

# **Rhode Island Saltwater Recreational Fishing License Program**

**Annual Report**

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## **I. Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to fulfill the requirements set forth by Section 20-2.2-10 of the Rhode Island General Laws. In accordance therewith, this report provides an overview of the Recreational Saltwater License Program for Rhode Island, offers a brief review of the status of state-based recreational fishing assessments, and sets forth a proposed FY12 programmatic budget, drawing upon the license fee revenues received since April 2010 and projected through June 2012.

## **II. Overview of License Program**

### **a. Background**

The State of Rhode Island enacted legislation in January 2010 establishing a new Recreational Saltwater License Program for Rhode Island. The program has two primary purposes:

1) It provides a state-based alternative to federal saltwater angler registry requirements, which are administered by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) pursuant to the 2006 Amendments to the federal Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Act (section 401(g)) (hereinafter referred to as the “Magnuson Act Amendments”).

2) It provides a source of state funding for programs and activities that benefit marine recreational fishing interests in Rhode Island.

The Magnuson Act Amendments mandate the establishment of a national registry program for all saltwater anglers, for use in conducting accurate marine recreational fisheries statistical surveys; those surveys serve as the backbone of marine fisheries management programs for the recreational fishing sector. In December 2008, NMFS promulgated the final rule creating the registry, and also established an option for States to develop their own state-based licensing programs as an alternative, provided that the state programs meet federal criteria.

The RI license fees -- \$7/year for residents (under age 65), \$10/year for non-residents, and \$5 for a 7-day license – are designed to both cover the administrative costs of the license program and provide additional support to programs and activities that serve the needs and interests of saltwater recreational fishermen in Rhode Island.

The statute establishing RI’s Recreational Saltwater License Program – RIGL Chapter 20-2.2 – was shaped and supported by a Recreational Marine License Study Group, co-chaired by the R.I. Department of Environmental Management and the R.I. Saltwater Anglers’ Association. The group included representatives from a variety of recreational fishing groups and interests from Rhode Island.

The statute includes a section titled *Accountability and oversight* (RIGL Section 20-2.2-10). Pursuant to that section, the RI Department of Environmental Management is charged with preparing an annual report that details the number of recreational saltwater licenses issued, the total amount of license fee revenue received, the expenditures made during the prior year from the license fee account, and how the Department plans to allocate and use the fee revenue during the next year. The report is also slated to include any additional, relevant information relating to the administration and enforcement of the licensing program, and the status of state-based recreational fishing assessments and stock assessments.

The statute calls upon the Department to submit the report to the Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council, and for the Department and Council to then conduct one or more public meetings to solicit input from recreational fishermen and the general public. The Council is then tasked with preparing an addendum to the report, setting forth its opinion on whether the licensing program is meeting its intended purpose, and offering any recommendations for modifying the program. The report and addendum are then to be submitted to the Rhode Island General Assembly.

#### **b. Status**

The RI Department of Environmental Management's Division of Fish & Wildlife, Marine Fisheries Program (hereinafter referred to as the "Division") developed the RI recreational saltwater license program early in 2010, and the program officially took effect on April 15, 2010.

As established by the statute, anyone wishing to recreationally fish or spearfish in the marine waters of Rhode Island must possess either a RI state license, a state license from a reciprocal state, or a federal registration. The requirement solely pertains to those harvesting, or attempting to harvest, finfish for non-commercial purposes. Exemptions are provided for the following categories:

- Children under 16,
- Anglers fishing on licensed party or charter boats,
- RI residents who are blind or permanently disabled, and
- RI residents who are on leave from active military duty.

RI residents over the age of 65, and active military personnel stationed in RI, are eligible to obtain RI state licenses at no cost.

The new federal registry requirements also pertain to for-hire vessels, requiring that they either register federally or be subject to state-based licensing. Pursuant to a previously enacted state statute – RIGL section 20-2-27.1 – Rhode Island requires for-hire vessels (charter and party boats carrying recreational fishermen) to obtain a RI party and charter boat license.

In the summer of 2010, the Division submitted the new RI recreational saltwater fishing license program, and the existing RI party and charter boat license program, to NMFS for review. On October 25, 2010, NMFS and the Division entered into an MOU, pursuant to which the Division agreed to regularly collect and transmit to NMFS the contact information generated by the two programs.

On the basis of NMFS' review and approval of the RI license programs, and the commitments set forth in the MOU, the State of Rhode Island was officially designated as an exempted state for all anglers, spearfishers, and for-hire fishing vessels on November 8, 2010 – enabling the RI recreational saltwater fishing license program, and the RI party and charter boat license program, to serve as a valid, legal substitutes for the federal registry.

