

**San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge
South San Diego Bay Unit
Fishing Plan**

March 2020

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge
1080 Gunpowder Point Drive
Chula Vista, CA 91910**

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SAN DIEGO BAY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SOUTH SAN DIEGO BAY UNIT FISHING PLAN

1. Introduction

National Wildlife Refuges are guided by the mission and goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS), the purposes of an individual refuge, Service policy, and laws and international treaties. Relevant guidance includes the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, Refuge Recreation Act of 1962, and selected portions of the Code of Federal Regulations and Fish and Wildlife Service Manual.

The mission of the NWRS, as outlined by the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act (NWRSA), as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (16 U.S.C. 668dd et seq.), is to:

“... to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

The NWRSA mandates the Secretary of the Interior in administering the System to (16 U.S.C. 668dd(a)(4):

- Provide for the conservation of fish, wildlife, and plants, and their habitats within the NWRS;
- Ensure that the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the NWRS are maintained for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans;
- Ensure that the mission of the NWRS described at 16 U.S.C. 668dd(a)(2) and the purposes of each refuge are carried out;
- Ensure effective coordination, interaction, and cooperation with owners of land adjoining refuges and the fish and wildlife agency of the States in which the units of the NWRS are located;
- Assist in the maintenance of adequate water quantity and water quality to fulfill the mission of the NWRS and the purposes of each refuge;
- Recognize compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses as the priority general public uses of the NWRS through which the American public can develop an appreciation for fish and wildlife;
- Ensure that opportunities are provided within the NWRS for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses; and
- Monitor the status and trends of fish, wildlife, and plants in each refuge.

Therefore, it is a priority of the Service to provide for wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities, including fishing, when those opportunities are compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established and the mission of the NWRS.

The South San Diego Bay Unit of the San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge or NWR) was established pursuant to the Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956, as amended (16 U.S.C. 742a-742j, not including 742d-742i) and the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531-1543).

The South San Diego Bay Unit of the Refuge was established to "...to protect, manage, and restore habitats for federally listed endangered and threatened species and migratory birds, and to maintain and enhance the biological diversity of native plants and animals..." 16 U.S.C § 1531-1543 (Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended) and 70 Stat. 1119 (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956, as amended).

The Refuge, which is situated at the south end of San Diego Bay, is surrounded by the urban communities of National City, Chula Vista, San Diego, Imperial Beach, and Coronado. Consisting of the Sweetwater Marsh and South San Diego Bay Units, the Refuge is located about ten miles north of the United States and Mexico border in San Diego County. The two units within the Refuge were established to protect endangered and threatened species. Most of what remains of San Diego Bay's historical coastal salt marsh and intertidal mudflat habitat is preserved within these two Refuge Units. (USFWS 2006)

The South San Diego Bay Unit lies at the south end of San Diego Bay. The Service has management authority for approximately 2,300 acres within the approved Refuge boundary. The lands and waters included within the current management boundary consist of portions of the open bay, active and restored solar salt evaporation ponds (salt ponds), and the western end of the Otay River drainage basin.

Fishing is an allowable use throughout much of San Diego Bay, including the open portions of the bay that occur within the management boundary of the South San Diego Bay Unit. Due to the shallow water depths in the South Bay, which range from less than a foot near the intertidal mudflats at low tide to about eight feet in the shallow subtidal areas, the majority of the recreational fishing in San Diego Bay takes place outside the Refuge boundary in the northern half of the bay. Some recreational fishing is conducted within the Refuge boundary using motorized and non-motorized shallow draft vessels, such as boats, canoes, and kayaks, and floats.

2. Statement of Objectives

In 2006, the Service completed a Comprehensive Conservation Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (CCP/EIS) to guide natural resource management with consideration for compatible public use on the Refuge over 15-year lifetime of the plan (USFWS 2006). While fishing is an existing use on the South San Diego Bay Unit, the Service did not complete the formal opening

process. The Service now proposes to formally open the South San Diego Bay Unit to sport fishing.

The objectives of a sport fishing program on the Refuge are to provide:

- An understanding and appreciation of fish and wildlife ecology and human's role in their environment, and to provide refuge visitors with high quality, safe, wholesome and enjoyable recreational experiences oriented toward wildlife to the extent these activities are compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established. Fishing has been identified as a priority public use for the National Wildlife Refuge System and will be encouraged on the Refuge.

Fishing is consistent with Goal 4 of the CCP/EIS, which is to provide opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependent recreation and interpretation that foster public appreciation of the unique natural and cultural heritage of South San Diego Bay. Objective 4.4 states that the Service will maintain the current level of recreational boating and fishing opportunities occurring in the open water portions of the South San Diego Bay Unit.

3. Description of the Fishing Program

A. Areas to be Opened to Fishing

Sport fishing would be permitted from a boat or an appropriate floating device on designated areas of the Refuge as shown in Figure 1. No fishing or other public access would be permitted within the Otay River channel, Otay River floodplain, or within the Refuge's active and restored salt ponds. Additionally, no fishing from the shoreline is permitted within the Refuge.



B. Species to be Taken, Fishing Periods, Fishing Access

San Diego Bay provides habitat for harvestable fish allowed for legal take such as leopard shark, Pacific mackerel, spotted sand bass, and barred sand bass (CDFW 2019). Other legally harvestable species may be available in accordance with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Ocean Sport Fishing Regulations depending on the season and tides.

