

**2015**  
**Southern New England**  
**Recreational Fishing Symposium**

*An Abundant Future For Recreational Fishing*

**March 24, 2015**

**Crowne Plaza Hotel, Warwick, RI**



Coastal Institute  
University of  
Rhode Island



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Saltwater Anglers  
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Report prepared by the  
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## Executive Summary

Recreational saltwater fishing plays an important role in Southern New England's ecology and economy.

Recreational fishing in Rhode Island has an annual economic impact of a \$208-million and supports over 2,000 full time jobs. But what most people do not realize is that according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), that although recreational fishing accounts for only 2% of the landings nationwide it has a far reaching and sustainable impact on our society. Recreational fishing represents over \$70-billion in economic output and 454,500 jobs compared to less than \$26-billion in economic output and 305,000 jobs for commercial fishing nationwide.

With this economic impact it is vitally important that the nation and Southern New England manage this resource to abundance so recreational fishing can continue to thrive in a highly sustainable way and continue to serve as a primary economic engine of growth.

Growing fish to abundance through ecosystem based management was the theme of the 2015 Southern New England Recreational Fishing Symposium. The Symposium brought together local, regional and national anglers, fish mangers and scientists to discuss the drivers that impact the fisheries, the ecosystem, and possible steps that can be taken to help impact the ecosystem is a positive way.

Participants were asked for their input on drives and positive steps that could be taken to improve the ecosystem to grow fish to abundance.

Three key directions for future action plan developed that came out of the Symposium included:

- 1. Focus on and advocate for forage fish** as they have far greater value in the water supporting the ecosystem and recreational fishing compared to directed fisheries (for example Atlantic menhaden and the role they play with striped bass, bluefish , etc. compare to fish processors).
- 2. Education** for the fishing community, political and government leaders, schools and children, as well as the public in general. Participants believed that just making people aware of the impact of recreational fishing on our community and our ecosystem and what impacts it in a negative and positive way will go a long way.
- 3. Advocate for fish abundance and ecosystem based management in conjunction with others...** like minded organizations, associations and partners need to come together to advocate for the ecosystem and recreational fishing to have greater impact and enhance desirable outcomes.

These challenges, possible action item goals and others are outlined in detail below and in the attached appendices. Overwhelmingly participants attending the Symposium praised the presenters and felt the topics discussed and people in attendance provided a productive exchange on the subjects of fish abundance and ecosystem based management.

## **Symposium overview**

What if our estuaries and coves were teeming with life: sea grass, shellfish, fin fish and more? What if we had an abundance of forage fish, traveling not only in our bays and rivers, but all along the coast? The fish we catch would thrive with an abundance of forage fish, including herring, Atlantic menhaden, silversides, bay anchovies and others.

This would lead to greater access to fish; an abundance of fish for shore anglers, as well as private and for-hire boat anglers.

This is the direction we need to explore and reintroduce into our environment and into fisheries management strategies.

Simply put, the 2015 Southern New England Recreational Fishing Symposium was about ecosystem-based management to create more fish for everyone.

There are many potential threats to the future of recreational fishing including restriction of shore access, changes caused by climate change, and improper or non-representative fisheries regulation. The 2015 Symposium followed up on some of the discussions from the 2013 Symposium in an effort to enhance the future of recreational fishing in Southern New England. In particular, the 2013 Symposium identified the importance of having fish populations at a level that common recreational fishers would have a high likelihood of catching fish. For this reason, the 2015 Symposium spent a significant amount of time discussing what can be done to ensure that recreationally important species are maintained at an abundant level in local waters that can be reached by recreational fishers.

## **Symposium Goals**

The goals of the Symposium were to:

1. Evaluate how Ecosystem Management may help to provide abundant fish stocks for access by Recreational fishers;
2. Look at how NOAA's NMFS "Counts Fish" and how that could be enhanced to better manage recreational anglers and support stronger re-building of fish populations;
3. Discuss NOAA's current development of a National Recreational Fishing Policy and Implementation Plan impacts ecosystem based management and how it can influence the Reauthorization of the Magnuson Stevens Act; and
4. How to continue to build an Action Plan that works toward a secure future for Recreational Fishing, which the Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association can promote with its membership and partners.

## **Symposium highlights**

*The PowerPoint presentations of each speaker is available to view online at [www.risaa.org/recsym2015.html](http://www.risaa.org/recsym2015.html)*

### **Richard Hittinger, 1st Vice President, R.I. Saltwater Anglers Association**

#### ***Symposium Director***

“The theme of the symposium is to grow recreational fish to abundance through ecosystem based management.” said Hittinger. “We need to protect and grow our recreational fishing resource in Rhode Island. According to NOAA it supports 2,000 full time jobs and has a \$208-million impact a year on Rhode Island’s economy.”

### **Greg Wells, U.S. Oceans Environmental Group, Pew Charitable Trusts**

#### ***What is Ecosystem Management?***

“Ecosystem-based fisheries management is a way to sustain the benefits people get from the ocean by accounting for the interconnections among marine life, humans and the environment.” That’s the way **Greg Wells** kicked off the 2015 Sothern New England Recreational Fishing Symposium.

