



Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council

SEP 16 1997

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Mr. John Rogers
Deputy Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street, N.W., MS 3256
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Rogers:

On June 2, 1997, the National Recreational Fisheries Coordination Council convened with the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council to discuss agency performance under the President's 1995 Executive Order 12962 for Recreational Fisheries. Follow-up meetings between agency staff, Partnership Council staff, and Dr. F. Eugene Hester were held to discuss the recommendations for the respective agencies. To conclude this process the Partnership Council reviewed the enclosed recommendations and has instructed me to forward this document to you for distribution to the National Recreational Fisheries Coordination Council.

Thanks for your leadership in enhancing recreational fishing and boating resources for the millions of people who enjoy them.

Sincerely,

Doug Alcorn
Coordinator

Enclosure

cc: Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council
Technical Working Group

bcc: Dan Ashe
Bob Batky
Gary Reinitz

Report to the National Recreational Fisheries
Coordination Council

Annual Evaluation and Recommendations
For Improving Performance Under
the President's Executive Order 12962

By the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council
in Consultation with Dr. F. Eugene Hester

Submitted: September 16, 1997
By SFBPC Initiatives Committee
Tom Bedell, Chairman

Contact: SFBPC Coordinator Doug Alcorn
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
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Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Introduction

The Executive Order on Recreational Fisheries in 1995 required cabinet officers to develop a nationally comprehensive *Recreational Fishery Resources Conservation Plan* (National Conservation Plan). The National Conservation Plan was completed by the addition of agency-specific plans in 1996. The agency-specific plans and the subsequent reports were submitted to the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council (SFBPC) for evaluation consistent with Section 5 of Executive Order 12962. This paper is a follow-up review of each agency's strategic plan and annual accomplishment report, and is a supplement to the SFBPC's 1997 annual evaluation report. This additional analysis is provided at the request of the National Recreational Fisheries Coordination Council (NRFCC), and complements meetings held between SFBPC and NRFCC members and staff, following the SFBPC's oral report on June 2, 1997. Subsequent to the June 2 meeting, eight agencies specifically asked for advice on improving performance and committed to future improvements in performance.

In making this evaluation, it is recognized that missions of all agencies are different, and all agencies do not have an opportunity to participate in all four National Conservation Plan strategies. Additionally some agencies have much greater discretionary control of their budgets than do others. These inherent differences were recognized in evaluating the plans and reports.

The basic question raised in making this evaluation was whether efforts on behalf of the Nation's recreational fisheries have improved as a result of Executive Order 12962. Making such a determination was difficult since no baseline was established from which change could be measured. Evaluation of reports for this initial reporting year was difficult for several reasons. Some reports were written to reflect outputs identified in the National Conservation Plan, some addressed agency-specific objectives, and some only addressed agency activities without reference to a plan. Agency outputs were often expressed as dollars spent or number of projects funded, without interpreting what these actions accomplished in improving fish populations, habitat, water quality, fishing access or education. When the National Conservation Plan was developed, all agencies agreed on how agency outputs would be reported, but most agencies did not use this format when reporting. Reporting format was not consistent between agencies.

Most agencies reported on activities without distinguishing whether these were initiated under new or existing programs. Often there was no identification as to whether these activities were increases over levels prior to the Executive Order. In addition to reporting on the agreed-to agency outputs identified in the National Conservation Plan, the plans and reports of most agencies could have been improved in these ways:

- ▶ making objectives less open-ended and more measurable (many were so open-ended as to make it difficult to determine if the goal is ever reached),
- ▶ identifying initiatives which go beyond status quo,
- ▶ identifying the net improvement to the resource resulting from various activities or expenditures,

- ▶ identifying a timetable for accomplishment,
- ▶ explaining the cost-share program and how it relates to accomplishing objectives, and
- ▶ identifying who is accountable to accomplish the objective(s).

