



AMERICAN FLY FISHING TRADE ASSOCIATION

AFFTA Policy Statement on Federal Fisheries Policy and Management

The American Fly Fishing Trade Association (AFFTA) is the nation's largest fly fishing trade association and is dedicated to the sustained growth of the fly fishing industry. AFFTA's more than 900 members, including fly fishing retail stores, manufacturers, outfitters, guides, and lodges, are a part of the nearly \$900 million contributed annually to the U.S. economy by the fly fishing industry. Ours is a growing market. Between 2015 and 2016, net sales revenue of fly fishing products increased by 8.5%. In 2016, more than 4.5 million Americans went fly fishing at least once, and the number of anglers who fly fish is estimated at ten million.¹

AFFTA recognizes that abundant fish populations supported by healthy marine, coastal, and freshwater habitats are the foundation for a thriving recreational fly fishing industry. AFFTA pursues and supports policies that conserve and protect fisheries, fish habitat, and wild spaces. This ensures high-quality and plentiful recreational opportunities that create economic activity for our members and safeguards the industry's future.

Saltwater fly fishing is the fastest growing segment of our industry. To encourage continued growth and investment in saltwater fly fishing by our members, AFFTA supports state and federal ocean fisheries management that conserves and restores intact and thriving coastal and marine ecosystems, achieves responsible access to our marine fisheries, and is based upon the best available science.

Overview and Status of Federal Fisheries Policy and Management

U.S. ocean fisheries are managed under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA). This law has been successful in moving federal saltwater fisheries toward sustainability, although work remains to recover depleted fish stocks and to ensure overfishing does not occur.

The MSA was last amended in 2006 and is up for reauthorization this Congress. AFFTA believes reauthorization efforts should concentrate on maintaining and strengthening the law's conservation focus. In particular, AFFTA encourages MSA reform that increases protections for important habitats, considers the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification in fisheries management decisions, provides for ample forage fish populations, advances science-based tools and methods that foster more accurate and efficient data collection, and ensures adequate funding for managers to achieve the MSA's mandates. AFFTA opposes measures that would compromise the scientific and conservation principles currently in the law that have led to the recovery of many fish populations.

¹ Southwick Associates, Inc. Survey of U.S. Fly Fishing Retailers for the American Fly Fishing Trade Association, July 18, 2017, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sIDRkMq9GqwpS0dtEeZs3ALAYWO-2H35/view>



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AFFTA's Policy Positions on Reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act

Best Available Science – Fisheries management decisions must be grounded in the best available scientific information. This means ensuring science continues to guide fishery management decisions, such as setting annual catch limits, and crafting rebuilding plans. Data collection methods and tools similarly must meet rigorous scientific integrity standards.

Ending and Preventing Overfishing – Science-based annual catch limits and accountability measures are responsible for the nation's progress toward ending and preventing overfishing of marine fisheries and must be preserved. Exempting specific sectors or fisheries from catch limits or weakening accountability measures increases the risk of overfishing and leads to lower fish abundance and must be avoided.

Reasonable Rebuilding Requirements – Depleted fish populations significantly reduce angler opportunities and damage the angling experience. The reasonable rebuilding timelines under existing law currently provide managers with the flexibility needed to recover depleted fisheries and increase fishing opportunities. Extending rebuilding timeframes delays the attainment of abundant fish populations, limits angling opportunity, and reduces economic benefits to our industry.

Alternative Management Measures for Recreational Fisheries – Regional fishery management councils have the authority to use a wide range of appropriate management measures in recreational fisheries. Under existing law, these alternative management approaches must be consistent with requirements to implement annual catch limits and accountability measures. Permitting the use of alternative management measures that are not consistent with, or that replace catch limits and accountability measures, significantly increases the risk of overfishing and must be avoided.

Habitat Protection – Protecting the places where fish populations feed, shelter, and spawn – essential fish habitats – is fundamental to productive fisheries. The MSA must be strengthened to ensure essential fish habitats are protected from damage related to both fishing and non-fishing activities, as well as to ensure habitat resilience to rapidly changing atmospheric and oceanic conditions.

Forage fish management – Forage fish, or the smaller fish species that provide food for larger marine species, must be managed with the goal to maintain the ecological role of these species to ensure an adequate food source for other species in the food chain, including important recreational fish stocks.

Climate change and ocean acidification – Human-driven carbon emissions are leading to rising ocean temperatures and ocean acidification, which in turn are impacting fish populations and their habitats. Fisheries management must focus on how to factor in the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification to ensure fisheries management decisions maintain or increase resiliency of fish populations and their habitats to these stressors.



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Data Collection – MSA reauthorization should consider how to foster new and improved methods and tools to increase the accuracy and efficiency of data collection to better inform management decisions. Emerging technologies, such as smartphone apps that record catch in real-time, are promising tools that proactively engage anglers in the management of recreational fish stocks. It is vital that new methods and technologies are subject to peer-review and scientific integrity standards.

Allocation Reviews – AFFTA supports the periodic review of allocations in dual-use fisheries to ensure a fair distribution across jurisdictions, sectors, and gear types. Allocation reviews based on indicators (for example, changes in landings by sector) should account for practices in sectors intended to maintain healthy populations (e.g., catch & release in recreational fisheries), or to stay within quotas (e.g., conservation banking measures like those found in successful catch share programs), or to support research that advances responsible fisheries management. In no event would AFFTA support reallocation to a sector that has exceeded its annual catch limit.