During 2010, a federal registration was available at no cost. Beginning in 2011, NMFS enacted a \$15 annual fee for the federal registration.

Because the RI program did not take effect until April 15, 2010, and because the federal registration did not have a fee during 2010, it was difficult to assess the RI program, vis-à-vis participation and fee revenues, during its inaugural year. 2011 is a more telling year with regard to program status. To date, all license fee revenues not retained by the program vendors have been deposited into a restricted receipt account. There have not yet been any expenditures made from the account.

### **c. Benefits**

The key benefit associated with the new RI license program is that it provides a *cost-effective* alternative to the federal program. The \$7 (resident) and \$10 (non-resident) fees for the RI license compare favorably to the \$15 fee for the federal registration. The RI fees also happen to be lower than the fees charged by most other states. What's more, under the RI program, there is no fee for licenses issued to RI residents over the age of 65 and active military personnel stationed in RI. Under the federal program, the \$15 fee applies to everyone. Also, the RI program provides for a short-term (7-day) license at a reduced cost (\$5); no such opportunity is offered by the federal program.

In addition to being less expensive than a federal registration, the RI license has *broader applicability*. The Rhode Island license affords reciprocity, whereas the federal registration does not. Rhode Island resident license holders can fish in neighboring state waters without having to get a neighboring state license, and neighboring state license holders can fish in Rhode Island waters without having to get a Rhode Island license. Rhode Island license holders can also fish in federal waters without having to obtain a federal registration.

Rhode Island currently enjoys reciprocity with New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Maine. Pursuant to Rhode Island's licensing statute, Rhode Island will extend reciprocity to any other state that offers reciprocity to Rhode Island.

The federal and state registry and license programs are designed to improve the **quality and accuracy of marine recreational fishing data**. In turn, the improved data will help to ensure that state recreational fishing regulations, flowing from regional fishery assessments and management programs, are more effective, fairer, and based on sound science. Pursuant to the MOU signed between the Division and NMFS, all Rhode Island license data is now being entered into a new national database, enabling the new federal recreational fishing data management program, known as MRIP, to more readily survey recreational fishermen, spearfishers, and for-hire vessels and, thereby, more accurately assess recreational catch and effort data. Rhode Island recreational fishermen and spearfishers stand to directly benefit from such improved assessments, as the Division is better able to target assessments and tailor state regulations in a way that more effectively addresses the needs and interests of Rhode Island's marine recreational fishing community.

The new state-license and federal registry programs will also provide the first **full accounting of the scope the recreational saltwater fishing** and spearfishing in RI, and throughout the U.S., and will thereby help to more fully demonstrate anglers' and spearfishers' economic, conservation, and marine stewardship contributions.

The Rhode Island license program has been designed with a view to maximizing the **ease and convenience** of obtaining a license. Anyone with access to a computer and printer can obtain a license, on the spot, in the time it takes to enter one's name, address, phone number, birth date, and if applicable, credit card information. The license is also available at an increasing number of vendors throughout the state.

The statutory provisions governing the protection and use of the Rhode Island license fee **revenues provide significant benefits and opportunities** for Rhode Island's marine recreational fishing community. The license fee revenues cannot be used for any purpose other than administering and enforcing the Rhode Island license program, managing recreational fishing programs in Rhode Island, and improving recreational fishing access and infrastructure throughout the State. Conversely, fees generated by the federal registry are deposited into the U.S. Treasury and provide no direct benefits for recreational fishermen.

A modest portion of each Rhode Island license sold -- \$2 for every license sold online, and \$3 for every license sold via a vendor -- is dedicated to covering the administrative costs of the license program itself. In this way, the **program covers its own costs and is self-sustaining**. The balance of the revenues derived from license sales are deposited into a restricted receipt account, which is managed by the Department and subject to the exclusive-use restrictions noted above.

Thanks to the long-standing federal Sport Fish Restoration Program, which provides dedicated federal funding for marine recreational fishing programs, Rhode Island has an opportunity to leverage every \$1 collected via the Rhode Island license program with \$3 in federal funds, thereby strengthening the capacity of both programs to

work together to provide enhanced benefits and opportunities for marine recreational fishermen in Rhode Island.

#### **d. Implementation**

##### *Web-Based System & Local Vendors*

Section 20-2.2-7 of the statute establishing the license program authorizes and directs the Department to engage the contractual services of a state-approved vendor to develop and implement a web-based system that serves as the sole means for obtaining licenses. The vendor is also responsible for servicing authorized licensing agents who can vend licenses at their establishments.