### **Russell Dunn, National Policy Advisor for Recreational Fisheries, Office of the Assistant Administrator *Development and Implementation of the First National Plan***

“Nationally recreational fishing employs over 381,000 people and generates \$58- billion in annual sales impacts plays a major role in our economy,” said Dunn.

In his presentation Dunn presented highlights of the nation’s first Recreational Fishing Policy released this year. “The policy was developed to institutionalize NOAA’s commitment to recreational fishing, to guide the agency’s actions and foster accountability to recreational fishing stakeholders.”

### **Jonathan Hare, PhD., director of NOAA’s Fisheries Science Center Lab in Narrgansett, RI**

#### ***Impact of Climate Change on Ecosystem Management***

“Climate change and variability have been affecting fisheries for decades and will continue to affect fisheries for decades to come,” said Hare. He pointed to the migration of fish to the northeast such as summer flounder, black sea bass, cobia and a host of others likely due to warming northern waters.

“Climate change can have a negative or positive impact on fishing.” Some species will migrate into the area and others (cold water fish like winter flounder and cod) may migrate out of the area.

### **Jason McNamee, Supervising Marine Biologist, for the RI Department of Environmental Management *Multi-species Statistical Catch-at-age Model***

Jason presented a new multi-species statistical catch-at-age model on Atlantic menhaden, striped bass, bluefish, weakfish and scup. The study model is one of the first of its type in the northeast that he is working on with Dr. Jeremy Collie at the URI Graduate School of Oceanography.

McNamee’s model demonstrated the relationship between forage fish and predators. You could see the correlation between the supply of Atlantic menhaden (a primary forage fish in our area) and the abundance of striped bass. McNamee said his presentation “Puts their research in the context of existing work on this species complex (Atlantic menhaden, striped bass, bluefish, weakfish and scup) , and presents some of the preliminary results from the modeling framework.”

**Matthew Mullen and Brett Fitzgerald shared the next topic**  
***Supplemental Catch and Effort Initiatives***

**Matthew Mullen, Northeast Regional Director of the Environmental Defense Fund**  
***Where Anglers Count***

“For years my friends and I would do a list of fish we caught on our fishing outings. Years later we now use a modified version of the Snook & Gamefish Foundation’s smart phone software to record catch and effort data in the Chesapeake Bay area. It is gratifying that we are now contributing to the fishery by providing accurate catch and effort data to fish managers.”

**Brett Fitzgerald, Executive Director, Snook & Gamefish Foundation, Florida**  
***Voluntary Data Reporting by Recreational Anglers***

Brett’s presentation described a program where recreational anglers in Florida recorded their catch and effort electronically on “smart phones” to collect supplemental fishing data.

“Let’s get the application working,” said Fitzgerald as he hit a few buttons on his smart phone. He pointed into the audience and said, “OK now you’re a striped bass and you’re a bluefish. Let me know when you are caught.” Later in the presentation audience members yelled out “I’m caught.”, and then Fitzgerald recorded their length and at the presentation conclusion Fitzgerald shared the information on the trip.

Fitzgerald said, “The Snook & Gamefish Foundation, with support from biologists, statisticians and anglers, developed the angler survey called the **Angler Action Program (AAP)** which captured size and general location, along with other data points.” The Foundation supplied fish managers with the supplemental data helping them to make better fisheries management policy and regulation decisions.

**Kevin Friedland, Ph.D., NOAA Fisheries Science Center Lab in Narragansett, RI**  
***Protecting Forage Fish***

Dr. Friedland spoke about the importance of forage fish and its value to species recreational anglers often target compared to its value to a directory fishery such as the Atlantic menhaden processing industry.

**David Martins, Aquatic Biologist for the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection**  
***Current Status of MRIP Data Collection***

David highlighted on data that is being collected today with intercept surveys.

“The number of intercept surveys of anglers has been increased to enhance accuracy and MRIP is moving from telephone survey to mail surveys as they have proven to be more effective in a recent studies,” Martins said.

**Steve Medeiros, president of RISAA** said, “We plan to post Symposium presentations on our website along with the input received from participants on ecosystem drivers and challengers in Southern New England. Our hope is to tap Symposium participants one more time with a survey that will help us prioritize our RISAA action plan to grow fish to abundance using eco-system based management strategies. Additionally, we hope to explore a pilot project like the Florida initiative Brett Fitzgerald spoke about where recreational anglers record catch and effort on smart phones, tablets and computers, but we have to make sure fish managers here in Rhode Island and at NOAA will recognize our efforts and be able to utilize the data to supplement their data collection efforts.”

## **WORK GROUPS**

There were two work group sessions by attendees during the Symposia, one identifying ecosystem drivers and the second on possible solutions or actions that could impact drivers in a positive way.

The suggestions from each session were compiled. Following the symposium, all participants took part in an online survey to vote on the issues.

