

Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Implementation Plan for §202 of the Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act (MFA): The MRIP Plan for State Partnerships

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I. Introduction

Section 202 of the MFA provides that, “The Secretary shall establish a partnership with a State [sic] to develop best practices for implementing the State program established under paragraph (2),” which refers to a state program that provides “data that meets the Secretary’s needs” per § 401(g)(2) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA). Section 202 further states that:

- “The Secretary shall develop guidance, in cooperation with the States, that details best practices for administering State programs pursuant to paragraph (2), and provide such guidance to the States.”
- “The Secretary shall submit to the appropriate committees of Congress and publish biennial reports that include: (1) the estimated accuracy of state registry information and the information from each State program that is used to assist in completing surveys or evaluating effects of conservation and management measures; (2) priorities for improving recreational fishing data collection; and (3) an explanation of any use of information collected by such State programs and by the Secretary...”
- “The Secretary may make grants to States to—
(I) improve implementation of State programs consistent with this subsection; and
(II) assist such programs in complying with requirements related to changes in recreational data collection under paragraph (3).” (Note: this reference is to MSA Sec. 402(g)(3), which required NOAA to “establish a program to improve the quality and accuracy of information generated by” the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey, or MRFSS.” The program established by NOAA to address this requirement is MRIP).
- “Any funds awarded through such grants shall be used to support data collection, quality assurance, and outreach to entities submitting such data. The Secretary shall prioritize

such grants based on the ability of the grant to improve the quality and accuracy of such programs.’’

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), through MRIP and the Fisheries Information System (FIS) programs, has established and long maintained partnerships with states and other regional partners in fisheries data collection. This plan for implementation of the provisions of MFA § 202 utilizes these existing programs as the foundation of the required state partnership program and adds new program components as needed to address all MFA requirements. The current state programs are primarily derived from regional FIN programs for the principal fisheries regions: ACCSP for the Atlantic Coast; FIN for the Gulf Coast; RecFIN for the Pacific Coast of California through Washington; WPacFIN for Hawaii and the Territories of Guam, American Samoa, and CNMI. Through ACCSP, FIN, and RecFIN, NMFS provides funding support to states for MRIP recreational survey work as specified in CAs. In addition, NMFS has established partnerships, including funding recreational data collection, via CAs with FIN for Puerto Rico and directly with Hawaii.

In addition, MRIP has established Regional Implementation Teams consisting of all primary partners in each region, to assess partner data collection needs and priorities. The Regional Implementation Teams consist of the FINs for the Atlantic, Gulf, and West Coast regions, and ad hoc teams for the Alaska, Pacific Islands, Caribbean, and Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) regions. The ad hoc teams include all regional partners, including states and territories, regional fisheries management councils, interstate marine fisheries commissions, NMFS OSF and OST, Regions and Fisheries Science Centers. The MRIP Regional Implementation Teams have prepared, and will update periodically as necessary, MRIP Regional Implementation Plans that define regional recreational catch and effort data needs, preferred survey methods, and priorities for data collection improvements.

It is therefore intended that this plan for establishing state partnerships will incorporate and build on the existing CAs and Regional Implementation Plans, in consultation with states, FINs, and MRIP Regional Implementation Teams. The Plan: 1) reinforces and proposes expansion of, as necessary, existing Memoranda of Agreement (MOA) with states and FINs; 2) describes “best practices for implementing the State program” and “guidance ... that details best practices for administering State programs” based on applicable provisions of the existing Final Rule for the National Saltwater Angler Registry and State Exemption Program (NSAR) (for state registries) and MRIP Standards (for surveys and estimation).

To ensure we are able to address the required content of the biennial reports to Congress, the Plan also addresses: 1) the methods NMFS will use to assess the accuracy of state registry data and state survey catch and effort estimates; 2) the priorities for recreational data collection, including both regional priorities as set forth in Regional Implementation Plans and national priorities derived by MRIP annually; and 3) an inventory of the uses to which state registry and survey data are used by NOAA/NMFS and state partners. These plan provisions, set forth in Appendix 3, have been developed in consultation with the states through the MRIP Regional Implementation Teams.

II. Description of existing state partnership programs

A. ACCSP: ACCSP is a comprehensive fisheries statistics program partnership established by Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among the East Coast data collection partners: Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and its 15 state members; New England, Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils; OST, OSF, Greater Atlantic and Southeast Regional Offices, and Northeast and Southeast Fisheries Science Centers; and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The ACCSP [guiding documents](#) include the updated MOU and its Strategic Plan, which is updated approximately every 5 years. ACCSP has also developed comprehensive Atlantic Coast Fisheries Data Collection [Standards](#) that provide “detailed information on standards, policies, reporting requirements, quality control and assurance documentation, and processes necessary for adjustments and modification.” The Standards are intended to be followed as fully as possible by all of the partners actively engaged in fishery-dependent data collection to ensure effective and consistent implementation of data collection and data management models.