As part of the initial program development stage, the Department entered into a formal agreement with Rhode Island Interactive (RII), which administers the Rhode Island state government web portal, known as RI.gov. Pursuant to the agreement, RII is responsible for developing and implementing the web-based licensing system. In close coordination with the Division, a webpage was developed that allows anglers and spearfishers to obtain a license, using a credit card for all fee-based licenses. The webpage is directly linked to a RIDEM website, known as **Saltwater.RI.Gov**, that serves as the focal point for the license program. The RII webpage serves as the means for both issuing licenses, and for collecting all of the relevant contact information at the point of sale for the national registry.

As an alternative to acquiring a license via the internet, anglers and spearfishers may also acquire a license at authorized vendors – namely, bait and tackle shops and other stores that sell fishing equipment. To date, there are sixteen authorized vendors (up from just seven vendors at the start of the 2011 fishing season); several more are expected to be added by the start of the 2012 fishing season. RII is responsible for handling the business arrangements with each vendor, and the vendors utilize the same web-based portal that the public uses for issuing licenses. RII handles all billing and remittance and also provides technical support. Vendors must pay an annual fee of \$75 to RII to cover service costs.

To cover the overall costs of administering the web-based license program, RII retains \$2 for each license sold via the internet. If a license is sold by a vendor, RII retains \$1 and the vendor retains \$2. Neither RII nor the vendors receive any compensation for no-fee licenses issued to RI residents over the age of 65 or active military personnel stationed in RI.

RII provides all angler contact information (name, address, phone number, date of birth – and if provided, email address) to the Division monthly via electronic transfer. The confidentiality of the data is protected via the use of encryption. The Division, in turn, provides the data to NMFS' MRIP program for incorporation into the national registry. RII also provides an internet-based reporting mechanism for exclusive use by the Department in accessing license status, angler counts, and revenue. Such access aides

the Department in the areas of law enforcement, fisheries management, and fiscal management.

### ***Information & Outreach***

The rollout of the Rhode Island Saltwater Recreational Fishing License involved considerable outreach to the Rhode Island angling community. As previously noted, the Division established a webpage – [www.saltwater.ri.gov](http://www.saltwater.ri.gov) –that provides direct access to the portal where licenses can be obtained. The page includes a detailed FAQ section, covering all aspects of the license program, as well as a link to all authorized license vendors, with their contact information. Also included on the page are links to Rhode Island’s recreational fishing regulations; the locations of all public boat ramps that provide access to marine waters in Rhode Island; and other information pertinent to recreational saltwater fishing in Rhode Island. A print-out of the [saltwater.ri.gov](http://www.saltwater.ri.gov) webpage is attached to this report.

The Division issued a major press release when the license program first went into effect, and has since issued periodic press releases reminding anglers and spearfishers about the program. See examples attached to this report.

The Division also developed a fact sheet, informational cards and brochures for dissemination at public events, such as the Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association annual fishing show. During the 2010 and 2011 shows, the Division joined forces with RII at a booth to provide information on the new license program, answer questions, and issue licenses on the spot. The shows offer a great opportunity to interact directly with the recreational fishing community, and the Division intends to maintain a presence at this show for years to come.

To help increase awareness regarding the license program in the field, the Division created weatherproof vinyl signs that were placed at fishing access points throughout the State. The signs feature an illustration of the license and clear text informing the public that the license is required and how it can be obtained.

### ***Free Fishing Day***

In accordance with the statutory allowance for one free fishing day a year, during which all license requirements are waived, the DEM Director declared a free fishing on Governor’s Bay Day in 2010. That declaration is intended to occur annually, although it was inadvertently missed in 2011. It will be resumed in 2012.



**e. Licenses Issued, Revenues Received: 2010-2011**

During the 2010 calendar year, a total of 15,697 Rhode Island Saltwater Recreational Fishing Licenses were issued, via both internet and vendor sales, resulting in \$98,040 in total license fee revenues. The portion of that total retained by RII and the local vendors to cover their administrative costs was \$27,137, resulting in a net deposit of \$70,903 into the license account. Table 1 provides a full breakdown of all licenses issued by type and source for 2010.

Table 1  
RI Saltwater Recreational Fishing Licenses Issued During 2010.

