

**Rhode Island Saltwater Recreational
Fishing License Program**

Draft Annual Report

Fiscal Year 2021

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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 for FY21, offers a brief review of the status of state-based recreational fishing assessments, and sets forth the FY22 programmatic budget.

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 more 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 (hereinafter, the “Department”) 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 Department 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 Department's Division of Fish & Wildlife, Marine Fisheries Program (hereinafter, 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 fishing license, a state fishing license from a reciprocal state, or a federal registration. The requirement solely pertains to those harvesting, or attempting to harvest, finfish 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, spear fishers, 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. The annual cost has since increased to \$29.

Because the federal registration did not have a fee during 2010, it was difficult to assess the metrics of the RI program during its inaugural year. Since 2011, the program has equilibrated, providing more predictable participation and revenue rates. The average number of licenses issued between 2011 - 2017 was approximately 42,000 per year, generating average revenues of about \$270,000 gross and \$180,000 net. For the last two years (2018 and 2019) this figure has risen to approximately 50,000 licenses issued per year generating average revenues of about \$300,000 gross and \$200,000 net. All net license fee revenues, those not retained by the program vendor, are deposited into a restricted receipt account.

c. Benefits

The overarching benefits of recreational license programs are their potential for improving recreational fishing management by:

- Allowing flexibility in the administration of the recreational license program to suit the needs of Rhode Island.
- Improving the quality and accuracy of marine recreational fishing data; and
- Providing an improved means for quantifying the scope of recreational saltwater fishing and spearfishing in Rhode Island, and throughout the U.S.

A key benefit of having the State of Rhode Island administer its own license program is the opportunity to make the license available at a lower cost than a federal registration. The \$7 (resident) and \$10 (non-resident) fees for the RI license compare favorably to the \$29 fee for the federal registration. Moreover, RI does not require state residents over the age of 65, or any active military personnel stationed in RI, to pay a fee for a license. RI offers a 7-day license at a reduced rate of \$5, available to both residents and nonresidents.

An additional benefit of having RI administer its own program is that the State program offers certain exemptions that are not available under the federal program – namely, exemptions for RI residents who are blind or permanently disabled, and RI residents who are on leave from active military duty.

Another benefit of having a RI state program is reciprocity with neighboring states and federal waters. Pursuant to Rhode Island’s licensing statute, Rhode Island will extend reciprocity to any other state that offers reciprocity to Rhode Island. Any resident from a reciprocal state who is licensed by that state can fish in RI waters without having to obtain a RI license, provided that a RI resident with a RI license can fish in the waters of the reciprocal state without having to obtain a license from that state. The states currently covered by a reciprocity agreement with Rhode Island are: New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Maine.

A portion of each Rhode Island license sold, \$2 for every license sold online, and \$3 for every resident license sold via a vendor, is used to cover the costs of administering the licensing program. An additional charge of \$3 per license is assessed if a non resident buys a license at a brick and mortar vendor. This money goes directly to the vendors who administer the program, and are not revenues received by the state. 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 set forth by statute. Monies from the account may only be used for: 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 availability of this dedicated revenue source for use in supporting programs and activities that address the priority interests of RI’s recreational fishing community is a major benefit associated with the RI license program. Of particular value is the opportunity to use the state funds to leverage federal funds.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service’s (USFWS) Sport Fish Restoration Program provides federal funding for saltwater recreational fishing programs. The funding is administered via grants to the State; projects written into these grants require a 25% state match. The fees generated by the RI saltwater license program are used to leverage an additional \$3 for every \$1 dedicated to projects and activities that enhance recreational saltwater fishing access, as well as science and management programs that relate directly to recreational fish stocks. It is the policy of the Division to only fund Saltwater Fishing License Fee projects which have been matched with USFWS grants unless absolutely necessary.

d. Implementation

Internet 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 a portal to obtain licenses. The system developed by the vendor is used directly by recreational fishermen and by authorized licensing agents.

During 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 internet-based licensing system. RII followed through by developing and implementing a system that serves as the mechanism for issuing licenses, and for collecting all of the required contact information at the point of sale for the national registry.

The internet-based system is used by authorized vendors to provide a point of sale alternative for anglers and spear fishers to acquire a license. These vendors include bait and tackle shops, marinas and big box stores. To date, there are twenty-five (25) authorized vendors. RII is responsible for handling the business arrangements with each vendor, including billing, remittance and technical support. Vendors must pay an annual fee of \$75 to RII to cover these 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 encrypted data to the NMFS MRIP program for incorporation into the national registry.

Information & Outreach

Since the rollout of the Rhode Island Saltwater Recreational Fishing License, the Division has continued to provide information and outreach to the Rhode Island angling community. The primary vehicle is the webpage, www.saltwater.ri.gov, which provides direct access to the licensing portal. The page includes a detailed FAQ section, covering all aspects of the license program, a link to all authorized license vendors, links to 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.

Since 2013, the Division has contracted with a publishing company to create a recreational fishing guide for distribution throughout the state. The guide provides information on a variety of recreational-fishing-related issues, including current recreational fishing regulations, information on local fishing and boating access sites, and commonly caught species. It also provides information on the license program. The guide has emerged as a popular, widely circulated annual publication that serves to both promote recreational saltwater fishing in RI and inform the angling community on saltwater license revenue supported programs and regulations.

The Division continues to issue periodic press releases regarding the license program and produce fact sheets, informational cards and brochures for dissemination at public events, such as the Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association (RISAA) annual New England Saltwater Fishing Show. The Division continues to man a booth at the show to answer questions about recreational fishing, and to support issuing licenses in a convenient forum for the community. The show offers an ideal opportunity to interact directly with the recreational fishing community. Per the suggestion of our recreational saltwater license study group, the Division will provide more frequent updates to the RISAA and other interested parties on projects funded by recreational license funds. For example, the Division will report any boat ramp repairs or construction updates to RISAA to disseminate to their members. Another valuable suggestion generated by the group was to communicate any maintenance / infrastructure via press releases. The group feels that it is important to increase public awareness of how the recreational saltwater license funds are being spent. Tangible results increase the positive perception of the program. To that end the Division will also highlight these projects in its annual magazine. The group also suggested more communication between the Division and the angling public to direct where access point maintenance is needed.