NMFS provides annual funding support for ACCSP operations and partner project funding, including state partner protects, via appropriated funds allocated by OST and OSF. In addition, OST and ACCSP have entered into a 5-year CA through which ACCSP administers three MRIP surveys – the Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS); the Headboat At-Sea Sampling Survey; and the For-Hire Survey (FHS) – conducted by the states from Maine through Georgia. In combination with the FHS, ACCSP also conducts the Large Pelagics Telephone Survey Add-on (LPTS Add-on), which collects extra data on for-hire trips by Atlantic HMS Charter/Headboat permit holders from Maine to Virginia. This CA also funds catch card census programs for Atlantic Highly Migratory Species in North Carolina and Maryland. Pursuant to the CA, ACCSP passes funds through to each of the states to conduct the sampling work as specified in the CA, and ACCSP engages in certain data processing, training, and related program administration functions. Annual funding under this CA for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 was \$6.0M, including the \$0.9M increase in FY20 (see section IV below).

B. GulfFIN: Like ACCSP, GulfFIN is a comprehensive fisheries data collection program that is primarily centered on the Gulf of Mexico fisheries, with components that collect data for Florida’s east coast and in the Caribbean. GulfFIN is a partnership among the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC), its five member states, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands; the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council; OST, OSF, Southeast Regional Office (SERO), and Southeast Fisheries Science Center; and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. GulfFIN was established by a 1993 MOU among the GSMFC, the five Gulf States, and NMFS. The purpose, organizational structure and activities of GulfFIN are described [here](#). The Gulf partners have adopted a program design document to include, “detailed information on the program standards and policies, reporting requirements and sampling programs, quality control and assurance documentation, and processes necessary for program adjustments and modification.” The program design states that, “requirements should be followed by all participating agencies as fully as possible to ensure effective implementation of the commercial and recreational data collection and data management systems.” As of December 2019, GulfFIN was in the process of developing a 5-year Strategic Plan.

NMFS provides annual funding support to GulfFIN through OST-budgeted funds administered via a 5-year CA by SERO. MRIP funds allocated for recreational data collection for FY 20 were \$6.829M, which includes the additional \$1.2M increase in FY20 (see section IV below). The annual GulfFIN work plan adopted per the CA specifies that the States of Florida (Atlantic and Gulf coasts), Alabama, and Mississippi will conduct sampling under the MRIP APAIS and FHS surveys, and Louisiana under the LA Creel state survey. Texas funds and administers its own programs and does not participate in MRIP, nor does it receive FIN funds for its recreational surveys. The total GulfFIN funding of \$6.829M includes \$300K in funds provided to Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi beginning in FY20 for support for state-administered specialized surveys for red snapper and other reef fish (Florida).

C. RecFIN: Pacific RecFIN was established by the West Coast region data collection partners in 1992 to provide recreational catch and effort statistics that met the specific needs of the region. The program replaced the OST-funded MRFSS for California, Oregon, and Washington with a combined OST and state-funded suite of state surveys that include: the California Recreational Fisheries Survey (CRFS), the California Ocean Salmon Project, the Oregon Ocean Recreational Boat Survey (ORBS), the Oregon Shore and Estuarine Boat Survey, the Washington Ocean Sampling Program (OSP), and the Washington Puget Sound Recreational Fishery Estimation Procedure.

RecFIN is designed to integrate state and Federal marine recreational sampling efforts into a single database to provide biological and demographic data for Pacific coast fishery scientists, fishery managers, and recreational fishing stakeholders. The primary partners are the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission and its member States of California, Oregon, and Washington, the Pacific Fishery Management Council; OST, West Coast Regional Office, Southwest Fisheries Science Center, and the Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC). Currently, the program does not operate under a comprehensive MOU, and there is not a program-wide program design document. However, RecFIN maintains detailed documentation of the survey and estimation methods for each of the included state surveys. As of December, 2019, RecFIN and California were developing a data-sharing MOA.

MRIP funds are provided to RecFIN by OST through the NWFSC and directly by the NWFSC. A CA with the center provides for allocating the funds to the three states to carry out specified components of CRFS, ORBS, and OSP. Annual funding from MRIP to the three states is \$2.1M (including the \$0.9M increase in FY20, see section IV below), and an additional \$1.0M is allocated from the NWFSC.

The Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission also coordinates additional state-Federal data collection programs in the region, including the PacFIN and the Alaska Fishery Information Network (AKFIN), both of which collect commercial fishery data. Recreational data collection in Alaska is conducted by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and is not currently incorporated into, or funded by, AKFIN or RecFIN.

D. WPacFIN: WPacFIN is a data collection and data management agreement among the NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) and the natural resource agencies of Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, and CNMI. For non-commercial fisheries, the territorial

partners conduct roving creel surveys to produce estimates of effort and catch, and the PIFSC provides technical support and data management services to the partnership.

WPacFIN, as represented by Director of PIFSC, is a member of the Fishery Data Collection and Research Committee (FDCRC) of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (WPRFMC) that serves as the coordinating body for fishery data collection in the region. This committee is comprised of the heads of the state and territorial natural resource agencies, WPRFMC, PIFSC, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Wildlife, and Sportfish Restoration Program. The FDCRC identifies the priorities for fishery data collection. The MRIP Pacific Islands Regional Implementation Plan was reviewed and approved by the FDCRC for submission to NMFS. The FDCRC reviews the data collection funding support for the existing data collection programs and identifies other funding sources to support pilot projects to improve data collection. Currently, NMFS does not contribute direct funding support to the WPacFIN non-commercial surveys. Hawaii's non-commercial surveys are funded separately from WPacFIN, as described below.

