



Topic II: Boating and Fishing Access

BACKGROUND:

- For America's anglers and boaters, access to the water is essential to pursuing their pastime. In recent years, declining water access has become a major obstacle to boating and fishing participation.
- Overcrowding at public launch and marina sites is more and more prevalent as facilities are lost to private waterfront development and conversion.
- The Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council (Council) identified access as one of its top strategic issues.
- Once on the water new resource management regimes, such as the establishment of no-fishing or no-take marine protected areas, have the potential to restrict use of publicly managed aquatic resources by the boating and angling public.
- The Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) plays a significant role and supports providing public access through programs it implements and manages: the Boating Access Program, funded through the Sport Fish Restoration Grant Program, and the Boating Infrastructure Grant (BIG) Program. Together these programs awarded over \$70 million in fiscal year 2008 toward projects that provide water access and access infrastructure to the boating and angling public.
- The Council explored ways to maintain and enhance water access, including co-sponsorship of a national symposium on the topic.
- The Council completed a programmatic assessment of the BIG Program in 2005 and worked with the Service to implement recommendations, and is now beginning a comprehensive assessment of access expenditures made through the Sport Fish Restoration Boating Access Program.

ISSUES:

Marine Protected Areas

- Establishment of no-take and/or no-fishing marine protected areas (MPA), reserves and monuments along our coasts and on inshore waters could negatively affect the public's ability to access aquatic resources.
- The Council and the boating and angling community are concerned that no-take and no-fishing areas are being established with minimal scientific evidence. The Council wrote correspondence to Interior Secretary Kempthorne and Council on Environmental Quality Chairman James Connaughton concerning this matter. The Council believes that the establishment of any MPA, regardless of its level of restrictions, should at a minimum:
- Be based on the best scientific information available;

- Include criteria to assess the conservation, economic, and social benefits and impacts of establishing the closed area;
- Require a timetable of review consistent with the conservation purposes intended;
- Provide for reopening areas once goals are met; and
- Be developed through an open and substantial public process.

Environmental Permitting and Interagency Coordination

- A lack of coordination among Federal agencies that issue environmental permits could limit or eliminate the development and maintenance of public water access sites.
- A better-coordinated environmental permitting process can help alleviate delays in constructing and maintaining boating infrastructure.

Reauthorization of the Coastal Zone Management Act

- The Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) creates a national partnership among state and federal coastal zone managers that over the past three decades led to reduced resource impacts from coastal development, provided important support for coastal zone planning, and helped resolve significant conflicts over competing coastal zone uses. The CZMA also provides local funding for public access programs in coastal areas.
- The CZMA authorization is expired. In the 110th Congress, funding was sought for a new “Working Waterfronts” program that would assist States maintain access sites and boating infrastructure (such as marinas and boatyards) for both commercial and recreational vessels.
- The reauthorization bill was not approved in the 110th Congress.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ADMINISTRATION:

- Establish Departmental policy that formalizes the above referenced criteria when identifying areas for potential MPA, monument or reserve designation, and that considers the provisions of the amended Executive Order 12962.
- Identify and implement methods to better coordinate environmental permitting processes that have the potential to limit development and maintenance of infrastructure that support boating and angling opportunities.
- Collaborate with States, nongovernmental organizations and boating stakeholders to support a positive reauthorization of the CZMA, including a “Working Waterfronts” grant program that maintains and enhances boating infrastructure, in the 111th Congress.
- Collaborate with the Council, partners and stakeholders to continue to identify and implement methods that enhance and improve boating and fishing access programs and infrastructure.