Comments on agency-specific strategies and reports, and recommendations for improvements are presented below for each agency. The following agency-specific recommended improvements should be viewed as selected, highlighted opportunities for enhanced agency accomplishment under the Executive Order. They are recommended purely as examples and should be viewed as complementary to, and not replacements for, the more detailed array of core and supplemental agency outputs specifically identified in the *Recreational Fishery Resources Conservation Plan*.

As a result of discussions at the June 2 meeting with all agencies, and after further discussions with the eight agencies requesting individual meetings, it was agreed that a more appropriate question would be whether efforts on behalf of the Nation's recreational resources have improved since the Executive Order was given. Identifying and quantifying improvement is important, whether it was specifically because of the Executive Order or because of other forces that contributed to the agency's implementation of the Executive Order.

Bureau of Indian Affairs

No plan was submitted, only a statement of how BIA operates. In a memorandum dated October 7, 1996, BIA stated that decisions are made by the tribes, and it is considered inappropriate for BIA to set objectives for the tribes.

A subsequent memorandum on March 19, 1997, stated that the key components of a meaningful strategy involve securing new base funding for tribal fishing programs, increasing the level of fisheries technical assistance provided to tribes, and broadening communications with tribes offering or capable of providing public fishing opportunities. A handbook on public use programs and contacts on Indian reservations is in preparation.

Recommended Improvements:

A plan could be developed to identify the tribes which have the greatest potential for recreational fisheries development, and to quantify the need for technical assistance. The plan could identify the tribes with the greatest potential for developing and administering recreational fisheries programs for tribal or public fee-use, and the resources needed to accomplish it, along with the anticipated benefits. The plan could also describe the need for technical assistance and identify how it could best be provided and funded.

Bureau of Land Management

The agency-specific plan is built on three existing programs: (1) *Riparian-Wetland Initiative for the 1990s*, (2) *Fish and Wildlife 2000: A Plan for the Future*, and (3) *Recreation 2000: A Strategic Plan*.

The budget for the *Riparian-Wetland Initiative Program* increased from \$3.5 million in Fiscal Year (FY)88 to \$10.4 million in FY92, to \$14.5 million in FY96, to \$16.1 million in FY97. The riparian team in Prineville, Oregon provides technical assistance and training. The report reflected both the magnitude of the program and its increases over the past few years.

BLM works with Trout Unlimited (TU), Forest Service and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation on "Bring Back the Natives" fish projects, a "Golden Partnerships" program with TU for five trout streams, and other projects, including reclamation of abandoned mines and range reform guidelines which allow restoration of riparian areas. Through a combination of fishery and recreation program funding, \$500,000 was provided for 34 projects identified by state and river or lake. Some were cost-share projects. These were in addition to projects funded at the state level. Each state identified both funded projects and unfunded needs.

Recommended Improvements:

The report should include information about the effectiveness of the *Riparian-Wetland Initiative*. It should include quantitative information on number of projects, miles of streams affected, acres fenced and other quantitative habitat parameters to make the report more useful. Information about the effects of these changes on improving water quality and fish populations would make the report even more useful. Results should be reported in terms identified in the National Conservation Plan.

In the section on state needs, the inconsistencies in the way funding is shown from state to state needs to be overcome, and missing data provided. Projects were identified in a different way in the agency-specific plan from the way they were identified in the report. They need to be more consistent.

Bureau of Reclamation

The agency-specific plan was designed to enhance recreational fishery resources which are directly associated with, or are the result of, existing and continuing Reclamation-funded projects and programs. The plan identifies several projects in each of 15 western states. Many of them are partnerships.

The plan contains many types of projects, including maintaining conservation pools, minimum flows, water rights, access, biological studies, boat ramps and docks, improved fish passage, student education programs, and reduced shoreline erosion. The report describes progress made on each project underway in FY97.

It would appear that all FY97 projects were previously programmed as project features. It

was not possible to determine if any of them were initiatives begun in response to the Executive Order.