E. Hawaii: In the past, Hawaii's Department of Land and Natural Resources, Division of Aquatic Resources (HDAR) has conducted a modified version of APAIS pursuant to CAs with OST. The intercept survey, referred to as the Hawaii Marine Recreational Fisheries Survey collects fishing catch data for shore and private boat modes of fishing in the state. MRIP funds are allocated by OST to HDAR to perform work as specified in the CA. FY20 funding under this CA is \$285,000.

Data collection partners in Hawaii are considering proposing changes to survey designs and conduct following a 2019 MRIP-sponsored workshop. This may result in changes to the work proposed and funded to be conducted via CA with HDAR.

F. Puerto Rico: Recreational sampling in Puerto Rico has been suspended due to the disruption to fishing activity and fishing sites resulting from Hurricane Maria. Prior to the suspension, funds had been provided to the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources to conduct intercept sampling via CA through the GulfFIN process. In 2020, the MRIP Caribbean Regional Implementation Team began planning for resumption of data collection in Puerto Rico and initiation of a new program for the U.S. Virgin Islands.

III. National Saltwater Angler and State Registry Program (NSAR) Data Sharing Agreements

Section 401(g)(1) of the MSA establishes a requirement for individuals who engage in recreational fishing in the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), or for anadromous species in any waters (limited to tidal waters in 50 CFR, subpart P), or for Continental Shelf fishery resources beyond the EEZ, to register with the Dept. of Commerce. In addition, §401(g)(2) provides that the Secretary shall exempt from that registration requirement those anglers and charter vessels that are licensed or registered by states, "if the Secretary determines that information from the State program is suitable for the Secretary's use or is used to assist in completing marine recreational fisheries statistical surveys, or evaluating the effects of proposed conservation and management measures for marine recreational fisheries."

In 2008, NMFS adopted the [final rule](#), 50 CFR 600, subpart P, for NSAR, the program established under MRIP to administer the provisions of §§ 401(g)(1) & (2). The rule has been amended once, in 2012. Subpart P establishes the detailed requirements and procedures for anglers and for hire fishing vessels to register with NMFS. It also establishes the provisions for designating states as Exempted States pursuant to MSA §401(g)(2). Under subpart P, states may be designated as Exempted States in two ways: 1) states agree to provide NMFS at least annually with a list of state-licensed or registered anglers and for hire vessels that meet specified requirements (see 50 CFR 600.1416); and 2) states that participate in a qualifying regional survey of recreational fishing catch and effort agree to provide specified catch and effort data to NMFS, meeting [Preliminary National Standards for Recreational Survey Coverage and Basic Data Elements](#) (see 50 CFR 600.1417). To complete the Exempted State designation process, the appropriate state or territorial government agency enters into an MOA with NMFS. The MOA specifies the data the state or territory will provide, the schedule and format for its delivery, and any agreed-upon schedule of improvements.

As of December, 2020, NMFS has established new comprehensive national Survey and Data Standards (Appendix IV) for MRIP and associated partner surveys. These new recreational fishing survey and data standards are intended to guide the design, improvement, and quality of information produced by our national network of recreational fisheries data collection programs, and will replace the Preliminary National Standards for Recreational Survey Coverage and Basic Data Elements as they are phased in over the next 2 years. The standards will promote data quality, consistency, and comparability across the recreational fishing surveys administered and funded through the MRIP, thereby facilitating the shared use of the statistics these surveys produce.

The standards, developed with input from our partners, including state agencies, interstate marine fisheries commissions, and regional fishery management councils, cover seven key focus areas: 1) Survey concepts and justification; 2) Survey protocols, sampling plans, and data collection and estimation designs; 3) Data processing, editing, and quality control procedures; 4) Reporting, review, and certification procedures; 5) Transition planning; 6) Process improvement planning; and 7) Access and information management.

The components of the Data Standards that are applicable to state surveys include Sections: 1 (all); 2 (all); 3 (all); 4 (if NMFS-funded); 5.1 (if NMFS-funded); 5.2 (all); 5.3 (if NMFS-funded); 7.2.2 (all); 7.2.3.1; 7.5 (all; if NMFS-funded).

The implementation of these standards will be a phased approach driven by federal management needs and the capabilities of our partners. During this period, MRIP will work with the FINs and state partners to assess the status of state surveys relative to the new standards, and to prepare plans that prioritize and phase in necessary improvements. To assist the states and other data users in adapting to the new standards, NMFS will publish a data user manual, hold a data user workshop, and preview changes to its statistical [Query Tool](#).

As of November, 2020, each Atlantic and Gulf Coast state from Florida to Texas had entered into an MOA with NMFS and agreed to provide at least annual updates of the lists of names,

addresses, telephone numbers, dates of birth, and, for for-hire vessels, and vessel identification numbers, of its licensed or registered anglers and for hire vessels. In turn, NMFS had designated those states as Exempted States.

Also, the West Coast states of California, Oregon, Washington, and Alaska, and the western Pacific Island Territories of Guam, American Samoa, and CNMI had entered into MOAs agreeing to annually provide catch and effort data to NMFS under their qualifying regional surveys.

As of December, 2019, only Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands were not designated as Exempted States. In each of those three jurisdictions, the state/territorial natural resources management agency was actively pursuing a saltwater fishing license, or a qualifying regional survey design to replace or supplement current data collection, or both.

