

Marine Recreational Information Program Initiative

FY 2007 Progress Report

Submitted by the Executive Steering Committee
September 2007

Executive Summary

Surveys on saltwater anglers' catch and effort give managers vital information on recreational fishing's impact on fisheries and values to our society. After nearly a year of getting the right pieces and organizational structures in place, the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) initiative got into full swing in 2007. The best minds from state and federal government and the fishing community have been assembled to develop a new program that will serve as the most trusted source of saltwater recreational fishing data.

Scientific Guidance and Congressional Mandate

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

National Research Council (April 2006)

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

Reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act (January 2007)

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

Major Activities

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

1. Got the right people on the bus. Understanding the importance of working collaboratively with partners and constituents, the Executive Steering Committee appointed two prominent figures in marine fisheries management (Pres Pate and Gordon Colvin) to MRIP Initiative leadership positions. This "people first" philosophy carried over to the creation of the work groups and teams. Respected members from the scientific, management, and fishing communities representing coastal fisheries from Alaska to Florida were invited to lend their expertise to the initiative by participating on the work groups and teams.

2. Prepared a game plan. Working in consultation with representatives from the states, councils, commissions, and recreational fishing community, we created a Development Plan for the MRIP Initiative. The plan outlines the organizational structure and decision-making process that is inclusive and transparent.

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

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

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

Next Steps

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

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

MRIP Initiative Work Groups and Charges

Analysis

Test assumptions, determine appropriate methodological changes to reduce bias in the estimates, and assess sample sizes and survey approaches needed to provide the levels of resolution required by managers and scientists.

Data Management and Standards

Develop a common set of minimum data elements, set national and regional standards for coding systems, and improve coordination between federal, state, and regional survey programs.

Design

Develop and test new data collection methodologies that will be incorporated into new surveys that are statistically robust, adaptive to changing fisheries management needs, and responsive to constituent concerns.

For-Hire

Enhance the accuracy, timeliness, and accountability of data and statistics obtained from the for-hire sector.

Highly Migratory Species

Examine opportunities to expand data collections programs targeting HMS anglers.

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

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

September

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

October

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

November

Coastal Conservation Association Media Summit
NOAA Fisheries Leadership Council Meeting

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

Conclusion

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

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

MRIP Initiative Timeline

Summer 2005

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

April 2006

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

September 2006

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

October 2006

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

November 2006

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

January 2007

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

February 2007

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

March 2007

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

April 2007

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

July 2007

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

August 2007

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

September 2007

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