To help increase awareness regarding the license program in the field, the Division also continues to maintain weatherproof vinyl signs at fishing access points throughout RI. The signs feature an illustration of the license and clear text informing the public that the license is required and how it can be acquired. RI also continues to provide informational signs to vendors to advertise the availability of licenses at their places of business.

In the FY2017 funding cycle the Division started funding an annual youth fishing camp administered by the Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association (RISAA) with oversight from the Division. The camp was a success enrolling 51 children for three days all centered around fishing. The popularity of the camp has prompted the Division and RISAA to continue the camp in FY2020, at Rocky Point. Unfortunately, due to the Covid -19 crisis the 2020 and 2021 kids fishing camps were cancelled. Hopefully conditions will improve and the camp can be held in 2022. RISAA is a very active, large recreational fishing organization based in the state of Rhode Island. An overview of the association can be found on their website: www.risaa.org. The state funding used to

match the federal USFWS sportfish grant in the past has been derived almost entirely from credits derived from the donated time spent by the RISAA volunteers. The grant the volunteer time was matched to was the USFWS RI Aquatic Education grant. Future camps will continue to leverage volunteer hours to match federal funding. Future camps will use recreational saltwater license revue will be used to match the federal grant in the event that volunteer hours are not available.

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 continues to declare a free fishing day each summer. Since 2010, the free fishing day has coincided with Governor's Bay Day.

e. Licenses Issued, Revenues Received: Fiscal Years 2011-2021

Tables 1-3 summarize licenses issued and revenue generated since the inception of the license program. For the purposes of this report gross revenue is the total amount of fees paid to RIDEM for the saltwater recreational license. Net revenue is the balance of fees deposited into the restricted account after the administrative costs are paid to the internet portal contractor and other brick and mortar vendors. License numbers and revenues increased after FY11, as expected, as the federal registry switched from being a free alternative to a costly alternative. In the ten years since FY11, license issued have increased to approximately 50,000 per year, generating an average gross revenue of about \$330,000, and average net revenue of about \$234,000. Despite the increases, the number of licenses sold and revenue generated fall well short of initial predictions from 2010, resulting in a much more constrained budget then originally envisioned. FY21 was a good year for license sales. The number of licenses decreased by approximately 4,000 licenses but still remains higher than average. During FY21 53,869 licenses were issued resulting in \$358,685 in gross revenue and \$258,467 in net revenue. This was a decrease from FY20 but still above the average and one of the highest total in the series. While sales fluctuate from year to year it is still an indication that the recreational saltwater licensing program is not losing ground and still has potential to grow. Fishing allows for recreation in the outdoors which is relatively safe due to inherent social distancing of the activity. This makes fishing relatively covid safe which is likely keeping license sales at an elevated level. In fact, it is estimated that use of all of RI's outdoor access points and resources increased approximately 80% during the pandemic. With more people recreating outdoors it is not surprising that the number of fishing licenses sold trend upward as well. This behavior sustained into 2021.

Table 1. RI Saltwater Recreational Fishing Licenses – Number Issued: FY11 through FY21

License Type	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15
Resident Full Year	18,658	26,556	25,864	25,938	26,084
Non-Resident Full Year	5,249	7,649	6,975	7,432	7,381
Resident 7-Day	60	122	107	144	134
Non-Resident 7 Day	1,310	2,505	2,730	2,958	3,055
Resident Over 65	3,635	4,613	4,653	4,667	4,704
Active Military Stationed in RI	703	993	996	1,055	992
Totals:	29,615	42,438	41,325	42,194	42,350

License Type	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21
Resident Full Year	29,335	28,605	31,576	30,155	37,664	33,888
Non-Resident Full Year	8,428	8,378	8,762	8,721	9,815	9,934
Resident 7-Day	159	158	167	135	185	237
Non-Resident 7 Day	3,141	3,221	3,436	3,430	3,395	2,948
Resident Over 65	5,078	5,613	5,879	5,489	5,858	6,154
Active Military Stationed in RI	1,006	971	975	807	815	708
Totals:	47,147	46,946	50,795	48,737	57,732	53,869

Table 2. RI Saltwater Recreational Fishing Licenses -- Gross Revenue: FY11 through FY21

License Type	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15
Resident Full Year	\$130,606	\$185,892	\$181,048	\$181,566	\$182,588
Non-Resident Full Year	\$52,490	\$76,490	\$69,750	\$74,320	\$73,810
Resident 7-Day	\$300	\$610	\$535	\$720	\$670
Non-Resident 7 Day	\$6,550	\$12,525	\$13,650	\$14,790	\$15,275
Resident Over 65	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Active Military Stationed in RI	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Totals:	\$189,946	\$275,517	\$264,983	\$271,396	\$272,343

License Type	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21
Resident Full Year	\$205,345	\$200,235	\$221,032	\$211,085	\$263,648	\$237,216
Non-Resident Full Year	\$84,280	\$83,780	\$90,938	\$93,495	\$104,210	\$104,683
Resident 7-Day	\$795	\$790	\$835	\$675	\$925	\$1,185
Non-Resident 7 Day	\$15,705	\$16,105	\$17,639	\$19,562	\$19,018	\$15,601
Resident Over 65	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Active Military Stationed in RI	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Totals:	\$306,125	\$300,910	\$330,444	\$324,817	\$387,801	\$358,685

Table 3. RI Saltwater Recreational Fishing Licenses -- Net Revenue: FY11 through FY20

License Type	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15
Resident Full Year	\$88,462	\$124,413	\$120,880	\$120,736	\$121,175
Non-Resident Full Year	\$40,702	\$58,566	\$53,340	\$56,970	\$56,682
Resident 7-Day	\$174	\$352	\$304	\$411	\$382
Non-Resident 7 Day	\$3,605	\$6,528	\$6,988	\$7,794	\$8,085
Resident Over 65	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Active Military Stationed in RI	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Totals:	\$132,943	\$189,859	\$181,512	\$185,911	\$186,324