### **WORK GROUP 1**

#### **What are current and future drivers of change in the Southern New England fisheries ecosystem?**

The ecosystem drivers suggested by attendees are as follows (listed alphabetically)

Acidification	Invasive Species
Climate Change	Predators Out of Balance (cormorants, seals)
Enforcement	Regional Management
Fishing Pressure	Runoff & Pollution (salt/fertilizers, sewerage)
Forage Fish Abundance	Scientific Uncertainty
Forage Fish Management	Shifting Abundance
Habitat Degradation	Technology To Find Fish

### **ONLINE SURVEY VOTES #1**

#### **What are current and future drivers of change in the Southern New England fisheries ecosystem?**

##### **TOP TEN RESPONSES**

1. Forage fish management
2. Climate change
3. Fishing pressure
4. Habitat degradation
5. Predators out of balance (seals, cormorants, etc.)
6. Runoff (salt/fertilizers) and pollution (wewerage/septic systems)
7. Enforcement
8. Forage fish abundance
9. Regional management
10. Scientific uncertainty

## WORK GROUP 2

### **What can we do to influence ecosystem drivers in a positive way that leads to fish abundance and ecosystem-based management?**

The influence drivers suggested by attendees are as follows (listed alphabetically)

Accountability (everyone)	Forage fish, advocate ecosystem management
Advocate for conservation management measures	Get involved in fishing input meetings, like AP's
Build system to be involved	Less runoff (salt)
Catch reporting	Look at history of abundance
Clean up habitat (and restore)	More symposia to bring attention to issues
Consistent catch limits	Magnuson Stevens Act compliance, input to process
Develop clear goals and objectives	Organizations, coordinate
Educate the public and politicians	Organizations, use voice of
Education in schools	Protect spawning areas
Effectiveness of lean changers	Push for better data, MRIP
Enforcement, stronger	Reduce dragging/mid-water trawling

**The following Online Survey Votes will constitute an ACTION PLAN going forward.**

### **ONLINE SURVEY VOTES #2**

**What can we do to influence ecosystem drivers in a positive way that leads to fish abundance and ecosystem-based management?**

#### **TOP TEN RESPONSES**

1. Forage fish, advocate for ecosystem-management at councils and hearings
2. Educate public and politicians
3. Reduce dragging/mid-water trawling
4. Protect spawning areas
5. Clean up/restore habitat
6. Enforcement, promote stronger enforcement
7. Push for better data, MRIP
8. Advocate for conservation management measures
9. Catch reporting
10. Develop clear goals, get involved in fishing meetings, more symposia

**The post-Symposium online survey of attendees allowed random comments that will help plan future symposiums. They are listed in no particular order.**

- This was a great start. Public education via fishing clubs, tackle shops and fishing shows needs to be on the forefront!!
- They could limit the draggers on their by catch. The three states should all have the same limits.
- The symposiums was well design and executed.
- Reach out to Connecticut DEP marine fisheries. The resource of three states and the coordination of ideas in a focus theme would result in accomplishing monumental goals.
- Advocate for strong funding for state and federal agencies that are ultimately responsible for ocean stewardship and coordinate with them regularly.
- Separate the survey data by group. The regulators and NGOs have a different view of the fishery then the actual stakeholders (recreational and carter boat captains)
- The Florida guy's websites that monitor catches was beneficial
- Very well structured, diverse speaker expertise, breakout sessions needed more time to discuss topics.
- Was an outstanding event. Leaps and bounds better than the first symposium held.
- Prohibit winter striped bass fishing. Eliminate commercial netting to reduce fish by-catch.
- Invite council members that regulate our fish, they need the results of symposiums like this one
- Great symposium this year. I would like to see some data from the draggers. Pretty sure we would all be shocked.
- Become pro-active versus re-active
- The symposium provided a lot of knowledge. For charter captains, commercial and recreational fishermen to get behind this you need to enforce rules and get rid of gill nets and dragger. When I talk to charter and commercial that`s what they bring up.
- Having been in enforcement for almost 24 years I lean very heavy on education. Most people will follow laws and regulations if they know what the regs are and why they are necessary.
- I believe very strongly in the management of forage species. I believe the club has done very well working on the pogy in the bay issue, more in the same vain for other forage species must be next. Also, everything we can do to help educate the politicians, public (non fishing) and ourselves is also a must be done!!
- Symposium was well planned and speakers provided interesting information. I thought the thrust of the symposium, ecosystem management efforts to enhance fisheries abundance versus climate change, were somewhat disconnected.

- I thought the event was very well run and the right people were in the room.
- This symposium opened my eyes to many topics related to fish management. Most importantly ecosystem management. I look forward to working with you all in the future.
- Keep bringing people together. Open dialogue is key to progress.
- Thanks for being a New England leader, and setting the example.
- Symposium was excellent overall. It seems there is a need for more scientific data.
- Being a novice to fish management this was very informative and an eye opener. If these symposiums continue to be as informative as this one don't change a thing.
- It was very difficult to make the choice for question three. They are all so important.
- Very good symposium. Moved at a good pace, topics were engaging. Well done and thanks for having me.