<b>License Type</b>	<b># of Licenses</b>	<b>Fee Revenues</b>	<b>Amount Deposited Into License Fund</b>
<i>Licenses Issued via Internet</i>			
Resident Full Year	7,707	\$53,949	\$38,535
Nonresident Full Year	2,845	\$28,450	\$22,760
Resident 7 Day	36	\$180	\$108
Nonresident 7 Day	795	\$3,975	\$2,385
Resident Over 65	2,353	\$0	\$0
Active Duty Military	378	\$0	\$0
<i>Licenses Issued by Vendors</i>			
Resident Full Year	643	\$4,501	\$2,572
Nonresident Full Year	583	\$5,830	\$4,081
Resident 7 Day	3	\$15	\$6
Nonresident 7 Day	228	\$1,140	\$456
Resident Over 65	109	\$0	\$0
Active Duty Military	17	\$0	\$0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>15,697</b>	<b>\$98,040</b>	<b>\$70,903</b>

A total of 38,224 Rhode Island Saltwater Recreational Fishing Licenses were issued during the 2011 calendar year, via both internet and vendor sales, resulting in \$249,746 in total license fee revenues. The portion of that total retained by RII and the local vendors to cover their administrative was \$56,852, resulting in a net deposit of \$173,002 into the license account. Table 2 provides a full breakdown of all licenses issued by type and source, to date, for 2011.

Table 2

RI Saltwater Recreational Fishing Licenses Issued To Date During 2011

<b>License Type</b>	<b># of Licenses</b>	<b>Fee Revenues</b>	<b>Amount Deposited Into License Fund</b>
<i>Licenses Issued via Internet</i>			
Resident Full Year	16,921	\$118,447	\$84,605
Nonresident Full Year	4,911	\$49,110	\$39,288
Resident 7 Day	108	\$540	\$324
Nonresident 7 Day	1,513	\$7,565	\$4,539
Resident Over 65	3,248	\$0	\$0
Active Duty Military	810	\$0	\$0
<i>Licenses Issued by Vendors</i>			
Resident Full Year	6,872	\$48,104	\$27,488
Nonresident Full Year	2,122	\$21,220	\$14,854
Resident 7 Day	17	\$85	\$34
Nonresident 7 Day	935	\$4,675	\$1,870
Resident Over 65	666	\$0	\$0
Active Duty Military	101	\$0	\$0
<b>Totals</b>			
	<b>38,224</b>	<b>\$249,746</b>	<b>\$173,002</b>

The tables illustrate that the majority of licenses are being issued via the internet: 90% in 2010, and 72% to date in 2011. The tables also illustrate that the breakdown of licenses issued to residents vs. non-residents was about 71% resident/29% non-resident in 2010; and about 75% resident/25% non-resident to date in 2011 (calculations exclude active military).

The tables also reflect a significant increase in licenses issued in 2011, over 2010. That increase is likely due to several factors:

- 2010 was the first year of the license program.
- The Federal Registry administered by the NMFS was free during 2010, but increased to \$15 in 2011.
- More anglers and spearfishers are becoming aware of the new license requirement.
- DEM Law Enforcement is conducting more compliance inspections, and issuing more citations to individuals who are caught fishing without a license.

It was anticipated that the total number of licenses issued during the 2011 calendar year would approach 38,000, and total revenues deposited into the license fund would approach \$175,000. A review of the data at the end of 2011 showed that these predictions were on target. It is further anticipated that the numbers of licenses issued, and the total revenues deposited, will continue to increase steadily each year, for at least the next several years.

### **III. Status of State-Based Fishing Assessments**

Rhode Island's recreational catch and effort data is currently collected via the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS). MRFSS houses this data in a database used for estimating catch and effort statistics related to marine recreational fishing. The data is collected by two independent, but complementary, surveys. Effort data are collected by random telephone sampling in coastal counties. Catch data is collected by intercept interviews with anglers at fishing access sites. Data from the two independent surveys is combined to produce estimates of fishing effort, catch, and participation. The number of fish caught in a particular time period and fishing area is estimated from the estimated number of fishing trips, and mean number of fish caught per trip. The Division has a contract in place with IFC Macro Inc. to carry out both aspects of the MRFSS. IFC Macro conducts both the phone and intercept surveys, relays the data for approval by the Division, and then provides the data to the MRFSS. The number of phone and intercept interviews and related statistics collected by IFC Macro during 2010 are displayed in Tables 3 and 4 respectively.