Recommended Improvements:

The agency-specific plan identifies projects to be considered. Only for 1997 does it identify projects to be undertaken. Identification of new projects for 1998 and beyond would be helpful. Water quality improvements should be quantified with corresponding activities and documented in the annual report consistent with the agency outputs agreed to in the National Conservation Plan. Identify whether the described projects are increases as compared to level of activity when the Executive Order was signed. If new initiatives exist, they should be identified.

Corps of Engineers

The Corps of Engineers plan presented an active and aggressive approach to meeting the objectives of the Executive Order. It identified numerous actions which could be undertaken on Corps projects, and indicated an increased emphasis on recreational fisheries.

The report gives a large number of quantified activities, indicating significant action. Information is presented as national summaries.

The aggregated number of miles of stream/river miles improved or surface water acres improved for fishery resources was impressive. It was consistent with the National Conservation Plan, and more quantitative than most other reports.

Recommended Improvements:

Presenting results by state, or some other geographic area would make the results more useful. Also the agency needs to state whether the activities instituted since 1995 were in response to the Executive Order, or for mitigation.

The concern expressed by stakeholders that the Corps of Engineers was attempting to close or shift responsibility for boat ramps or recreation areas to the states or others should be resolved or explained in future reports.

Department of Defense

The agency-specific plan identified quantifiable actions to be taken on military bases, consistent with the four strategies in the National Conservation Plan. The report provides cumulative totals for each branch (Army, Navy and Air force) plus success stories from several bases. The report is quantitative.

Recommended Improvements:

The report would be improved by identifying whether the accomplishments since 1995 were a result of activities initiated in response to the Executive Order. New initiatives should be identified with expected outcomes described.

Department of Energy

The Department of Energy prepared one plan for the department. It is primarily about Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), but included some information about Southwestern Power Administration (SPA), Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). The report is primarily a status report on many BPA projects. FERC identified actions taken, mainly to provide recreation facilities at power projects.

The Energy Department report was primarily a report of BPA projects; activities of other components of the Energy Department were only briefly explained. BPA funds a large number of projects, but there is no way to identify which were for mitigation which, if any, were initiatives in response to the Executive Order, or whether there has been an increase in activities. The FERC component of the report identified recreation facilities constructed as a result of the licensing/relicensing process. Stakeholders are concerned about FERC action on minimum flows and fish passage. These subjects need to be more specifically addressed in future reports.

Recommended Improvements:

Identify whether BPA, SPA and WAPA projects are in response to the Executive Order and represent an increase of activity since the Executive Order was signed in 1995. Also identify whether most projects are for mitigation or enhancement. To the extent that improvement in water quality or fish populations result from projects, identify the improvement.

Identify action FERC has taken to provide needed minimum flows, fish passage and all appropriate core measurements. Identify whether these represent improvements over status at the time the Executive Order was signed in 1995.

Department of Transportation

The Department of Transportation prepared one plan for the U.S. Coast Guard and the Federal Highway Administration. The report was a statement of relevant Coast Guard activities for the year.

The plan is primarily a summary of the way routine Federal Highway Administration and Coast Guard activities are supportive of the Executive Order. Some activities are passive, and there is no indication of increased program emphasis. The brief report makes no reference to Federal Highway Administration actions, and except for increased emphasis on safe boating, only describes continuing Coast Guard activities.

Recommended Improvements:

An increased emphasis on recreational fisheries is needed to be responsive to the Executive Order. The Federal Highway Administration and Coast Guard both need to express a more aggressive plan to respond to the President's call to enhance recreational fisheries. When projects are funded, the effects on water quality and fish populations and access should be reported, when possible. A more active approach to access areas in conjunction to highway construction needs to be addressed.

Increases and special initiatives need to be distinguished from status quo.

Environmental Protection Agency

The plan and report described extensive work with states, tribes, communities and others in establishing standards, measuring existing conditions, developing mutual goals for improvement and providing guidance and resources to accomplish the goals. Many new approaches, including computerized data and models are being produced to facilitate improved water quality. Several programs are resulting in better, more coordinated and more useful data, and through training and financial assistance point and non-point pollution are being reduced.