The requirements stated in MFA section 202 include the provision that, “The Secretary shall submit to the appropriate committees of Congress and publish biennial reports that include: (1) the estimated accuracy of state registry information and the information from each State program that is used to assist in completing surveys or evaluating effects of conservation and management measures... .” Therefore, the required report to Congress must address the accuracy of state data provided pursuant to the NSAR MOAs. NMFS will conduct this evaluation using the following criteria:

- For states designated as Exempted States based on submission of state license or registry data per 50 CFR 600.1415:
 - Data quality for registry data can be expressed in two ways: as completeness of the registry, or as the degree to which the database is error-free and free of non-angler entries.
 - With respect to completeness, the following will be evaluated:
 - Timeliness of submission: Exempted States are required to submit their registry updates at least annually in January. In addition, those states in which the MRIP FES is conducted (Maine through Mississippi) have been asked to submit updated current license holder lists electronically each month to assure the survey performs as designed.
 - State license exceptions: the number and extent of exceptions to license or registration requirements for certain anglers.
 - Non-compliant anglers: Non-compliance with state licensing and registration requirements is a major source of incompleteness of the state registries. Improving compliance through more effective education and enforcement is an important measure necessary to significantly improve the completeness of state registries. For FES states (Maine through Mississippi), the percent of persons in the non-matched frame (those who cannot be matched to a license) who reported fishing will be reported as an indicator of the level of non-compliance.
 - With respect to the reduction of error rates and non-angler entries in the state databases, the following measures will be used:

- The degree to which there is: inclusion of saltwater privileges in state combination licenses; general fishing licenses that do not identify saltwater anglers via a saltwater stamp, or endorsement for general fishing license holders who wish to fish in saltwater.
 - Angler or Registry address errors in the state-submitted list, as measured by the rate at which NSAR addresses match to the USPS address frame.
- For states designated as Exempted States based on submission of catch and effort data from a qualifying regional survey per 50 CFR 600.1416, the following will be evaluated:
 - Whether all components of state-conducted surveys have been certified consistent with NMFS [Policy Directive 04-114](#).
 - Whether state surveys meet the applicable provisions of the MRIP Recreational Fishing Survey and Data Standards. (NOTE: Because these standards were not established until late 2020, they will not be used in evaluations of state programs to be reported to Congress until the second report at the end of 2022.)
 - Whether state surveys address priority needs as reflected in MRIP Regional Implementation Plans (see below).
 - Whether the surveys include measures to estimate precision of estimates and how such estimates of precision compare to established regional targets, if any.
 - Whether the state has comprehensive survey design and estimation documentation and Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC) measures in place and available to data users.

IV. MRIP Regional Implementation Plans

In 2013, the MRIP Executive Steering Committee (ESC) conducted a workshop to plan for transitioning from a program primarily concerned with developing new survey designs to one focused on implementing the improved program nationally. The workshop participants concluded that MRIP should operate as a hybrid program, with overall program management, budgeting, and research and development work coordinated centrally through OST, and survey implementation and operations managed regionally, designed to meet individual regions' needs and priorities. The workshop resulted in establishment of seven MRIP [Regional Implementation Teams](#): Atlantic, Caribbean, Gulf, Atlantic HMS, Pacific, Alaska, and Pacific Islands. The established FINs were identified to serve as the teams for the Atlantic, Gulf and Pacific regions. Ad hoc teams were established for the remaining regions.

Subsequent to the workshop, the MRIP Operations Team (OT) and ESC developed and adopted the *MRIP Implementation Funding Process* (Appendix I). The Funding Process document incorporated national guidelines for the prioritization of NMFS' investments in implementation of new survey methods as developed at the workshop: "MRIP has established National guidelines for the prioritization of NMFS' investments in implementation of new survey methods. Specifically, funding priority will be based upon the extent to which surveys, alone or in combination with other surveys being implemented in a region:

- Use MRIP-certified survey designs or methodologies;
- Achieve MRIP standards for survey coverage and basic data elements, as well as any future standards adopted by the program

(http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/Assets/recreational/pdf/National_Standards_for_Survey_Coverage_and_Data_Elements.pdf);

- Provide recreational (or non-commercial) catch estimates for fisheries managed under MSA – including Atlantic HMS – or jointly by the states and NMFS that are sufficient to
 - Contribute to reliable stock assessments;
 - Support development of acceptable biological catch recommendations, annual catch limits (ACL), and accountability measures that meet MSA requirements; and
 - Support development of recreational regulations that minimize triggering of accountability measures.
 - Allow reasonably precise tracking of recreational catch against ACLs.”

The document further provides that each Regional Implementation Team is responsible for identifying regional needs and developing MRIP [Regional Implementation Plans](#) to implement improved data collection designs that address both regional and national needs. Specifically, the plans are to include:

- Descriptions of regional needs for recreational fishing statistics, including needs for coverage, resolution, precision, and timeliness of survey estimates;
- A baseline assessment of current data collection programs, including the extent to which current programs satisfy needs and identification of data collection gaps;
- Recommendations and justification for a sequential, prioritized approach for implementing improved methods that address national and regional needs that are currently unmet;
- A proposed process for combining statistics derived from multiple sources¹; and
- Estimated costs, overall and for individual survey components.

In summary, NMFS expects that future investment in state and other partner recreational catch and effort data collection and estimation programs will be based on needs and priorities identified through the MRIP regional implementation planning process.