License Type	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21
Resident Full Year	\$136,810	\$133,772	\$155,040	\$140,853	\$177,714	\$169,440
Non-Resident Full Year	\$64,923	\$64,664	\$68,952	\$67,723	\$76,372	\$79,472
Resident 7-Day	\$453	\$430	\$477	\$384	\$541	\$711
Non-Resident 7 Day	\$8,445	\$8,765	\$9,465	\$9,488	\$9,504	\$8,844
Resident Over 65	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Active Military Stationed in RI	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Totals:	\$210,631	\$207,631	\$233,934	\$218,448	\$264,131	\$258,467

III. Status of State-Based Fishing Assessments

Rhode Island's recreational catch and effort data is collected via the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). MRIP is designed to improve recreational data collection by using the data generated from license sales to create a national recreational angler registry and by employing new angler survey protocols. This registry of licensees is a known sampling frame that can be drawn upon to conduct more focused surveys. Addresses taken from the registry are used to assess fishing effort, i.e., the number of anglers and the number of trips they make in Rhode Island. Catch data is collected by intercept interviews with anglers at fishing access sites. This catch data is used to calculate the number, species, and size of the fish being caught by recreational anglers in Rhode Island. Data from the two independent surveys is combined to produce regional and coast wide estimates of recreational harvest. Results are reported in two-month periods called waves. This data is collected during the months of March through December; no intercepts for shore, private/rental, or party charter modes are collected in Rhode Island during wave 1 (January - February) due to low fishing activity. RIDMF does sample in Head boat mode during wave one as part of the add on sampling coverage. Samplers ride along on head boats twice per month in January and February to collect data on cod, tautog, and black sea bass winter fishing trips. The covid -19 crisis prevented us from sampling head boats our full complement in FY 2021. RIDMF only sampled the number required by NOAA base sampling levels (no add-ons) which is a reduction of ~50% of ride alongs.

The portion of MRIP that collects recreational fishing effort data is currently being collected by the Fishing Effort Survey (FES) a mail based system which has replaced the Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS). A benchmarking period during which data collection was conducted with both methodologies and was successful. The data collected during benchmarking period was used to calculate a conversion factor used to relate effort data collected in the past with the CHTS to the new effort data collected by the FES.

The FES methodology uses information provided by anglers when purchasing a Rhode Island Saltwater Recreational Fishing License as the sample frame for the surveys. The data is provided to MRIP to create a registry of anglers whose addresses are randomly drawn from to receive a mail survey concerning fishing effort. The new system has proven to be a better estimator of fishing activity than the CHTS, one outcome of which is higher angler effort statistics. The improved accuracy of the FES has provided a better understanding of the number of anglers and trips taking place and has shown that more anglers were making fishing trips than previously thought using CHTS data. The increased effort combined with the existing catch rates has highlighted that previous catch and harvest estimates were much lower than previously thought. Comparisons of catch and harvest estimates using the two methods are available on the MRIP website.

The second portion MRIP focuses on the collection of recreational catch statistics. As of 2016, the Division is responsible for conduct of the Access Point Angler Interview

Survey (AP AIS). Prior to that, the Division had a contract with the federally approved contractor, to perform the AP AIS. AP AIS is the portion of MRIP which captures the recreational catch data. The accuracy of the data collected via angler intercepts has been improving over the past three years, due to the new approaches employed under MRIP. The number of attempted interviews is increasing, as is the spatial and temporal distribution of the interviews. A more comprehensive sampling frame of potential sampling locations with accompanying site pressures is being used to better distribute the interviews. Better statistical sample distribution is expected to continue to increase the accuracy of the estimates. Additionally, interviews are now being conducted at increasing rates during the winter months on head boat trips. Intercept refusal rates have remained level, despite the change to the Division conducting the AP AIS. The Division is working hard to improve this aspect of the processes and engaged stakeholders at local club events to foster buy in to the AP AIS. This face to face approach has been well received and will continue into the future. The Division has also reached out to NOAA Fisheries for outreach materials and strategies which should have positive results.

To further add to the above-described improvements, the Division is increasing the number of sample draws across all months using revenues from Rhode Island Saltwater Recreational Fishing License matched 3:1 with USFWS federal grant money. The funds are being used to hire four additional seasonal employees during the summer months to perform these additional interview shifts. The Division plans to continue this practice into the foreseeable future. This state-specific increase in sample numbers has increased the accuracy and precision of recreational catch and effort data for RI.

As mentioned above, AP AIS has transitioned from contractor-based administration to state-based administration. The transition occurred in 2016. The data collected from AP AIS is displayed in table 4a, 4b, 4c and 5. Recreational Saltwater License funds were not used to make this transition; it was a federally funded initiative. Agreements have been forged between NOAA Fisheries and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) outlining the duties and responsibilities the Division must accomplish to successfully transition and run the program. To accomplish this transition the Division hired a full time coordinator to administer the program. The funding for this position is provided annually by NOAA Fisheries. The MRIP coordinator is responsible for maintaining and scheduling personnel who will conduct angler intercepts throughout RI. In addition to staffing duties, the coordinator is responsible for QA/QC, validation, and disseminating of data collected to the Atlantic Coast Cooperative Statistics Survey (ACCSP). ACCSP is part of ASMFC and is coordinating the collection of data from state partners for delivery to NOAA Fisheries.

The Division has hired 2 full time field interviewers to perform angler intercepts during waves 2 -6 throughout Rhode Island. NOAA Fisheries provides funding for one staff via funding for AP AIS and ~75% of the other staff via funding to conduct the For Hire Telephone Survey (FHTS). NOAA Fisheries provides funding as well as for four seasonal employees each year. These employees travel to shore based sites and ride on board head boats to conduct angler interviews routinely as prescribed by AP AIS. The full time employee also provides back office support to the MRIP coordinator.

As mentioned above, Recreational Saltwater License funds will be used each year to increase the number of interviews beyond the base number funded by NOAA Fisheries. These additional interviews are accomplished by hiring additional seasonal employees during peak fishing waves. The funding for the three additional seasonal employees and three months of a full time staff member's time is provided by Rhode Island Recreational Saltwater License fees matched 3:1 with USFWS grant money. It is estimated that the four additional temporary samplers will accomplish the same number of additional samples (likely more) than were purchased directly from the contractor in the past. After one year of the new methodology it has been determined that two additional seasonal employees is an effective number to conduct the additional site assignments requested by the Division. By ordering additional samples from NOAA Fisheries, the tiered nature of the sample draws can result in summer weekend days requiring six staff members to carry out all of the site assignments. Non weekend sample draws are less intensive and require fewer staff.