Table 3

RI Phone Interviews Conducted by IFC Macro during 2010 and Response Rates

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number of Calls</b>	<b>Percent of Calls</b>
<b>Non-Response</b>	<b>24,362</b>	<b>33.36%</b>
No Contact	19,551	26.77%
Contacted No Response	4,811	6.59%
<b>Response</b>	<b>48,662</b>	<b>66.64%</b>
Respondent ineligible	42,639	58.39%
Eligible Non-Fishing Households	5,677	7.77%
Eligible Fishing Households	346	0.47%
<b>Total Calls</b>	<b>73,024</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4

RI Intercept Interviews Conducted by IFC Macro during 2010 and Refusal Rates

<b>Months</b>	<b>Successful Interviews</b>	<b>Refused Interviews</b>	<b>Percent Refused</b>
March – April	46	9	16.4%
May – June	395	108	21.5%
July – August	527	415	44.0%
September - October	432	214	33.1%
November - December	100	54	35.1%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1500</b>	<b>800</b>	<b>34.8%</b>

Regarding the phone interviews, the strikingly low percentage of eligible fishing households reached –346 “hits” out of 73,024 attempts, or less than one-half of one percent -- clearly illustrates the shortcoming of the MRFSS, and the benefits to be derived by transitioning to the new system (MRIP) whereby calls will be made to known Rhode Island saltwater anglers, via the registry of licensees, rather than random calls to numbers from Rhode Island phonebooks.

Regarding the intercept interviews, note the relatively high refusal rate, as well as the fact that no intercept interviews were conducted in January or February. The new MRIP system is designed to improve the spatial and temporal distribution of interviews (e.g., conducting more at night, and during the winter months, and in locations other than major access sites and marinas), which will help to improve the precision of the estimates. That initiative, combined with a State-supported initiative to increase the number of intercept interviews conducted, promises to vastly improve the quality and accuracy of Rhode Island’s recreational catch and effort data.

#### **IV. Issues & Initiatives: 2011**

##### **a. Increasing the Number of Local Vendors**

Although the internet remains the most convenient means for obtaining a license for most people, it is apparent that a significant number of people would prefer to go to a local store or shop. Such individuals may either not have, or not be comfortable utilizing, a home computer and printer; or wish or need to pay for their license using cash.

As of the date of this report, there are sixteen local vendors authorized to issue licenses at their places of business (up from just seven vendors at the start of the 2011 fishing season). The locations of the sixteen vendors cover the major population areas of Rhode Island, including Block Island, but it is recognized that adding more vendors to the program will make it easier for more people to get their licenses, thereby helping to increase compliance with the program.

With a view to incentivizing more local businesses, particularly those that service recreational fishermen, to become vendors, the Division applied for and was awarded a grant from the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to administer a vendor-incentive program. Pursuant to the program, the Division is offering to loan computers and printers to any establishment that is willing to vend licenses for a period of five years. The project began in March of 2011. All bait and tackle shops throughout RI were mailed an announcement detailing the program and informing them of the opportunity to apply. Several have responded, and the Division is continuing to accept applications. The Division has enough funds to provide equipment for up to 50 vendors.

## **b. Developing Regulations for the License Program**

In April 2011, the Division initiated the process of enacting regulations for the license program. The Division intends to promulgate those regulations, pending the completion of this report. The draft regulations largely codify the key statutory provisions governing the license program, i.e.:

- Licenses are required for anyone who fishes or spearfishes recreationally in Rhode Island waters for finfish, with such activities defined;
- Licenses may include a valid Rhode Island license, a valid license from a reciprocal state, or a federal registration;
- Reciprocal states identified;
- Anglers and spearfishers must be in possession of a valid license when angling or spearfishing, or have it in close proximity; and
- Licenses are not required for anyone who is exempt, per the prescribed exemption categories; and where, appropriate, anglers and spearfishers who are exempt must carry applicable proof.

Additional provisions set forth by the draft regulations include:

- Licenses are required for anyone fishing for squid; and
- Licenses are not required for anyone holding a federal Highly Migratory Species Angling Permit, issued under the angler's name.

The draft regulations also included a provision requiring all license holders to carry a photo ID, but the Department has decided to drop that proposal, based on comments received at the public hearing.

## **c. Meeting with the Recreational Marine License Study Group**

On June 14, 2011, the Division held an ad-hoc meeting with the members of the Recreational Marine License Study Group – the Group that worked closely with the Division on the development of the original saltwater license bill. The purpose of the meeting was to review and get input on a draft budget for the saltwater license restricted receipt account. The draft budget presented to the Group was essentially identical to the one set forth in this report. The Group responded favorably to the proposal, which helped set the stage for this report. The Division is interested in reconvening the Group – perhaps under the new name of Recreational Marine License Task Force – on a regular basis for the purpose of obtaining feedback and input regarding the license program and issues associated therewith. Such a process would be in addition to, not in lieu of, the Council and public comment processes set forth by the license statute. The names and affiliations of the Group members are listed in an attachment to his report.

