



Topic 1: Sport Fish Restoration Program and Sport Fish Restoration & Boating Trust Fund Reauthorization

BACKGROUND:

- The Sport Fish Restoration Grant Program (SFR) and other programs funded through the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund (Trust Fund) channel hundreds of millions of dollars each year to state fish and wildlife agencies for aquatic resource conservation programs and provide the American public with recreational opportunities.
- Since 1950, industry and their customers have invested over \$5 billion in resource conservation through the Trust Fund.
- SFR and Trust Fund revenues are derived through the collection of fishing tackle manufacturer excise taxes and boat and fishing import duties as well as motorboat and small engine fuel taxes. These dollars are matched at the State level with funds derived from the sale of fishing licenses and other permits.
- Approximately \$700 million was provided to programs that support fishery management and research, development and maintenance of public access sites, docks, sanitary boat pumpout facilities and conservation education through the SFR in fiscal year 2008.
- Investments made through both Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Programs underwrite more than 80 percent of state fish and wildlife agency budgets annually and represents one of the most longstanding and effective conservation programs in America.
- The Trust Fund programs are the backbone of aquatic resource conservation and the provision of opportunities for the American public to enjoy the Nation's aquatic resources. This model of resource conservation funding is a model for other countries and is known within the community as the "*American System of Conservation Funding.*"
- Other important Trust Fund programs include: National Outreach and Communications Program (funds the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation), Boating Infrastructure Grant Program (BIG), Clean Vessel Act Grant Program (CVA). The Council continues to assess these programs and has provided recommendations to the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) regarding program effectiveness.

DISCUSSION:

- The Trust Fund authorization expires in 2009. Partners and stakeholders with a vested interest in reauthorization agreed to work toward a common position.
- The States, through the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators agreed to a State position supporting Trust Fund reauthorization.

- Industry partners, conservation NGOs, Tribal organizations and other key Trust Fund constituencies established a coalition to reach a position on reauthorization and to work towards passage of the legislation.
- It is vital that the States, industry partners, conservation NGOs and others come to an agreed upon position on the tenants of the coming reauthorization.
- The boating and angling communities continue to seek new revenue streams to enhance program funding. An example of a potential new funding stream could come from funds made available through future establishment and operation of a tradable emission credit market established to control the release of greenhouse gases.

ISSUES:

Access

- Angling and boating access issues are a priority for industry and user groups. The Council is a collaborator in seeking ways to preserve and enhance access to publicly managed aquatic resources.
- Angling and boating access are negatively affected by loss of public ramps, boatyards, marinas and other boating related infrastructure.
- Partners and stakeholders are seeking ways to use reauthorization as a vehicle to preserve and enhance access and access programs.

Angling/Boating Participation and Kids in Nature

- The Trust Fund provides resources for outdoor education outreach programs that instill respect, appreciation, and knowledge of the outdoors; increase awareness of the importance conserving our Nation's aquatic resources and increase the number of Americans that boat and fish.
- Over the last 20 years, participation in recreational boating and angling is declining. This trend has the potential to reduce funding for conservation programs.
- The decline in participation is compounded as more Americans, including youth, are spending less and less time outdoors pursuing these pastimes.
- States and the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation are collaboratively working to increase the numbers of Americans that actively boat and fish and are working to educate the America public about the importance of conserving our Nation's aquatic resources. Many of these efforts are focused on getting America's youth to enjoy fishing and boating, and other outdoor activities.

Tribal Funding

- Native American Tribes play a significant role in managing aquatic resources, but are not currently eligible to receive funds apportioned through SFR. Currently, Tribes receive funds for fishery management and other wildlife management activities through the Service's competitive Tribal Wildlife Grants Program.
- Tribal interests continue to seek funding for fishery management programs to implement responsible fish conservation actions in or on tribal conservation areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ADMINISTRATION:

- Collaborate with Industry partners and stakeholders, States, Tribes and conservation NGOs to support an agreed upon position for a positive reauthorization of the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund (including the transfer of fuel tax revenues) in the 111th Congress.
- Review and consider the Council's assessments of the CVA Program, BIG Program and Boating Access Program and seek implementation of Council recommendations that were not implemented concurrent with reauthorization of the Trust Fund. In cases where regulation or program guidance need to be revised; assure Service collaboration with the Council, partners and stakeholders in this process.
- Continue to support funding for, and collaborate on existing and new efforts to get more Americans, especially youth, to participate in outdoor recreation and thereby expand awareness of and appreciation for natural resource conservation.