As of December 2020, MRIP Regional Implementation Plans have been developed and approved for each region except Alaska, for which a plan is in development by the regional partners. In addition, MRIP has adopted the following MRIP Regional Implementation Plan update schedule:

1. Full updates:
 - a. To consist of a complete, objective re-visitation of the region’s data needs, preferred survey methods, and priorities for expansion and improvement, informed by the updated goals and objectives of the MRIP Strategic Plan;
 - b. At least every fifth year, one year following updates to the MRIP Strategic Plan; or

¹ For example, regions may implement data collections that are specific to a sector or species. Implementation plans should describe how information generated from these sources will be integrated with more generalized data collections to either supplement or replace alternative estimates.

- c. If and when the Regional Implementation Team determines that there has been a significant change in priorities.
 2. “Addendums” to address new or revised national priorities or opportunities: scheduled as requested by MRIP’s ESC.
 - a. These updates would not modify existing plan content, but simply add or revise projects, surveys in use, or priorities based on the revised national priorities and opportunities.
 - b. In general, there should be a payoff to the Regional Implementation Team to justify the effort to prepare the addendum.
 3. Abbreviated or partial updates to address revised Regional Implementation Team preferences for data collection methods, priorities, new or revised funding, etc.
 - a. These updates would be primarily self-generated by the Regional Implementation Teams to address significant changes in a part of the regional program.
 - i. For example, if a Regional Implementation Plan had identified a sample based survey as the standard/preferred design for for-hire mode, but the Regional Implementation Team decided to change over to a mandatory logbook as its preferred design, but not to change other priorities or methods, a partial update would be required.

Several of the initial MRIP Regional Implementation Plans identified expansion of current state sampling effort as a priority to: 1) restore sampling to a level conducted previously that has been cut back due to long term level funding of the state program; 2) a desire to increase survey coverage to include areas, fisheries, or time periods not sufficiently covered at present; or 3) to increase sample size to improve precision or other properties of the catch estimates. To assist in determining how to prioritize such needs, MRIP developed the *Methodology for ranking partner proposals for increasing sample size or scope of current regional survey(s)* (Appendix II).

In FY20, additional funding became available for MRIP-supported grants to states as a result of language in the Senate Appropriations and Conference reports as follows:

- **Senate:** “The Committee provides no less than \$2,500,000, within Fisheries Data Collection, Surveys and Assessments, to support collaborative programs focused on improving recreational fishery data collection, as articulated in sections 201 and 202 of Public Law 115-405. This funding should focus on assisting states to establish, test, and implement more reliable recreational fishery data collection tools, such as smartphone applications or text messaging supplements.”
- **Conference:** Modern Fish Act. —The agreement adopts Senate language on data collection for recreational fisheries and provides **no less than \$3,000,000** for these purposes.

Communications received by NMFS indicated that the congressional intent for use of the funds was driven by constituent interest in implementing provisions of the MFA, and in advancing development and utilization of electronic and app-based reporting options for private anglers. Based on that understanding of congressional intent for distribution of the \$3M in additional funds, NMFS developed and executed the following plan in FY20:

PLAN FOR DISTRIBUTION OF RECREATIONAL DATA COLLECTION FUNDING

- The approach to planning for distribution of the \$3M incorporates the following:
 - Our strategy for distribution of funds is based on implementation of the plan for MFA section 202, State Partnerships. OST completed a plan in FY20 to address this requirement of the MFA, in consultation with the MRIP Regional Implementation Council, to develop and seek state input on the plan for addressing this provision of MFA.
 - Consistent with the developing state partnership plan, the State Partnerships funding support will be focused on identified state priorities in the MRIP Regional Implementation Plans.

- Accordingly, NMFS has developed a \$3M Modern Fish Act investment plan that is responsive to state priorities identified in MRIP Regional Implementation Plans, and that addresses Senate priorities including support for state angler ER initiatives. Funds will be allocated to states through direct cooperative agreements with the regional FINs (Pacific RecFIN, GulfFIN, and ACCSP). Increasing sample sizes in ongoing surveys to improve the precision of catch estimates for ACL-managed fisheries was identified as a high priority in each of the regional plans. In addition, support for specialized state surveys that provide options for electronic reporting by private anglers was a high priority in the Gulf plan. Funds to be allocated regionally as follows:
 - Atlantic: \$0.9M to improve precision of estimates in targeted fisheries – *supports highest priority in regional plan*
 - Gulf of Mexico: \$1.2M to restore base APAIS sample sizes and support state specialized survey programs – *supports highest priorities in regional plan*
 - \$0.9M to restore base APAIS and supplement LA Creel
 - \$0.3M to support specialized state survey programs that provide angler ER options (GRFS, Snapper Check, Tails 'n Scales) in FL, AL, MS
 - Pacific: \$0.9M to restore base sample sizes for state programs – *supports highest priority in regional plan*

V. Strategic Plan

The MRIP [Strategic Plan](#), adopted in 2017, incorporated and built on the Regional Implementation Plan process for identifying regional needs and priorities. Strategic Plan Goal 5, Operate Collaboratively, states that it is MRIP’s goal to, “Maintain effective collaborations with state, interstate, regional, and national partners for cost effective and responsive recreational data collection and catch estimation.” Under Goal 5, several strategies and tactics address the MRIP Regional Planning process, and expansion of collaborative work with states:

Goal 5 – Operate Collaboratively

Strategy – *Maintain a team-oriented program management structure that includes partners and key stakeholders in deliberations on program design, management, and implementation.*