#### **d. Addressing Additional Options for Obtaining Licenses**

Although the internet and the increasing number of local vendors throughout the State offer convenient opportunities for anglers and spearfishers to obtain a license, it is recognized that there are still a large number of people who either don't own a computer and printer or don't have a convenient means of accessing a local library or local vendor. While this constituency may be a minority, it apparently constitutes a significant portion of the recreational fishing community in Rhode Island. If too many people perceive the process of obtaining a license as a roadblock, it will turn people away from fishing, which is clearly counter to the spirit and intent of the license program.

The Division is committed to exploring options that would make it easier for people without a computer and printer or a convenient means for getting to a local library or vendor to obtain a license. Such options could include a mail-in or call-in option. Either option would entail additional administrative costs, and it will be a policy decision as to whether funding from the budget for the license fee account should be redirected to cover the costs of a call-in and/or mail-in option.

Initial indications are that costs would range from approximately \$25,000 for a contract with a call center to approximately \$47,000 to hire an administrative clerk working out of the Division's office. While the call center option is appealing, given its relatively low cost, callers would not be afforded access to well-informed individuals, and so many if not most questions regarding the license program and recreational fishing in Rhode Island would likely have to be redirected to the Division. An administrative clerk, working directly for the Division, would be more well-versed on licensing- and marine fisheries-related questions and thus able to provide better customer service. Also, a clerk could process mail-in license applications as well. The major downside to the hiring of a new fulltime staff person is the relatively high cost, and the challenge of securing a new staff position within the very restrictive state government system.

#### **e. Allowing Volunteer Contributions to the Restricted Receipt Account**

There have been suggestions made that some anglers and spearfishers would welcome the opportunity to make an additional, voluntarily contribution to the restricted receipt account associated with the license program at the time they purchase their license. It is unclear whether this could be done without additional statutory authority, but if there is enough interest in the part of the Rhode Island recreational fishing community to pursue the initiative, the Division would be more than willing to further explore it.

#### **f. Streamlining the Online License Renewal Process**

Currently, license holders seeking to renew their license each year must re-enter all of their contact information. The Division is coordinating with RII in an effort aimed at streamlining the renewal process, namely, by having prior contact information recalled and re-inserted, with an onus on the licensee to verify that it is up-to-date and accurate.

Since phone numbers are the most important data field, the system may still require phone numbers to be re-entered every year, to help ensure that they are up-to-date and accurate.

## **V. FY12 Program Budget**

### **a. Preface**

As noted previously, in accordance with the provisions of the RIGL Chapter 20-2.2, all monies from the saltwater license fees are deposited into a restricted receipt account and can only be used for the following purposes:

- Administering and enforcing the Rhode Island license program;
- Managing Rhode Island's marine recreational fisheries, with particular reference to improving state-based recreational fishery catch and effort statistics and stock assessments; and
- Enhancing recreational fishing opportunities in the State.

The Division undertakes a range of programs that address and support recreational fishing interests in Rhode Island. Those programs are largely funded via federal sources, namely: the US Fish & Wildlife Service through the Sport Fish Restoration (SFR) Program; and grants received from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The SFR Program, which is derived from excise taxes on fishing and boating equipment and is structured as a user-pay/user-benefit program, is the bedrock, providing some \$2 million annually; however, that grant required a 25 percent non-federal match (i.e., nearly \$700,000). The annual NMFS funding amounts to about \$200,000. The Division receives a very modest amount of state general funds each year – approximately \$150,000 for all marine fisheries-related programs and activities. And there is only one other source of non-federal funding: that relates to recreational interests: the receipts from annual sales of non-resident recreational shellfishing licenses and recreational lobster fishing licenses (totaling about \$120,000/year).

The primary state programs pertaining to sport fishing fall into the following general categories:

- Fish stock assessments
- Recreational catch and effort estimates
- Management plans and regulations
- Boating and fishing access
- Artificial reefs and habitat protection/enhancement
- Public information, outreach, and education
- Enforcement

It behooves Rhode Island to utilize the revenues from the saltwater fishing license program in a way that a) is consistent with the licensing statute, b) addresses the priority



needs and interests of the recreational fishing community in Rhode Island; and c) maximizes opportunities and benefits by leveraging federal SFR funds.

## **b. Expenditures**

At the end of 2011, there was a total of \$243,905 in the restricted receipt account. That total includes the \$70,903 collected during 2010 and the \$173,002 collected to date in 2011. It is anticipated that the account will grow to at least \$250,000 by June 30, 2012, and so the proposed FY12 Programmatic Budget is based on that amount.

