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Martha Williams
Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Thomas McCann
Designated Federal Officer
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
5275 Leesburg Pike, MS-3C016A-FAC
Falls Church, Virginia 22041
P 703-358-2056

November 5, 2024

Martha Williams
Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street, NW
Washington District of Columbia 20240

Judy Camuso
President
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
1100 First Street, NE
Washington District of Columbia 20002

Janet Coit
Assistant Administrator
National Marine Fisheries Service National
Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington District of Columbia 20230

Craig Bonds
Chairman
Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation
500 Montgomery Street, Suite 300
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Dear Ms. Williams, Ms. Camuso, Ms. Coit, and Mr. Bonds,

The Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council (SFBPC) serves as an advisor to both the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Commerce on aquatic conservation and restoration endeavors in freshwater, estuarine, and marine environments that benefit recreational fishery resources, enhance recreational boating, and encourage partnerships among industry, the public, and government to advance these efforts. This letter serves as the SFBPC's feedback on the National Outreach and Communications Program Assessment Report of Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation Implementation 2016-2021 (Assessment) and recommendations for future focus.

The National Outreach and Communication Program (NOCP) promotes conservation and responsible use of the nation's aquatic resources, removes barriers to recreational boating and fishing participation, and improves communication with recreational anglers and boaters. The program averages \$12 million in federal funding per year and is currently executed through a five-year cooperative agreement between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF). The SFBPC is tasked with conducting periodic reviews of the NOCP to evaluate its effectiveness.

In 2022, on behalf of the SFBPC, the USFWS contracted with Spitfire Strategies to complete a programmatic assessment of RBFF's efforts implementing the NOCP for the period of 2016-2021. RBFF provided additional updates to the SFBPC on activities that took place from 2021 to the present. The year-long assessment concluded in October 2023 and was presented to the SFBPC for review and concurrence.

The assessment included literature reviews, stakeholder interviews, and additional research. The final report also includes 17 new recommendations to help guide future implementation of the NOCP. The SFBPC met with RBFF staff to ensure future focused recommendations incorporated work and lessons learned outside the assessment timeframe. The SFBPC recommends carrying forward 14 of the Assessment recommendations consolidated into four focus areas (see Appendix A).

Recommendations to improve future evaluations and implementation of the NOCP

The SPBPC seeks to provide a more flexible, future-looking framework with which to evaluate the implementation of the NOCP and to enable responsiveness to changing trends in communication, marketing, and technology.

The SPBPC also acknowledges that technology, communications, and marketing strategies have changed significantly over the last decade, and the tactics and metrics reviewed during the Assessment period may not provide appropriate evaluation tools in the future. Therefore, the SFBPC makes the following additional recommendations to guide future work:

1. The SFBPC Communications and Outreach subcommittee will review the 1998 Strategic Plan and provide any necessary amendments to update research, data, or strategic objectives to guide future implementation of the NOCP.
2. Future proposals to implement the NOCP will require specific, measurable, and meaningful metrics as part of the application package.
3. Direct annual oversight of the metrics should be incorporated into terms of future cooperative agreements governing the implementation of the NOCP. More frequent oversight from USFWS and SFBPC will ensure metrics can remain responsive to changing trends and meaningfully connect to the specific terms of the financial assistance award.

These recommendations will help the SFBPC assess progress and inform future implementation of the NOCP, including the creation of the next NOCP funding opportunity projected to be published in 2027, and the subsequent cooperative agreement projected to be awarded in 2028.

We acknowledge that RBFF, under the guidance of its Board of Directors, has served as a valuable partner to the United States Fish and Wildlife Services and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in promoting opportunities and access to boating and fishing. Additionally, RBFF has established a successful operating model serving as a national communications partner, strategic advisor, and source of funding to numerous state and local agencies who share the key objectives of increasing access to boating and fishing but have a deeper understanding of the specific needs of their communities.

We appreciate this leadership and the strength of the partnerships that have been established, and we encourage a continuation of this strategic operating model during the completion of their award period.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Chris Horton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Chris Horton
Chairperson

Appendix

Following a thorough assessment of RBFF's implementation of the NOCP (2016-2021) Spitfire Strategies identified 17 recommendations to help improve implementation of the NOCP. The SFBPC recommends carrying forward 14 of the *Assessment* recommendations consolidated into four focus areas. These focus areas and individual recommendations can be used to advance the strategic objectives of the NOCP as identified in the 1998 Strategic Plan:

1. Create a top-of-mind recreational boating and fishing campaign to develop awareness, trial and continued participation.
2. Educate people how and where to boat and fish.
3. Prioritize market segments and create messages that address each segment's specific needs.
4. Educate stakeholders on marketing, outreach and implementation of national strategies to targeted user groups.
5. Make availability of and access to boating and fishing locations easy and simple.

Recommendations to improve the current implementation of the NOCP (See pp 18 – 25 of the *Assessment for the full methodology and discussion of recommendations.*)

Focus Area	Recommendations
Capacity Building Among State and Local Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Help state partners reengage audiences who started fishing during the pandemic but did not continue after stay-at-home orders were lifted.• Invest in local activities to remove barriers for first-time anglers and boaters from diverse communities.• Provide state partners with tips on how to make the most of their existing marketing budgets based on the Foundation's research.• Exercise capacity-building expertise by training and coaching local partners on the basics of communication and marketing strategy.
Expanding Participation in Boating and Fishing Among Prioritized Market Segments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify ways to support efforts that make outdoor spaces safer and more welcoming to people of color and women.• Invest in forging meaningful and long-term partnerships with diverse communities to play leadership roles and produce materials and campaigns, host events and address strategic outreach.• Support partners with marketing materials and research (that they can use within their organizations) that will engage young people of color or girls, because fishing as a child is one of most effective predictors that a person will continue to fish long into adulthood.• Focus and tailor marketing campaigns and tactics to engage people of color and women.
Advancing Measurements of Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Include metrics to directly track the progress of equity, inclusion, and diversity efforts in all work.• Develop an improved method of collection and analysis of available local data to track outcomes of outreach efforts in local communities.• Partner with industry to improve communications and data collection at the point-of-sale.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AFWA, USFWS, and SFBPC should work together to establish specific goals and objectives and a process for rigorously evaluating and reporting on the NOCP's effectiveness at enhancing the public's understanding of aquatic resources and sustained participation in boating and angling.
Expanding Focus on Conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in conservation resources, plans and campaigns. • Conservation is a broad topic. Create smaller entry points into conservation by focusing on specific habitats or species — and guiding partners to do the same.