<p>Tactics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Conduct periodic reviews to ensure that partners are adequately represented and actively participating on the various MRIP Teams. ➤ Assess partners’ sense of ownership in MRIP (i.e., do partners consider themselves partners?). ➤ Periodically review management structure to address evolving program functions and priorities. ➤ Evaluate options to enhance recreational fisheries stakeholders’ participation in MRIP advisory structure. ➤ Expand MRIP collaborations, including adding additional experts in survey design and communications to MRIP consultant team. ➤ Revise program management and team structure periodically to assure full partner engagement, based on results of Strategy 5.1 reviews and provisions of Regional Implementation Plans.
<p>Strategy – <i>Create and maintain an inventory of, and support meeting, partner data needs and priorities by enabling regional identification of data needs, preferred methods, and priorities.</i></p>
<p>Tactics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Develop Regional Implementation Plans that include R&D priorities for developing and certifying new methods that address partner needs. ➤ Attend and actively participate in FINs and FIN partner meetings when data needs are being discussed. ➤ In regions that do not have a FIN, create and maintain ad hoc regional implementation teams. ➤ Annually specify national priority-setting criteria for providing support for needs identified in the Regional Implementation Plans.
<p>Strategy – <i>Assess feasibility and costs/benefits of expanding regional implementation of data collection and data management: field work by states and off-site telephone/mail/internet survey work, survey management, frame maintenance, estimation, and QA/QC done by Regional Implementation Teams (e.g., FINs and ad-hoc teams like the Western Pacific Fishery Data Collection and Research Committee).</i></p>
<p>Tactics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Evaluate and, as appropriate, support and enable delegating responsibility of survey operations to regions, based on (yet to be established) standards to maintain data consistency and comparability. ➤ Conduct evaluation of costs/benefits of centralized vs. regionalized catch and effort estimation.

VI. Opportunities to Improve State-Federal Partnership State Data Collection Programs

In consultation with the MRIP Regional Implementation Teams through the [MRIP Regional Implementation Council](#), NMFS identified the following measures that provide potential opportunities to improve the state-Federal partnerships for recreational catch and effort data collection, building on the current FIN and state CAs, and the Regional Implementation Plan process in which the states and NMFS play pivotal roles. Collectively, these measures constitute the best practices for implementing and administering state programs.

A. State-Federal Program Administration: Measures to improve the performance of the state-Federal recreational data collection partnerships under the current FIN and CA programs in place may include the following:

- Ensure that FINs have current Strategic Plans or equivalent policy-level measures in place that reflect priorities of MRIP Regional Implementation Plans.
- Ensure that FIN governing documents make clear the roles of each partner in data collection, estimation, information management, quality assurance and quality control, and data confidentiality.
- Streamline annual funding distribution to FINs under 5-year CAs by moving funds during the first quarter of each Federal fiscal year, as possible.

- Compile and publish an inventory of survey improvement needs, including estimated cost, from MRIP Regional Implementation Plans.
- Establish formal MOA to establish cooperative statistics programs among all partners in non-FIN regions (or add states and territories to current FINs, e.g. add Hawaii to RecFIN).
- Cooperatively develop national standards and guidelines on recreational data confidentiality.
- Improving state-Federal collaboration on investigating differences among estimates from overlapping programs.

B. State-Conducted Catch and Effort Surveys: Measures to improve the quality of data provided by state survey contributions may include the following, as appropriate to the priorities of the states and the regional partnership as expressed in the MRIP Regional implementation Plan:

- Ensure that all components of state-conducted surveys have been certified consistent with NMFS [Policy Directive 04-114](#).
- Ensure that state surveys address priority needs as reflected in MRIP Regional Implementation Plans.
- Establish regional goals for estimate precision and coverage and expand data collection to address them.
- Where MRIP general surveys do not meet more rigorous or timely needs for catch estimates, evaluate implementation of certified specialized survey designs to supplement the general survey.
- Implement the provisions of the MRIP Data Standard that are applicable to state programs.
- Comprehensive Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC) measures.

C. State Saltwater Angler Registries: Data quality for registry data can be expressed in two ways: as completeness of the registry, or as the degree to which the database is error-free and free of non-angler entries.

- With respect to completeness, the following can be undertaken to improve the state registry data:
 - Timeliness of submission: Exempted states are required to submit their registry updates at least annually in January. In addition, those states in which the MRIP FES is conducted (Maine through Mississippi) have been asked to submit updated current license holder lists electronically each month to assure the survey performs as designed. Most states have met this request; some have not.
 - State license exceptions: Many states provide exceptions to license or registration requirements for certain anglers. The fewer such exceptions, the more complete the database.
 - Non-compliant anglers and for-hire vessel operators: Non-compliance with state licensing and registration requirements is a major source of incompleteness of the state registries. Improving compliance through more effective education and

enforcement is an important measure necessary to significantly improve the completeness of state registries.

- With respect to the reduction of error rates and non-angler entries in the state databases, the following measures would be helpful:
 - Reduce or eliminate inclusion of saltwater privileges in state combination licenses. Also, eliminate general fishing licenses or require a saltwater stamp or endorsement for general fishing license holders who wish to fish in salt water. These measures will reduce the large number of persons who purchase combination licenses or general fishing licenses to cover desired privileges, but do not fish in saltwater.
 - Add QA/QC measures states can do to reduce error rates in registry databases.

