offered that it would be important for the Division to monitor how NOAA Fisheries allocates its funds relative to MRIP to be sure the Division isn't penalized for state-purchased add-ons.
- A member of the Council asked about the participation rate for surveys needed in order for the data to have statistical validity and be useful; in response, the Council Chair noted that the issue was being evaluated intensively by NOAA Fisheries via the MRIP Program.

After the comment and discussion portion of the meeting, the Council moved to offer its opinion that *the Licensing Program is continuing to meet its intended purpose*. The motion passed unanimously (8-0).

Submitted on Behalf of the Council

*Robert Ballou*

Robert Ballou, Chair