The Division intends to build on the recent improvements to the survey and anticipates better data collection and more accurate information going forward with the program. Tables 4a and 4b, show the assignment statistics by wave and mode for 2020 and 2021. Table 5 compares 2016- 2021 APAIS interview statistics. The results compare the first four years of RI State conduct of the survey. Notably the number of completed interviews has increased but refusal rates only slightly decreased. Staff will continue to develop strategies to reduce the number of refusals.

The higher number of completed interviews is a function of higher angler encounter rates. During the early sampling waves of 2016, the Division was still learning the nuances of conducting the survey. A key part of the process involved adjusting the site pressures used by NOAA Fisheries to make the random assignments directing where interviews take place. Rhode Island site pressures needed adjustment because they were not resulting in random draws that would direct field interviewers to popular fishing sites. The adjustments have been accomplished and their effectiveness is reflected in a higher number of completed interviews between 2017 and 2020 relative to 2016. Field interviewer production rates continued to contribute to more completed interviews in 2021. Production rates remained steady between 2020 and 2021 with an average of ~ 6 interviews/assignment. The sustained high field interviewer production rates are the result of the experience gained in our first year of the program and a more refined training regimen. It is anticipated to maintain this increased production in 2022 as there is 1 field interviewer returning from 2021. This FI has two years of training under their belts, which should foster higher productivity.

Refusal rates have decreased slightly between 2016 and 2019 but increased in 2021. This increase in refusals is likely contributed to Covid – 19 and anglers social distancing/avoiding our interviewers. The Division will continue its outreach efforts to reduce this statistic. Most of the refusals occur in Party/Charter mode. Staff has been focused on obtaining interviews from all clients from any given charter boat trip to bring this number down with some good preliminary results. Since 2016, any angler that is not interviewed from a boat party from which at least one angler was interviewed is coded as

an initial refusal, and the count of missed anglers only refer to anglers who were eligible but could not be interviewed because the interviewer was busy interviewing other anglers. This procedural change has increased the number of refusals in this mode. The Division constructed a kiosk at the main charter boat dock in the state. The kiosk is meant to raise awareness to the survey and provide a central location from which our field interviewers may operate.

Since FY2020, RIDMF has assumed the duties for maintaining the vessel registry, the For-Hire Telephone Survey (FHTS), and Large Pelagics (phone) Survey (LPS) for Party/Charter and Head Boats. The vessel registry is used to randomly select for hire vessels for inclusion in the FHTS as well as add them to the vessel good list. The good list is the list of vessels which are active in any given wave and are available to be interviewed as part of APAIS and surveyed via the FHTS. The FHTS is used instead of the FES to collect fishing effort data to be compiled with APAIS to create recreational harvest estimates for the for-hire fleet. The LPS is another telephone survey which collects fishing effort data but specific to large pelagic species of fish such as tunas and sharks. RIDMF received additional funds from NOAA Fisheries to provide for staff time to make these calls throughout the year. No recreational license fees have been used to run this survey. As mentioned above the Division hired an additional full-time staff member, that persons main focus is the FHTS. The three months funded by the RI Saltwater License Fees and USFWS Sportfish funding take place during the winter season to help with add on Head Boat rides, add on Fall interviews and preparation for spring each year.

The concept behind the state taking over the FHTS and LPS is that those surveys will now have a local brand associated with them which will in turn increase participation. Other states that have already taken over conduct of these two surveys have experienced better results since taking over the job from the federal contractor (Quantech). The increased participation can be credited to having the same core group of staff making the calls building a rapport with the for-hire captains as opposed to a random person calling them from week to week. RIDMF plans to use similar methods using the same two staff members to make all the calls to the RI for-hire fleet.

Table 4a. APAIS Interview Statistics from 2020 Assignments. (CH = Party/Charter, PR = Private/Rental Boat, SH = Shore, HB = Head Boat)

Year	Wave	Mode	Assignments	Completed	Initially Refused	Language Barrier	Missed Anglers	Productivity
2020	2	CH	0	0	0	0	0	0
2020	2	HB	1	6	3	5	0	6
2020	2	PR	8	0	0	0	0	0
2020	2	SH	28	40	9	3	17	1.43
2020	3	CH	35	155	269	5	66	4.43
2020	3	HB	0	0	0	0	0	0
2020	3	PR	46	234	80	57	66	5.09
2020	3	SH	60	272	77	66	95	4.53
2020	4	CH	60	523	831	8	249	8.72
2020	4	HB	0	0	0	0	0	0
2020	4	PR	82	638	183	60	172	7.78
2020	4	SH	48	302	68	79	65	6.29
2020	5	CH	36	274	297	27	65	7.61
2020	5	HB	0	0	0	0	0	0
2020	5	PR	69	524	109	45	119	7.59
2020	5	SH	54	317	116	83	77	5.87
2020	6	CH	9	42	80	0	9	4.67
2020	6	HB	0	0	0	0	0	0
2020	6	PR	10	4	1	0	0	0.4
2020	6	SH	25	72	24	7	32	2.88
			571	3403	2147	445	1032	5.96

Table 4b. APAIS Interview Statistics from 2021 Assignments. (CH = Party/Charter, PR = Private/Rental Boat, SH = Shore, HB = Head Boat)

Year	Wave	Mode	Assignments	Completed	Initially Refused	Language Barrier	Missed Anglers	Productivity
2021	2	PR	21	40	8	6	10	1.9
2021	2	SH	24	95	18	16	19	3.96
2021	3	CH	46	311	462	5	103	6.76
2021	3	HB	6	69	46	0	0	11.5
2021	3	PR	65	430	139	94	151	6.62
2021	3	SH	55	332	98	64	132	6.04
2021	4	CH	75	523	807	31	305	6.97
2021	4	HB	16	268	131	34	0	16.75
2021	4	PR	97	611	279	82	184	6.3
2021	4	SH	41	226	98	74	82	5.51
2021	5	CH	50	191	377	32	72	3.82
2021	5	HB	10	110	66	32	0	11
2021	5	PR	73	488	186	87	131	6.68
2021	5	SH	54	199	91	105	84	3.69
2021	6	CH	15	75	224	15	32	5
2021	6	HB	4	41	22	4	0	10.25
2021	6	PR	15	14	6	4	0	0.93
2021	6	SH	26	95	29	2	52	3.65
2021			693	4118	3087	687	1357	5.94

Table 5. Summary of APAIS interview Statistics from 2016 – 2021 assignments by wave.

