



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

**Fish and Wildlife Service
National Marine Fisheries Service**

For release December 12, 1995

Janet Tennyson, FWS 202-208-5634
Scott Smullen, NMFS 301-713-2370

NEW POLICY WILL IMPROVE ADMINISTRATION OF ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT WHILE PROVIDING FOR RECREATIONAL FISHERIES

The Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Commerce Department's National Marine Fisheries Service today announced a draft policy ensuring endangered species recovery while maximizing recreational fishing opportunities. The policy, recommended by sportfishing advocates and endorsed by President Clinton in an Executive Order earlier this year, is aimed at improving the administration of the Endangered Species Act as it relates to recreational fisheries.

"In a few instances, especially in the West, the goals of recovering endangered species and providing recreational fisheries have been, or have been perceived to be, in conflict," explained Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt. "While we remain steadfast in our commitment to endangered species recovery, we are equally committed to ensuring that America's 50 million anglers can enjoy good fishing opportunities. This policy will guide us in doing both."

The proposed policy is one of several measures to enhance recreational fisheries called for by President Clinton in Executive Order 12962 signed in June 1995, highlighting the social, cultural, and economic importance of the Nation's recreational fisheries and requiring Federal agencies to strengthen efforts to improve these resources.

"This policy illustrates the commitment of this Administration to the tenets of sustainable development--environmental protection hand-in-hand with the vital concerns of the recreational fishing community," said Secretary of Commerce Ronald H. Brown.

The proposed policy identifies measures the two agencies will take to ensure consistency in the administration of the Endangered Species Act; increase partnerships with other Federal, state, and Tribal fisheries managers; involve these groups in recovery planning and other actions taken for species listed under the Act and those proposed for listing; increase public information regarding the requirements of the Act; and provide more fishing opportunities on Federal lands.

(over)

"This is a good, sound policy that represents a middle ground on managing endangered species and recreational fisheries," said Helen Sevier, corporate executive officer for the Bass Anglers Sportsman Society, the world's largest sportfishing organization with 660,000 members.

Habitat loss and degradation historically have been the biggest causes of fish declines and loss of recreational fishing opportunities. As habitat quality was compromised, many native species declined. Because of these declines, as well as public desire for specific types of fish, fisheries managers began introducing non-native fish favored by anglers. The risks associated with introducing non-native species were often not well understood, and in some situations, these fish have preyed upon or competed with native species and contributed to their long-term decline.

One purpose of this policy is to acknowledge that management of native and non-native fishes can be complementary or at least compatible in many situations, and to ensure that if conflicts do arise, the agencies and partners will work together to resolve them.

The Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service are the agencies responsible for administering the Endangered Species Act and cooperating with state and Tribal agencies to manage fishery resources.

"This policy will allow state fish and wildlife agencies and others to replace adversarial situations with common-sense solutions," said Max Peterson, executive vice president of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. "In most cases, both recovery of endangered species and recreational fishery objectives can be met through close cooperation and management by Federal and state agencies. Meaningful participation by the states, as well as numerous stakeholders, in the development of these policy recommendations should ensure prompt and effective implementation."

Two components of the policy are especially designed to avoid or resolve conflicts. One is cooperating with states, Tribes, and other groups to provide comparable fishing opportunities when others are curtailed to protect listed species. The policy also aims to eliminate unnecessary restrictions involving stocking for recreational fisheries. For example, in areas where stocking may be restricted because the areas are part of a listed species' historical range but are not currently occupied by the listed species, the agencies would ensure consideration of the recreational fishery's importance as well as the recovery needs for the listed species.

The proposed policy was initiated by the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council, established in 1993 to advise the Interior Secretary on recreational fishing and boating issues. The council is composed of 18 sportfishing and boating advocates from the private sector and state government agencies.

In a report called the "Recreational Fisheries Stewardship Initiative," issued in April 1994, the council identified among its top goals the need to "achieve balance in the management and use of recreational fishery resources." Moreover, the council wanted to avoid or minimize conflicts in the joint management of native, non-native, and endangered fisheries.

In February 1995, the council published a more comprehensive report on the subject including specific recommendations, which are largely reflected in the proposed policy announced today.

"It's a very rewarding experience as a major stakeholder in the sportfishing industry to see that the work you were asked to do was taken seriously," said Sevier, who is also vice-chairman of the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council. "We're grateful for the chance to advise the government through the council and especially that the Administration was sincere in listening to our recommendations."

"Before this policy was developed, two well-intended programs of importance to the American public were on a collision course that would have hurt both endangered species conservation and recreational angling," said Mike Hayden, president of the non-profit American Sportfishing Association, another organization that was instrumental in developing today's policy. "It was gratifying to participate in this process of informed dialogue and reform. The sportfishing community wants to thank the leaders of the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service for nurturing this consensus-building initiative to better protect all of our Nation's aquatic resources."

The proposed policy will be published in the Federal Register on December 13, 1995, and the agencies will accept public comments for 45 days, after which time a final policy will be developed. Comments should be sent to the Chief, Division of Endangered Species, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 North Fairfax Drive, Room 452, Arlington, Virginia 22203 (telephone: 703-358-2171); or the Chief, Endangered Species Division, National Marine Fisheries Service, 1335 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910 (telephone: 301-713-2322).

For more information on the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council or to obtain copies of the cited reports, contact the Coordinator, Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4040 North Fairfax Drive, 304 Webb Building, Arlington, Virginia 22203 (telephone: 703-358-1777).