

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE BLUE RIBBON PANEL ON MARINE RECREATIONAL FISHING DATA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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BLUE RIBBON PANEL
ON MARINE RECREATIONAL FISHING DATA

The Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (TRCP) in 2010 convened a Blue Ribbon Panel (BRP) of nationally recognized experts on marine recreational fishing data to examine challenges associated with gathering and using such data. Through the support of The Walton Family Foundation, the BRP focused on potential solutions for consideration by appropriate federal entities and other interested groups.

Marine recreational fishing data have historically been difficult to gather in a timely manner and have not been of sufficient precision for practical use. In recent years, shortcomings regarding recreational fishing data at the federal level have led to increasing controversy, as management decisions have been made without timely and precise information regarding in-season recreational catch levels, thereby precluding the opportunity for any mid-season adjustments. The BRP believes current federal efforts to address marine recreational data, primarily through the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP), are insufficient.

The BRP recommendations address specific issues pertaining to recreational fishing data in the following areas:

- Timeliness,
- Quality and accuracy,
- Use of new technologies to address biases and spatial resolution issues and
- Angler engagement.

Timeliness is examined based on the critical need for identifying innovative and creative ways for federal marine resource management bodies to enhance timely collection and analysis of recreational catch data. Ideas examined in this section of the report include implementing recreational management plans with longer-term goals to recognize that catches may vary and exceed allowable levels in one-year timeframes. The BRP also recommends moving away from implementing the longest open seasons possible, given that this increases the risks for overages and early closures.

Recommendations regarding quality and accuracy of recreational data focus on ways to improve recreational fisheries statistics. In this section of the report, the BRP emphasizes the need to carry out prioritization, particularly when it comes to species, scientific uncertainties and biases in marine recreational monitoring programs. The BRP also lays out recommendations regarding catch-and-release mortality, standardization of trip definitions, quality control through cross validation with fishery independent data and complementary but independent sampling to compare with ongoing surveys.



The “new technologies” section centers on the need to reduce biases in recreational fishing data and their spatial resolution and explores this need with an eye toward using new technologies and methodologies. Among the ideas outlined by the BRP are enhancing the use of VMS systems in the for-hire fleet, expanding the use of commonly available technologies such as GPS and cell phones as the basis for improved data collection systems for private angling, expanding the use of voluntary tagging programs and increasing investments to collect flyover and satellite information to enhance understanding of the spatial distribution of recreational effort.

The final section on angler engagement in the data collection process focuses on ways to reach out to specific groups and individuals within the recreational fishing community. In this section, the BRP recommendations include developing and expanding partnerships with fishing clubs and other angler groups, blending scientifically designed studies with the use of volunteer anglers and the for-hire fishing fleet to conduct fisheries-independent surveys, and training experienced anglers (guides and others) as a potential higher-quality data layer.

Through this report and the ideas presented in the sections described above, the BRP seeks to help the federal government move toward a system that will improve accountability, enhance marine recreational fisheries management nationwide, allow for greater fish conservation and enhance the overall recreational fishing experience for everyone.