Year	Wave	Completed	Refused	Missed	Percent Refused	Percent Complete
2016	2	116	63	3	8	35.20%
2016	3	396	549	66	65	58.10%
2016	4	857	1157	190	260	57.45%
2016	5	665	557	101	143	45.58%
2016	6	111	61	41	4	35.47%
2016		2145	2387	401	480	53.00%
2017	2	124	15	8	13	10.79%
2017	3	759	579	128	146	43.27%
2017	4	1908	1011	217	629	34.64%
2017	5	901	518	37	267	36.50%
2017	6	149	94	36	37	38.68%
2017		3841	2217	416	1092	36.60%
2018	2	149	46	14	19	23.59%
2018	3	782	532	114	277	40.49%
2018	4	1740	989	151	704	36.24%
2018	5	1058	583	150	434	35.53%
2018	6	199	147	70	87	42.49%
2018		3928	2297	499	1521	36.90%
2019	2	199	63	31	31	24.05%
2019	3	1001	460	142	142	31.49%
2019	4	1659	765	147	147	31.56%
2019	5	1044	354	182	182	25.32%
2019	6	140	75	27	27	34.88%
2019		4043	1717	529	529	29.81%
2020	2	46	12	8	17	20.69%
2020	3	661	426	128	227	39.19%
2020	4	1463	1082	147	486	42.51%
2020	5	1115	522	155	261	31.89%
2020	6	118	105	7	41	47.09%
2020		3403	2147	445	1032	38.68%
2021	2	135	26	29	29	16.15%
2021	3	1142	745	163	386	39.48%
2021	4	1628	1315	221	571	44.68%
2021	5	988	720	256	287	42.15%
2021	6	225	281	25	84	55.53%
2021		4118	3087	687	1357	42.85%

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 portion of the population continues to prefer to

obtain a license, in-person, at a local store or shop. Such individuals may either not have, or may not be comfortable using a home computer and printer. Additionally, some individuals may have the need to pay for their license using cash, instead of a debit or credit card, which is required for the online transaction. This precipitates the need to maintain and increase brick and mortar vendors in RI.

To date, there are twenty-five local vendors authorized to issue licenses at their places of business. This is up from just seven vendors at the start of the 2011 fishing season. The locations of the twenty-five vendors cover the major population areas of Rhode Island, including Block Island. Increasing the number of vendors should remain a top priority, since adding more vendors to the program will make it easier for more people to get their licenses, thereby enhancing compliance.

The Division applied for and was awarded a grant from the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to administer a vendor-incentive program. The program started in 2011. Pursuant to the program, the Division loans computers and printers to any establishment that agrees to vend licenses for a period of five years. The Division has enough funds to provide equipment for up to 50 vendors. This grant ended as of November of 2015. The Division has exhausted its supply of computers.

In 2018 RIDEM successfully rolled out a new outdoor recreational licensing system which will allow saltwater, freshwater, and hunting licenses to be purchased over the internet at once. By way of background, the saltwater and freshwater licenses were already available online, hunting licenses were still being issued via a paper system. The new system has both an online and agent module to allow both online and brick and mortar sales outlets. Combining all three licenses into one system has resulted in the saltwater license being available at more brick and mortar locations. Saltwater recreational fishing licenses are now sold at over 25 locations throughout the state including municipalities and the RIDEM Boating Registration office. This increased access to the fishing license and a sustained outreach campaign associated is the likely contributed to license sales remained relative level in FY2021.

b. Developing Regulations for the License Program

In 2010 the Division developed and enacted comprehensive regulations for the recreational license program. The regulations largely codify the key statutory provisions governing the license program. The Division tracks recreational fishing issues and strives to keep pace with advances in technology as it pertains to fishing licenses and will amend regulations if needed to address current issues. At this time, the Division plans to pursue legislation to supplement the new combined online system to create a license that would cover saltwater, freshwater, and hunting licenses. This legislation would also address license fees and agent fees. It is not anticipated that saltwater license fees will increase. Allowing for a combination purchase will enhance the customer service aspect of the licensing program, and is therefore an important initiative for the State.

c. Meeting with the Recreational Saltwater License Study Group

The Division plans to continue meeting annually with the Recreational Saltwater License Study Group. This ad-hoc group worked closely with the Division on the development of the original saltwater recreational license bill. The purpose of these annual meetings is to review and get input on the status of the overall license program, as well as the draft budget for the saltwater license restricted receipt account. These meetings are in addition to, not in lieu of, the Council and public comment processes set forth by the license statute.

d. Allowing Volunteer Contributions to the Restricted Receipt Account

It has been suggested that some anglers and spear fishers 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 on the part of the Rhode Island recreational fishing community to pursue the initiative, it can be pursued further. Examples of voluntary methods for contribution include license plate programs and donations on state tax forms. There are no proposals to develop additional means of acquiring voluntary contributions at this time.

e. Streamlining the Online License Renewal Process

The Division has continued to coordinate with RII in an effort to streamline 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. Phone numbers remain an important data field, the system still requires phone numbers to be re-entered every year, to help ensure that they are up-to-date and accurate. MRIP methods have shifted to a mail based survey, the Fishing Effort Survey (FES). This change makes the address of the applicant the key data element. It is unclear if the telephone number will become self-populated from previous license data after the switch is made to the mail survey, but for now it will still be a required data element of the RI program.