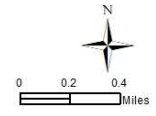
On the South San Diego Bay Unit, fishing is permitted year round in the open bay waters present within the northwestern most portion of the Unit (see Figure 1). Access to this area is by boat or an appropriate floating device. There are no boat ramps on the Refuge and none are proposed, so fishing access would be through public and private boat ramps located elsewhere within San Diego Bay. Public boat ramps near the Refuge include Bayfront Park in Chula Vista and Pepper Park in National City.



Figure 1
Refuge Area to be Opened to Fishing

-  Refuge Boundary - South San Diego Bay Unit of the San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge
-  Proposed Fishing Area

Sources: USFWS, Local Agency Partnership (2 ft Imagery)



Carlstad Field Office - 2019
 /emilie/maps/SSDBAYFishing.mxd

C. Fishing License Requirements

Anglers must comply with all applicable State and Federal regulations while fishing. Anglers 16 years of age or older are required to have a sport fishing license and an Ocean Enhancement Validation, issued by CDFW, before attempting to take fish, mollusks, crustaceans, or invertebrates in San Diego Bay, including on the designated fishing area within the Refuge. Report cards are also required for certain species per CDFW regulations (<https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Licensing/Fishing>). No Refuge fishing permit or Refuge user fee is required.

D. Consultation and Coordination with the State

Fishing will be permitted within the framework of applicable State and Federal regulations, with the State retaining primary oversight of all fishing activities within San Diego Bay, including the Refuge.

E. Law Enforcement

CDFW Wildlife Officers have jurisdiction over the fishing activities throughout San Diego Bay, including within the Refuge, and San Diego NWR Complex Federal Wildlife Officers also maintain a law enforcement presence on the refuge's open waters of San Diego Bay. Other marine operations are conducted by a variety of law enforcement agencies, including but not limited to, Port of San Diego Harbor Police (Harbor Police), San Diego Sheriff's Department, City of San Diego Police Department, Chula Vista Police Department, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection. These operations can involve enforcement of take and license violations. The Harbor Police are also cross-trained to protect the safety of San Diego Bay, including the open water areas of the Refuge.

The following actions are implemented by the Refuge to support enforcement of fishing regulations:

A fishing brochure indicating where fishing is permitted on the Refuge is available at the Refuge office, distributed at public events, and available at local marinas.

- Regulatory information, which is provided by CDFW, is available at local marinas and online at [CDFW Ocean Recreational Fishing Regulations](#).
- Refuge Complex Federal Wildlife Officers will randomly check anglers for compliance with applicable fishing regulations.

F. Funding and Staffing Requirements

Initiation of a fishing program within the Refuge will require periodic enforcement by Refuge Wildlife Officers and continued outreach regarding fishing regulations and responsible disposal of monofilament fishing line. The total cost of the fishing program is expected to be approximately \$20,000 per year.

4. Conduct of the Fishing Program

A. License Requirement, Validations, and Other Requirements

The Refuge will not regulate fishing quotas and defers to quotas set by the CDFW. Angers are required to have a California sport fishing license and an Ocean Enhancement Validation, issued by CDFW. Report cards from CDFW are also required for certain species per CDFW regulations ([https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Licensing/ Fishing](https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Licensing/Fishing)). No refuge permit or Refuge user fee is required.

B. Refuge-Specific Fishing Regulations

Listed below are refuge-specific regulations that pertain to fishing on the South San Diego Bay Unit of the San Diego Bay NWR as of the date of this plan. These regulations may be modified as conditions change or if refuge expansion occurs.

50 CFR 32.24 California (Refuge-specific regulations; Sport Fishing). San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge, South San Diego Bay Unit.

Sport Fishing. We allow fishing from boats or appropriate floating devices on designated areas of the Refuge in accordance with CDFW Ocean Sport Fishing Regulations. No shoreline fishing is allowed on the San Diego Bay NWR.

C. Relevant State Regulations

Please see the State of California Sport Fishing Regulations at: [CDFW 2019-2020 Ocean Sport Fishing Regulations](#) and [CDFW Interactive Sport Fishing Web Map](#)

D. Other Refuge Rules and Regulations for Fishing

- None.

5. Public Engagement

A. Outreach for Announcing and Publicizing the Fishing Program

The Refuge maintains a mailing list, for news release purposes, to local newspapers, radio, and websites. Special announcements and articles may be released in conjunction with opening the Refuge to fishing. In addition, information about fishing will be available at the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge Complex headquarters, and on the Refuge website.

6. Anticipated Public Reaction to the Fishing Program

Very little reaction by the angling public is expected, as fishing already occurs in this area per CDFW regulations.

B. How Anglers Will Be Informed of Relevant Rules and Regulations

General information regarding fishing can be obtained at the Refuge Complex headquarters at 1080 Gunpowder Point Drive, Chula Vista, CA 91910; by calling (619) 476-9150; or by accessing the Refuge website at: [San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge](#).

Specific information regarding current fishing regulations is available at: [CDFW 2019-2020 Ocean Sport Fishing Regulations](#) and [CDFW Interactive Sport Fishing Web Map](#)

6. Compatibility Determination

Fishing and all associated program activities proposed in this plan are compatible with the purposes of the refuge. See Sport Fishing Compatibility Determination.

7. References

California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). 2019. November 1, 2019. Current California Ocean Recreational Fishing Regulations. Accessed at [CDFW 2019-2020 Ocean Sport Fishing Regulations](#) November 6, 2019.