Addendum I

MRIP Implementation Funding Process

To address MRIP's focus on implementation, the ESC charged the MRIP OT with the "development of recommendations for NMFS/MRIP to make additional investments in survey implementation and operations" of recreational survey methods. The goals of this process are to: 1) support implementation of certified methods that satisfy the *minimum* needs for management and science, and result in regional survey programs that achieve at least the *minimum* MRIP standards for coverage, resolution, and data elements, and 2) establish a consistent, priority-based foundation for investment of available funds for data collections that exceed minimum needs.

Implementation funds will be allotted from "new" MRIP funding, as current funding allocations (e.g., FIN funding) will likely remain level. Additionally, funding will not be used to replace existing partner funds for recreational fisheries data collection.

National Guidelines

MRIP has established national guidelines for the prioritization of NMFS' investments in implementation of new survey methods. Specifically, funding priority will be based upon the extent to which surveys, alone or in combination with other surveys, are being implemented in a region:

- Use MRIP-certified² survey designs or methodologies;
- Achieve MRIP standards for survey coverage and basic data elements, as well as any future standards adopted by the program (http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/Assets/recreational/pdf/National_Standards_for_Survey_Coverage_and_Data_Elements.pdf);
- Provide recreational (or non-commercial) catch estimates for fisheries managed under MSRA – including Atlantic HMS – or jointly by the states and NMFS that are sufficient to:

² MRIP certification is granted after the proposed method has undergone MRIP-led internal and external peer review and has been determined to be a statistically sound and credible method for estimating catch and effort data.

- Contribute to reliable stock assessments;
- Support development of acceptable biological catch recommendations, ACLs, and accountability measures that meet MSRA requirements;
- Support development of recreational regulations that minimize triggering of accountability measures; and
- Allow reasonably precise tracking of recreational catch against ACLs.

Regional Planning

Each Regional Implementation Team³ is responsible for identifying regional needs and developing a plan to implement improved data collection designs that address both regional and national needs. Regional implementation plans, which will be reviewed and approved by the OT and ESC, will provide estimated implementation costs, and will reflect consensus among partners within a region with respect to regional needs and implementation priorities.

Regional implementation plans will include:

- Descriptions of regional needs for recreational fishing statistics, including needs for coverage, resolution, precision and timeliness of survey estimates;
- A baseline assessment of current data collection programs, including the extent to which current programs satisfy needs and identification of data collection gaps;
- Recommendations and justification for a sequential, prioritized approach for implementing improved methods that address national and regional needs that are currently unmet;
- A proposed process for combining statistics derived from multiple sources⁴; and
- Estimated costs, overall and for individual survey components.

Each year, NMFS OST will review Regional Implementation Plans and establish agency funding priorities across regional programs. OST will develop metrics, based on the above national guidelines and subject to ESC review and approval, for assessing the Regional Implementation Plans and setting OST priorities. To the extent possible, funding for improved survey methods will be permanent, and funded survey components will not be subjected to prioritization and evaluation in subsequent years. Evaluation and prioritization in subsequent years will be limited to unfunded data collections described in the implementation plans. Exceptions will be made in the event of reduced and/or insufficient funding to cover the costs of approved data collections and/or changes to regional priorities, which will be reassessed at a minimum of every 5 years, coincidental to NMFS' science program review cycle.⁵ Funding may also be reallocated, if it is determined by the ESC or OST that expenditures are inconsistent with the approaches described in the Regional Implementation Plans.

³ The MRIP ESC determined that regional FINs and their equivalents will serve as the MRIP Regional Implementation Teams (www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/Assets/recreational/pdf/2013-2014%20Implementation%20Plan%20Update.pdf)

⁴ For example, regions may implement data collections that are specific to a sector or species. Implementation plans should describe how information generated from these sources will be integrated with more generalized data collections to either supplement or replace alternative estimates.

⁵ www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/science-program-review/index

Program Reporting

Regional implementation Teams are expected to submit annual reports describing progress in executing Regional Implementation Plans. Annual reports will describe MRIP data collection activities, document expenditures, and assess the extent to which regional goals and needs for recreational fisheries statistics have been satisfied. For regional partnerships currently funded through a NMFS grant (e.g., ACCSP, GulfFIN, Pacific RecFIN), MRIP program updates can be incorporated into existing reporting requirements (e.g., annual grant reports).

Addendum II

Methodology for ranking partner proposals for increasing sample size or scope of current regional survey(s):

- Scope of applicable projects:
 - Expansions of existing surveys to assess partner needs for general survey:
 - Sampling levels (i.e., to increase the number of samples broadly to improve precision of estimates generally, or for a selected component of the fishery, such as a rare event species group or the offshore fisheries); and/or
 - Coverage (i.e., adding sampling to include catch of invertebrates, sampling in Waves not currently sampled, and expanding geographic coverage to include tidal rivers upstream of current sampling).
 - New surveys that replace components of current general surveys, but only to the extent that sampling levels/coverage exceeds the current survey.
- Initial screening questions (must answer yes to all for a proposal to be eligible to be ranked and considered for funding):
 - Does the project or survey expansion meet the objectives of the Regional Implementation Plan as determined by the applicable Regional Implementation Team?
 - Is the survey proposed for expansion MRIP certified? If not, is there a plan in progress and on track to achieve certification?
 - Does the requested increase fully describe the current sampling baseline, and the estimated cost of the proposed enhancement?
 - Does the request include specific measures of improvement to be achieved?
 - Project narratives should discuss the potential for improvements promised by a proposed project to be offset by reductions in data quality elsewhere. (For example, will the benefits of efforts to increase the timeliness of estimates by going to monthly waves be offset by reductions in precision due to lower sample size per estimate?)
- Criteria for ranking proposals:
 - Determine whether, and if so to what extent, the proposed sampling level relates to specific survey objectives (High (H)/Medium (M)/Low (L)).