RIDEM is currently in the process of comIt should be noted that the new online system took ease of license renewal into its design speciation's. A new unique identifying number will be assigned to each license holder that will directly link to an account in the system. The user accounts will maintain a history of past transactions and store all demographic information. These changes have reduced the amount of time any given user spends renewing their recreational saltwater fishing license.

f. Compliance

As mentioned above, the number of licenses issued for the past three years has remained static at approximately 42,000 until 2016. During the 2018 and 2019 fiscal cycles, this number increased to ~50,000 licenses. In 2021 the number remained elevated ~53,000 licenses. A slight decrease was observed in the resident license sales while a

slight increase was noted in the non-resident demographic. Although it is too soon to predict whether these sales numbers will be sustained, it is a positive sign that general awareness to the licensing program continues to be high. It is speculated that the presence of APAIS field interviewers dressed in RIDFW uniforms is also a factor in raising awareness of the program or perception that an angler's license may be checked more frequently. The Division is vested in providing outreach and education to the public, this positive sign is encouraging and fosters a belief that the outreach funds are well spent.

It is important to know how closely the number of licenses tracks the actual number of anglers in order to assess the effectiveness of the saltwater license program. RIDEM Division of Law Enforcement (DLE) conducts field checks of the recreational license to ensure compliance with the saltwater license requirement with good results. These field checks are essential to the success of the program, the officer's invest numerous patrol hours checking for compliance and are the Departments hands on ambassadors. On average approximately 1,200 license checks take place annually. These results have yielded an approximate 90% compliance rate with the Saltwater Recreational License program. DLE states that this is similar to rates seen by other regional law enforcement agencies. While 90% is a good compliance rate it still remains necessary to promote a high level of awareness of the saltwater license program to keep noncompliance in check, to facilitate good quality data collection, and continue to foster the gains in sales from FY2021 into the future.

The Division will continue working to increase compliance as well as prevent license sales from eroding. Several ideas provided by the Saltwater Recreational License advisory group will be pursued to this end. The Division collects email addresses from license applicants; these email addresses will be used in the future to send an electronic reminder to renew their licenses annually. The Division executed these email reminders beginning in 2017 and will continue to do so. The new online recreational licensing system will allow the Division to continue this functionally for all three types of recreational licenses types.

It is generally accepted that the frequent recreational angler is aware of the recreational license requirement; a lack of compliance likely exists in the casual angling population. To address this compliance gap the Division expanded its distribution of its saltwater fishing magazine to more diverse locations such as popular tourist hotels and attractions.

V. Expenditures and Budget

a. Preface

The goal of the saltwater recreational fishing license is to promote healthy and diverse recreational fisheries which are easily accessible by the fishing public. By providing funds to promote better data collection and stock assessment, the license leads to better management programs which should ensure sustainable fishing into the future.

Robust fishing opportunities coupled with modern, well thought out, and convenient fishing access is ultimately the best strategy to increase awareness of the license to ensure that all Rhode Islanders are participating in the program equally. To this end the saltwater recreational license program will continue to direct funding towards recreational fishing programs that work towards completing our goal.

As noted previously, in accordance with the provisions of the RIGL Chapter 20-2.2, all funds from the saltwater license fees are deposited into a restricted receipt account that can only be used for the purposes list below.

- 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.

It is important to note that this account does not need to be spent down every year. License revenue that is not spent remains in the account and is available for projects the following year and into the future. If designated funds are not spent in any given category they are kept in that category for the next budget cycle.

The Division undertakes a range of programs that address and support recreational fishing interests in Rhode Island. These programs are largely funded via a federal grant administered by the US Fish & Wildlife Service's Sport Fish Restoration (SFR) Program. The SFR Program is derived from excise taxes on fishing and boating equipment, and is structured as a user-pay/user-benefit program. The SFR program is the primary source of funding for recreational fishing programs in Rhode Island, providing some \$2 million annually. SFR grants require a 25 percent non-federal match.

The primary RIDEM programs pertaining to recreational fishing fall into the following general categories:

- Fish stock assessments
- Recreational catch and effort estimates
- Management programs and regulations
- Boating and fishing access
- Artificial reefs and habitat protection/enhancement
- Public information, outreach, and education
- Enforcement

In developing annual budgets for the recreational saltwater license account, RIDEM draws upon the following guidelines: projects must be consistent with the licensing statute; address the needs and interests of the recreational fishing community in Rhode Island; and maximize opportunities and benefits by leveraging federal SFR funds whenever possible.

b. FY20 Expenditures

During the 2021 fiscal year, a total of \$251,314 was spent on the Rhode Island Marine Recreational Fishing Program (Table 6). This amount is down from the \$359,185 expended in FY2020 which was expected as there was no major boat ramp construction project. Of that total:

- \$37,019 was used to hire two additional seasonal field interviewers and part of a full time staff member to accomplish additional MRIP intercept interviews, \$374 on programmatic supplies.
- \$132,901 was used for personnel costs related to the management of the Marine Recreational Fisheries Program and Stock Assessment. \$4,241 was used for equipment costs in support of the Division's finfish surveys for stock assessments. The total for this category was \$137,143.
- \$25,763 was spent on a dive survey for the Westerly Boat ramp project. \$8724 was used to provide match to a NFWF grant to create a design for road improvements at the Quononchontaug boat ramp. The total for this category \$34,488.
- \$4,950 was used to hire two seasonal employees to monitor the Camp Cronin fishing area. These employees helped coordinate parking, monitored for user conflicts, and picked up trash. \$4,993 was used to support the Division's boating/fishing access site maintenance program. Maintenance performed at marine ramps included mowing, brush removal, dead tree limbs and downed trees removal. Litter and trash is removed weekly, or biweekly as needed. Fishing line recycle boxes under our oversight are emptied of fishing line. Snow was plowed in some saltwater access areas. Location and regulation signs were inspected monthly at each fishing site and repaired or replaced as needed. Specifically:
 - Supervised and provided oversight at annual float removal and winter storage of docks at Mt Hope, Haines Park, Galilee and Fort Adams boat ramps with contract vendor- Steel Giraffe. Assisted with the spring installation.
 - Charlestown Breachway- periodically checked and repaired ramp
 - Colt Park- checked periodically, contracted dock services, removed rocks from ramp and installed safety barrier at end of floating dock
 - Ft. Adams - transported gravel for repairs and contracted dock services
 - Galilee Boat Ramp-repaired and regraded parking lot, contracted dock services, and checked periodically
 - Gull Cove- removed trash, graded access road and parking area
 - Goddard Park-contracted dock services and removed debris from ramp area
 - Haines Park-contracted dock services, periodically inspected, and removed derelict dock
 - Longmeadow- relocated boulders for habitat protection and installed location signs
 - Mount Hope- contracted dock services
 - Narrow River Ramp- removed trash, maintained parking area, installed informational signage