The Division recommends making the following expenditures during FY12:

### **1. Enhanced MRIP/MRFSS Data Collection (\$82,500)**

***Proposal.*** Expand the recreational catch and effort data collection program for Rhode Island (under the MRIP/MRFSS sampling umbrella) fourfold, to increase the overall precision of the State-based estimates and better enable mode-specific (e.g., shore-based) estimates. The \$82,500 investment will leverage an additional \$247,500 in federal (SFR) funds to provide \$330,000 in total programmatic benefits. The \$330,000 will supplement the existing contract Rhode Island has with Macro, which conducts the angler intercept surveys.

***Rationale.*** The MRFSS program, which is evolving into the new MRIP program, is the source for all marine recreational catch and effort fishing assessments. Data collected via the program is used to estimate catch (landings and discards) and effort by species/state/mode/wave. Estimates of catch and effort are used to develop status of the stock for all species, including striped bass, summer flounder, scup, tautog, bluefish, winter flounder, cod, black sea bass, and weakfish. In addition, indices of abundance using catch per unit of effort are incorporated into age-structured models to track abundance in comparison to other fisheries independent surveys. Estimates of catch and effort are quite variable due to sampling levels, which are directly correlated to the level of funding for each survey.

The marine recreational catch and effort fishing assessments yield fishery-dependent information which, coupled with the non-fishery dependent trawl and seine surveys, serve as the basis for marine recreational fishing regulations. The accuracy and fairness of recreational fishing regulations is directly related to the quality and precision of the assessments. What's more, to the extent that the Division can increase the surveys and sampling of fishermen in Rhode Island, the Division will have a better ability to tailor Rhode Island regulations in a way that best supports the interests of the Rhode Island fishing community. Of particular interest is the ability to pursue mode splits – e.g., differential regulations for shore-based fishermen versus boat-based fishermen. That can only be done if there is enough survey and sampling done of the two modes to enable relatively precise estimates of respective catch and effort.

The proposed enhanced data collection initiative will restore sampling to prior levels (2002-2005), and in conjunction with the vastly improved MRIP program, help to significantly boost the quality and accuracy of the data used to assess Rhode Island's marine recreational fisheries.

## **2. Boating/Fishing Access I (\$50,000)**

**Proposal.** Undertake improvements to the Galilee Boat Ramp. The \$50,000 investment will leverage an additional \$150,000 in federal (SFR) funds to provide \$200,000 in total programmatic benefits.

**Rationale.** The ramp in Galilee is one of the most popular and important ramps in the State, providing direct access to the salt ponds and south shore, as well as Block Island. The ramp is heavily utilized and in need of rehabilitation.

The Galilee ramp ranks high on the Division's list of priority boating/fishing access sites in need of upgrade or improvement, and is a worthy candidate for funding via the license fee account. In 2010, the Division completed work on one of the largest boat ramps in Rhode Island, the Mt. Hope Boat Ramp in Bristol. Three other projects are slated to be undertaken, under separate funding, beginning in 2012:

- New boat ramp at East Transit Road in Providence
- Improvements to ramp and parking at Marina Park Boat Ramp in South Kingstown
- Improvements to ramp and parking at Third Brach Boat Ramp in Middletown

Other boating/fishing access projects that are on the Division's priority list, and will be targeted for future funding, include:

- Goddard Park Boat Ramp, Warwick
- Weaver Cove Boat Ramp, Portsmouth
- Bold Point Boat Ramp, East Providence
- Pawtucket Boat Ramp, Pawtucket

## **3. Boating/Fishing Access II (\$25,000)**

**Proposal.** Enhance the Division's boating/fishing access site maintenance program. The \$25,000 investment will leverage an additional \$75,000 in federal (SFR) funds to provide \$100,000 in total programmatic benefits.

**Rationale.** The Division has over 60 state-owned and operated boating/ fishing access sites used by an estimated 28,000 boats that are less than 24 feet in length. The Division is responsible for maintaining these areas, but lacks adequate resources to undertake all of the work that's needed on a regular basis. The proposed allocation of funds from the license fee account, particularly when leveraged with federal funds, will

significantly boost the Division's ability to properly maintain state-owned boating/fishing access sites throughout Rhode Island.

#### **4. Recreational Fisheries Management Support (\$23,500)**

*Proposal.* Hire a new fulltime staff person in the Division's Marine Fisheries Program who will be responsible for coordinating a range of projects and activities that relate directly to priority marine recreational fishing issues. The \$23,500 investment will leverage an additional \$70,500 in federal (SFR) funds to provide \$94,000 in total programmatic benefits.