Many projects have been undertaken which should improve water quality, but it is not yet possible to quantitatively measure the improvement. Existing techniques can not measure the nation's progress in increasing the percent of surveyed stream miles that are restored or improved as fish habitat or restored to established water quality standards. The completion of the *National Water Quality Inventory Report to Congress: 1994* and the 1995 update for the *National Listing of Fish and Wildlife Consumption Advisories* seem too delayed, and almost out of date by the time they are produced. The number of fish consumption advisories rose by 209, representing a 14% increase over 1994. The way in which individual states decide on issuing fish consumption advisories leaves the figures open to varying interpretations.

Recommended Improvements:

The numerous individual actions by EPA for better sewage treatment, better control of non-point source pollution control, a better and more involved public and greater partnerships with other agencies all should result in better water quality and fish populations. It is important to provide evidence of these improvements.

EPA should explain how and when their activities will enable a more comprehensive measure of whether the Nation's waters are improving.

If the *National Listing of Fish and Wildlife Consumption Advisories* and the *National Water Quality Inventory Report* are available in more real-time, this should be identified. The effects of various non-point source pollution abatement and other projects on water quality and fish populations should be described when possible. There needs to be an identification as to whether the level of effort (or in some cases quantity of individual projects) have increased since the Executive Order was signed in 1995, as contrasted to business-as-usual. EPA is a major agency in accomplishing the objectives of the Executive Order. A better understanding of how EPA actions will improve resources, and how their efforts will measure improvements by others in a cumulative way are needed and should be more specifically reported.

National Marine Fishery Service

The agency-specific plan was prepared with input from external groups. Objectives were established to improve recreational fish stocks and access to them. The report identifies accomplishments or status of several projects. In cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service a joint policy was developed for administering the Endangered Species Act so as to minimize conflict with recreational fisheries. Several actions were taken to implement the policy.

Several important actions were taken in response to the Executive Order, including establishing new positions emphasizing recreational fisheries, both in Washington and regional offices.

Many of the agency-specific plan implementation outputs are open-ended. It is possible to report actions, but not to measure degree of success. Lack of quantification prevents development of timetables, measuring rate of progress or determining when the objective has been fully accomplished.

Recommended Improvements:

Describe objectives in more quantifiable terms so success can be measured. Identify time targets and accountable positions. In rebuilding recreationally important fish stocks, identify how many species (or stocks) are involved. Perhaps the more important ones could be identified. Describe any of them that can be rebuilt during this 5-year program, then measure and document success.

In developing quantitative economic and social information on recreational fisheries, describe any benchmark and timetable for accomplishment of a certain threshold of information. Quantify success toward reaching this goal.

In completing memoranda of understanding with states, identify how many have been completed, and the timetable for future completions. Also identify who is responsible for accomplishing them.

When accomplishments are reported as dollars spent or projects funded, identify net effect to the habitat or fish populations, when possible. Identify whether effort represents increases and initiatives beyond those existing before the Executive Order was signed in 1995, versus status quo.

National Park Service

The agency identified eleven action items in addressing the four National Conservation Plan strategies. The annual report was quantitative, identified projects by individual National Park areas, and indicated an active interpretative program and participation by 48 parks in National Fishing Week. Several fishery related professional positions were recently added in the parks.

Most projects are long-term, and either are not quantitative or will be accomplished in 1998, 1999 or 2000. Some are not sufficiently quantitative.

Recommended Improvements:

The timetable on action items needs to be shortened. Since there are initiatives for improvement over status quo, more resources devoted to them should enable more timely response.

The action items need to be more quantitative. Identification of programs such as challenge cost-share are not well understood by the recreational fisheries community. Steps can be undertaken to identify the process and encourage partnerships.

The locations of needed facilities such as boat ramps should be identified.

The need and location for additional fishery biologists and related positions should be identified.