- Pawcatuck River Boat Ramp, Westerly- removed trash, installed informational signage, cleared tree, and continued to monitor ramp damage
- Passeonquois Cove- graded and repaired ramp and parking area
- Quonochontaug boat ramp- repaired and graded roads, moved boulders at parking area, replaced informational signage, installed fence
- Sakonnet Point boat ramp- installed informational signage
 - \$32,344 was used for staff time and supplies relative to public education, information, and outreach. This includes production of the sixth annual Rhode Island Recreational Saltwater Fishing Guide, the one page laminated fishing abstract, and other outreach materials.

Table 6. FY2022 Recreational Saltwater License Program budget. Please note the category Rec Fisheries Support is being combined with Fish Stock Assessment Support.

Category	FY20 Carryover	FY21 Revenue	FY21 Available	FY21 Expended
Enhanced MRIP Data Collection	\$63,172	\$12,923	\$76,095	\$37,394
Boating/Fishing Access I	\$70,037	\$51,693	\$121,730	\$34,488
Boating/Fishing Access II	\$37,580	\$25,847	\$63,427	\$9,944
Fish Stock Assessment Support	\$107,521	\$155,080	\$262,601	\$137,143
Artificial Reef	\$32,502	\$0	\$32,502	\$0
Public Education, Information, and Outreach	\$39,888	\$12,923	\$52,811	\$32,344
TOTAL	\$350,699	\$258,467	\$609,167	\$251,314

c. FY20 Budget

The budget for FY21 is described in Table 7. It is anticipated that the restricted receipt account will receive another \$200,000 from FY21 license sales, and the proposed FY21 Programmatic Budget, as set forth below, is based on that amount. The revenue will be allocated into each of the budget categories based on projected short and long term spending.

Table 7. FY2022 Recreational Saltwater License Program budget.

Category	FY21 Carryover	FY22 Revenue	FY22 Available	FY22 Budgeted
Enhanced MRIP Data Collection	\$38,701	\$5,000	\$43,701	\$35,000
Boating/Fishing Access I	\$87,242	\$90,000	\$177,242	\$150,000
Boating/Fishing Access II	\$53,483	\$0	\$53,483	\$10,000
Fish Stock Assessment Support	\$125,458	\$100,000	\$225,458	\$150,000
Artificial Reef	\$32,502	\$0	\$32,502	\$0
Public Education, Information, and Outreach	\$20,467	\$5,000	\$25,467	\$25,000
TOTAL	\$357,853	\$200,000	\$557,853	\$375,000

1. Enhanced MRIP Data Collection (\$35,000)

Proposal. Continue to expand the recreational catch and effort data collection program for Rhode Island (under the MRIP sampling umbrella) by providing funding for add-on intercept surveys to increase the overall precision of the overall catch estimates and better enable mode-specific (e.g., shore-based) estimates.

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 can have high variability in part due to sampling levels. These sampling levels are directly correlated to the level of funding allocated for each survey.

The marine recreational catch and effort fishing assessments yield fishery dependent information which, coupled with the fishery independent 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. Better accuracy and precision will lead to a better understanding of fishing activities by mode. This information is paramount if the Division is to pursue

mode splits such as differential regulations for shore-based fishermen versus boat-based fishermen. Mode specific regulations require adequate survey and sampling of the two modes to enable relatively precise estimates of respective catch and effort.

The proposed enhanced data collection initiative will continue to attempt to maintain sampling to prior levels (2002-2005). The \$35,000 investment will leverage an additional \$105,000 in federal (SFR) funds to provide \$120,000 in total programmatic benefits. The \$120,000 will allow the Division to provide three months of full time interviewers time allow the hire of three additional seasonal field interviewers to staff additional samples ordered from NOAA Fisheries. The addition of these three staff members plus the full time coordinator, two full time field interviewers, and three seasonal field interviewers funded via NOAA Fisheries base MRIP grant bring the total number of staff working on the APAIS to nine. The Division has a contract with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to provide staffing support for these employees. The \$35,000 figure was derived from personnel costs incurred in 2020.

2. Boating/Fishing Access I (\$150,000)

Proposal. Major renovations at Westerly Main Street boat ramp.

Rationale. The next fishing access projects to be funded with recreational saltwater license funds will be the ramp located at the Westerly Main Street boat ramp. This boat ramp is heavily used during the summer and fall. The ramp slab has been undermined by natural occurring spring currents which has resulted in significant erosional damage and needs repair. The damage is such that the existing ramp will need to be completely replaced and regraded. The project was delayed by a year. It is currently in the planning phase and is on track to be completed by 2023. The funding provided by the Saltwater Recreational Fishing License and USFWS SFR will begin once the construction has started at the site. Using \$150,000 in licensing to leverage \$450,000 in SFR funds frees up \$600,000 to be used on this project, expediting the public access program as a whole.

3. Boating/Fishing Access II (\$10,000)

Proposal. Continue to support the Division's boating/fishing access site maintenance program.

Rationale. The Division is responsible for maintaining 60 state-owned and operated boating/ fishing access sites used by an estimated 28,000 boats that are less than 24 feet in length. In order to foster compliance and repeat participation in the saltwater recreational license program, it is as important to keep our public access points clean and functional as it is to build new ones. The Division lacks adequate resources to undertake all of the work that's needed to maintain these sites on a regular basis. The allocation of these funds from the license fee account, leveraged with federal funds, supports the Division's ability to properly maintain state-owned boating/fishing access sites throughout Rhode Island. The \$10,000 investment will leverage an additional \$30,000 in

federal (SFR) funds to provide \$40,000 in total programmatic benefits. This amount was estimated based last years costs. The Division will be hiring two Park Rangers to at Camp Cronin to monitor the parking lot and remove trash, they will also remove trash from other select Washington county access point sites. These hires will increase in budget for this category into the foreseeable future.