*Rationale.* The Division has never had a staff person dedicated to marine recreational fishing programs. The Division proposes hiring such a person, to focus solely on some or all of the following issues:

- Coordinating the overall license program, in concert with Rhode Island Interactive and local vendors; and serving as the conduit for data management between the program and NMFS, pursuant to the Division's MOU with NMFS.
- Coordinating recreational fishing assessments (i.e., coordinating the Macro contract per item #1 above); serving on the ACCSP's Rec Tech Cmte and monitoring the transition of MRFSS into MRIP; advancing Rhode Island's eRec logbook program
- Coordinating the development of marine recreational fishing management programs in Rhode Island; applying recreational fishing assessments to recreational management programs; developing mode-specific recreational fishing management programs and other recreational fishing alternatives for important ASMFC-managed species (e.g., bonus fluke for shore-based anglers; extended seasons for scup; increased bag limits for black sea bass).
- Serving as a principal point of contact for recreational fishing groups and organizations in Rhode Island.
- Assisting with the coordination of the Division's boating/fishing access program – including assessment, maintenance, and management of existing sites; pursuing grants to upgrade/improve existing sites and develop new sites; and conveying information on access opportunities to the Rhode Island recreational fishing community.
- Assisting with the coordination of Rhode Island's artificial reef program (per item #5 below)

#### **5. Artificial Reef & Fish Stock Assessment Support (\$50,000)**

*Proposal.* Support the development and implementation of an artificial reef plan for Rhode Island, and the continuation of finfish surveys in Rhode Island waters. The \$50,000 investment will leverage an additional \$150,000 in federal (SFR) funds to provide \$200,000 in total programmatic benefits.

**Rationale.** Two key programs funded via the federal SFR grant are the development and implementation of an artificial reef plan for Rhode Island, and the continuation of the Narragansett Bay trawl survey, and the juvenile finfish seine surveys conducted in the Bay and the coastal ponds; the latter being the most important annual finfish fisheries surveys in Rhode Island waters conducted by the Division. To date, these programs have been funded by the State's federal SFR grant, and matched entirely with commercial fishing license fee revenues. Given the importance of these programs to the recreational fishing community, it makes sense to use a portion of the recreational fishing license fees to cover the non-federal match requirements of the SFR grant pertaining to these programs.

## **6. Public Education, Information, and Outreach (\$19,000)**

**Proposal.** Conduct a public outreach campaign, pertaining to the license program, via radio and newspaper ads and use of social media. Also, develop a 2012 Rhode Island Recreational Fishing Guide, modeled after the guide that Massachusetts developed in 2011.

**Rationale.** Although compliance with the new license program has generally been good, it is clear that a large number of recreational fishermen and spearfishers remain unaware of the program, not only in terms of the need to obtain a license, but also with regard to the purpose of the program and the benefits it provides to the recreational fishing community. Since the primary purpose of the license program is to develop a comprehensive database of contact information for all recreational fishermen and spearfishers, it behooves the State to make a modest investment in a PR campaign, aimed at increasing awareness among the recreational fishing community regarding the license program, particularly during the summer season, thereby enhancing compliance and bolstering programmatic support.

In 2011, the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries published a 2011 Recreational Fishing Guide. The publication, done in a colorful and appealing magazine style, offers a wealth of information of interest to the marine recreational fishing community in the Commonwealth. While the Division continues to provide information to the Rhode Island recreational fishing community via the Division's website and an annual abstract that features recreational and commercial fishing regulations, the magazine would enhance the Division's ability to connect with and inform recreational fishermen, and serve to promote recreational fishing in Rhode Island. The Rhode island guide would help to inform fishermen on the issues associated with the licensing program and the benefits associated therewith – drawing upon some of the information set forth in this report – as well as other issues of priority interest to the community. The Guide produced by Massachusetts is partially funded via advertising, and that angle may be worth pursuing for the Rhode Island version as well.

## **VII. Looking Ahead to FY13**

It is reasonable to expect that the license program, and associated receipts received, will continue to grow at a modest pace over the next several years. As previously noted, the total number of licenses issued during the 2011 calendar year was 38,224, and total revenues deposited into the license fund for the calendar year were \$173,002. *For planning purposes, the FY13 Programmatic Budget is conservatively projected to be \$200,000.*

Among the issues that should be considered in future funding cycles is the importance of effective enforcement, both in terms of compliance with the license program and with recreational fishing regulations. Rhode Island's marine recreational fishing community has long supported sound, effective enforcement, and the recreational license program can serve as a vehicle for lending more support to the Department's Division of Law Enforcement.