Natural Resource Conservation Service

The agency-specific plan essentially identifies the many existing programs administered by NRCS. The report gave quantitative information about each program in terms of number of projects or million of acres treated. These are on-the-ground treatments which have as their purpose conserving land and water.

The plan and report were not prepared consistent with the National Conservation Plan. They were reports of on-going programs. Quantification is provided about acres in programs such as the Water Bank and Wetland Reserve Programs, but they are not further interpreted in terms of the agency outputs agreed to in the National Conservation Plan. Also it is not possible to interpret the extent to which the numerous individual actions have affected public water quality and fish populations.

Recommended Improvements:

To the extent it can be determined, identify effects of various conservation programs on improvements in water quality and fish populations.

Identify whether any programs are increases or initiatives since the Executive Order was signed in 1995.

Tennessee Valley Authority

The agency-specific plan identified on-going efforts to maintain and improve habitat and fishery resources. The plan and report provide good quantification about number of hydrologic units and 22 other measurements such as number of pollution reduction projects completed or percent of time minimum flows were achieved.

Although important activities are underway, there is no evidence that priorities were re-examined or new initiatives were begun after the Executive Order was signed. Most quantitative measurements were not directly converted to the agency outputs identified in the National Conservation Plan.

Recommended Improvements:

Identify increase activity or initiatives since the Executive Order was signed in 1995.
Identify project results in terms of agency outputs as recommended in the National Conservation Plan.

Concern was expressed by stakeholders that TVA was attempting to close or shift responsibility for boat ramps or recreation areas. This concern should be resolved or explained in future reports.

U.S. Forest Service

The agency-specific plan was developed after good outreach. It has measurable objectives, an aggressive timetable and responsible positions are identified. It also identified challenges which limit the ability of the organization to develop a dynamic and responsive recreational fisheries program. The report contains evidence of progress and important accomplishments. Results are quantified. Progress is measured since 1995.

This was one of the better reports. Quantified results were reported consistent with the National Conservation Plan. Good progress was made.

Recommended Improvements:

Reporting on the administrative actions identified in the agency-specific plan would have been helpful. The agency-specific plan identified a series of action items with anticipated time for accomplishment and accountable position. Accomplishments should be reported.

Identify whether programs represent increases or initiatives since the Executive Order was signed in 1995 as compared to status quo.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The agency-specific plan was developed after extensive work with stakeholders. An active program was devised, with new initiatives. The report provides quantified results consistent with the National Conservation Plan. In cooperation with the National Marine Fisheries Service a joint policy was developed for administering the Endangered Species Act so as to minimize conflict with recreational fisheries. Significant actions were taken to implement the policy.

This was one of the better plans and reports. The existing program was reevaluated and resources moved from low priority to high-priority projects. New budget initiatives were included in the President's budget, additional refuges were opened to fishing, and law enforcement actions stopped significant illegal activities. New positions were added to emphasize recreational fisheries. Tangible improvements in fish populations and habitats were reported.

Recommended Improvements:

Where possible, for projects or expenditures, identify resulting effects on water quality or fishery resources.

Identify increases or initiatives since the time the Executive Order was signed in 1995 as compared to status quo.

U.S. Geological Survey Biological Resources Division

The agency-specific plan and report are of activities of the Biological Resources Division of the U.S. Geological Survey. This division was established through consolidation of the biological research, survey, inventory and monitoring capability from other Interior department bureaus. Because it conducts research in response to needs and priority established by other bureaus, the plan does not identify independent division objectives. The report identifies numerous projects underway which are essential to healthy fish populations and their environments.

Recommended Improvements:

Include/describe other USGS information, such as:

- ▶ findings of the National Water Quality Assessment program,
- ▶ the automated stream monitoring data available by telephone,
- ▶ the strong partnerships provided by the Cooperative Units, and
- ▶ the availability by computer of information on non-indigenous species such as the zebra mussel.

Identify increases or initiatives since the Executive Order was signed in 1995 compared to status quo.