- Quantify the increment of improvement the proposed expansion would achieve for one or more of the following (scoring is additive) with respect to recreationally significant managed species or species groups:
 - If the proposal is to increase sample size to improve overall survey precision, then include a quantitative assessment of the expected improvement in Percent Standard Error (PSE) or other measure of precision (H = achieving annual PSE of 30 percent for targeted managed species; M = achieving annual PSE of 50 percent for targeted managed species; L = reduction of lesser magnitude).
 - If the proposal is to extend the survey's coverage in time or space, then estimate the proportion of catch that will be added to the overall estimate (>15 percent = H; 5-15 percent = M; <5 percent = L) derived from the expanded survey, as compared to the current condition.
 - If the proposal is to add targeted sampling to improve precision of a species or species group, then include an assessment of the expected improvement in the PSE or other measure of precision. (H = achieving annual PSE of 30 percent for targeted species; M = achieving annual PSE of 50 percent for targeted species; L = reduction of lesser magnitude)
- Determine whether a proposed expansion will address specific findings of a fisheries stock assessment or assessments that have determined that the properties of current estimates fail to fully meet assessment requirements. If this criterion is part of the project justification, the proposal must include a specific characterization of the scientific uncertainty it will address and the likelihood of success in doing so, including addressing the questions:
 - Will proposed expansion fully or partially resolve the deficiency? (Fully = H; Partially = M; Not = L)
 - Will it address deficiencies for a single or multiple species? (Multiple = H; Single = M; None = L)
- Determine whether a proposed expansion will result in a quantifiable reduction in management uncertainty associated with a fishery's ACL reduction to an Annual Catch Target or "buffer."
 - Proportionate reduction in the size of the buffer. Include current baseline, estimated reduction in size of buffer, and basis for the estimated reduction (H/M/L).
 - Number of recreationally-significant managed fisheries for which management uncertainty is reduced (fisheries may be single species or species groups, when managed as such) (H/M/L).
- Importance of the fishery(ies) for which the targeted specified improvements will be achieved, as measured by:
 - The economic importance of the targeted fishery(ies) to the region (H/M/L based on how targeted fisheries compare to others in the region), using an

initial proxy⁶ for economic importance (see footnote) for the targeted fisheries and seasons⁷:

- Estimates of number of directed fishing trips for targeted species (H = 5 percent or greater of total trips in project period/region; M = 3-5 percent of trips; L = less than 3 percent of trips).
- The vulnerability of the targeted fishery(ies) to overfishing (H/M/L based on the status of the targeted stock(s): (H = exceeding overfished or overfishing threshold; M = exceeding overfished or overfishing target; L = not exceeding overfished or overfishing indicators).
- The contribution of the recreational fishery to the stock status using percent recreational and commercial mortality (H = >50 percent; M = 30-50 percent; L = <30 percent).
- The extent to which the expansion would disrupt ongoing data collection efforts, i.e., the ease of implementation. (H = proposals that would require minimal effort to implement, e.g., sample size increases within framework of existing survey; M = proposals that would require moderate effort, e.g., proposed work might be new but would be closely integrated within framework of existing surveys – minimizing transition and calibration efforts; L = proposals that would require extensive effort to implement, e.g., separate surveys intended to replace or be completely independent of existing survey framework – requiring considerable transition and calibration efforts).
- Cost effectiveness, measured as score from above divided by total cost.

Addendum III

State Program Information Required for Report to Congress

(1) Estimated accuracy of state registry information and the information from each state program that is used to assist in completing surveys or evaluating effects of conservation and management measures;

(a) Registry data

- Error rates for names and addresses in state registry databases;
- The presence of one or more major exceptions to state saltwater licensing requirements;

⁶ For future development: work with economists to develop a direct indicator of economic benefit, e.g., level of expenditures, employment, or other available economic indicators associated with targeted fisheries.

⁷ This comparison could be based on current directed effort, or historic directed effort patterns, if it has been reduced in recent years due to management restrictions implemented to address overfishing. For seasonally restricted fisheries, the comparison could also focus on directed effort proportions during that seasonal period, if the proposed project will only run during the season.

- The timeliness of state license database submission to NMFS for annual and monthly (where relevant) submission; and
- License non-compliance rates as measured by the proxy: proportion of persons who report fishing to the FES who are not matched in the state license database.

(b) Survey data

- Conduct of non-certified surveys; and
- Degree to which MRIP standards are met. Including standards for coverage and data gaps.

(2) Priorities for improving recreational fishing data collection;

- This will be derived by compiling the priorities from MRIP Regional Implementation Plans as of the beginning of FY21.

(3) Explanation of any use of information collected by such state programs and by the Secretary

- This information will be derived from the MRIP Communications and Education Team's ongoing customer satisfaction survey, results of which are pending as of Dec. 2019.