4. Fish Stock Assessment Support (\$150,000)

Proposal. Support the continuation of finfish stock assessment surveys of recreationally important species in Rhode Island waters as well as other recreational management initiatives and activities. Note this category is now combined with the old Recreational Fisheries Management Support category going forward.

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 important annual finfish fisheries surveys in Rhode Island waters with long standing time series of data. In the past, these programs have been funded by the Division'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 stands to reason that a portion of the recreational fishing license fees should continue to cover the non-federal match requirements of the SFR grant pertaining to these projects. Project reports are submitted annually for these programs to USFWS and are available upon request. The \$150,000 investment will leverage an additional \$450,000 in federal (SFR) funds to provide \$600,000 in total programmatic benefits.

5. Artificial Reef Support (\$0)

Proposal. The Division has successfully deployed a small scale artificial reef adjacent to the state fishing pier at Sabin Point. No new artificial reef projects have been proposed currently hence no budgeted expenditures for FY2021. The Division anticipates more artificial reef work to in the future and will keep the \$32,502 in this budget category to be used as match for future projects.

Rationale. The Division is currently working on a fish habitat enhancement project with support from The Nature Conservancy and the USFWS SFR program. The project is in the early stages of a major investigation of fish habitat quality in upper Narragansett Bay over the next two years. This information will be used to develop plans for habitat improvement opportunities as well as evaluate the most effective methodologies. A variety of habitat enhancement and restoration techniques are being considered, including "reef balls". The reef balls are small low relief concrete domes with various holes to provide shelter for small fish. Now that Sabin Point is complete, the Division will evaluate other locations for deployment, likely the newly built Rocky Point Fishing Pier.

6. Public Education, Information, and Outreach (\$25,000)

Proposal. To continue the annual one-page water resistant regulation abstract and the Rhode Island Recreational Saltwater Fishing Magazine, fund a youth fishing camp conducted by the Rhode Island Saltwater Angler's Association, and purchase new field interviewer uniforms. Additionally, RIDMF staff will be participating in more outreach events to represent the work being done at RIDMF and promote saltwater recreational fishing hence the increase in projected budget in this category.

Rationale. Although compliance with the new license program has generally been good, it is clear that a number of recreational fishermen and spear fishers 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 spear fishers, it makes sense to continue making a modest investment in public outreach, 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.

Each year the Division publishes a one page regulation abstract which contains the current year's recreational fishing rules and regulations. These are printed on glossy water resistant paper and supplied to various locations throughout the state. The abstracts are heavily utilized and raise awareness and foster compliance to the current regulations.

In 2021, the Division published the eighth annual edition of the Rhode Island Recreational Saltwater Fishing Magazine. 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. The guide informs fishermen on the issues associated with the licensing program and the associated benefits. It also provides recreational fishing information as well as other issues of interest to the community, including current regulations, informative articles, and lists of local bait and tackle shops and party/charter boat services. 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 to promote recreational fishing in Rhode Island. The publication has been well-received, and so it makes sense to continue utilizing a small portion of funds from the license account to fund it annually.

Since 2016, the Division has participated in the Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association's (RISSA) youth fishing camp. Prior to 2016, there were no dedicated Saltwater Fishing community based instructional programs in Rhode Island. Each year, RISSA has conducted a successful pilot youth fishing camp for 50 children between the

ages of 7 and 14 at the end of June. The camp doesn't just focus on fishing techniques but additional taught the attendees about fishing regulations, ecology and sustainable practices. Youth programs have been recognized as important to keeping vitality in the recreational fishing industry as well as developing a more informed and responsible fishing populace. (1) This educational program was a pilot program intended to show proof of concept, funding is required to keep it going into the future. The Division provided funding to RISAA in 2017 to keep the program going into future to fill this programmatic gap.

The 2017 camp began to be funded completely by the Division's Aquatic Education program via credits for volunteer hours spent by RISAA member's and USFWS Sportfish Aquatic Education grant. The Division proposes to continue to support and fund the camp into the future. While it is anticipated that volunteer hours will provide the match for the camps federal funds, recreational saltwater license funds will be available to cover any shortfall.

A memorandum of understanding has been established with RISAA to conduct the camp. The day camp will be run by RISAA with RIDEM participation and oversight. The camp will continue to accommodate 50 children between the ages of 7 and 14. The camp will be planned, coordinated, and implemented by a hired camp coordinator. The base location for the camp will be Rocky Point State Park, Warwick, RI. Part of the camp will involve children fishing on boats launched at local marinas for two of the camp days. These two days will require the use of a bus to transport children to and from Rocky Point State Park. Vessel captains will be provided by RISAA. The camp will last for three days include but is not limited to the following activities:

- Classroom setting instruction of basic fish biology and identification, sustainable fishing methods and practices, fishing tackle, safety on and around the water, fishing regulations, and recreational data collection
- Hands on fish capture and identification using beach seines and dip nets
- Hands on knot tying and casting instruction
- Hands on fishing from shore
- Hands on fishing from boats

The Division is hopeful that the camp can take place in 2022. At this point no decision has been made and the progress of the pandemic is being monitored.

The Division is also looking to participate in an initiative called "Vamanos A Pescalar", which is a program that gets inner city youths interested in fishing. It involves an educational component paired with fishing on head boats and from shore.

The proposed outreach budget would spend \$25,000 of Recreational Saltwater Fishing License funds to leverage additional \$75,000 in USFWS SFR funding resulting in \$60,000 used for outreach and education pertaining to the recreational fishing license.

VII. Looking Ahead to FY22

There is cautious optimism that the increased revenue generated in FY16 – FY21 from Saltwater Recreational Licenses will hold steady into the future. Time will tell if the sustained increase seen in FY2021 will continue or was the result of the large increase in outdoor related activities observed during the pandemic. The Division is looking into other programs to enhance recreational fishing opportunities in Rhode Island in anticipation of pre-pandemic license issuances. Be sure to look out for us on social media as we have plans to increase our presence in the form of instructional videos and other educational topics relative to Marine Fisheries.