

**Rhode Island Saltwater Recreational
Fishing License Program**

Annual Report

Fiscal Year 2015

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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 for FY15, offers a brief review of the status of state-based recreational fishing assessments, and sets forth the FY16 programmatic budget.

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 more 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 (hereinafter, the “Department”) 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 Department 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 Department's Division of Fish & Wildlife, Marine Fisheries Program (hereinafter, 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. In 2012, regulations were amended to have the requirements also include those harvesting, or attempting to harvest, squid. 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, spear fishers, 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. The annual cost has since increased to \$25.

Because the federal registration did not have a fee during 2010, it was difficult to assess the metrics of the RI program during its inaugural year. Since 2011, the program has equilibrated, providing more predictable participation and revenue rates. The average number of licenses issued since 2010 is approximately 42,000 per year, generating average revenues of about \$270,000. All license fee revenues that are not retained by the program vendor to cover administrative costs are deposited into a restricted receipt account.

c. Benefits

The overarching benefits of recreational license programs are their potential for improving recreational fishing management by:

- Allowing flexibility in the administration of the recreational license program to suit the needs of Rhode Island.
- Improving the quality and accuracy of marine recreational fishing data; and
- Providing an improved means for quantifying the scope of recreational saltwater fishing and spearfishing in Rhode Island, and throughout the U.S.

A key benefit of having the State of Rhode Island administer its own license program is the opportunity to make the license available at a lower cost than a federal registration. The \$7 (resident) and \$10 (non-resident) fees for the RI license compare favorably to the \$25 fee for the federal registration. Moreover, RI does not require state residents over the age of 65, or any active military personnel stationed in RI, to pay a fee for a license. RI offers a 7-day license at a reduced rate of \$5, available to both residents and nonresidents.

An additional benefit of having RI administer its own program is that the State program offers certain exemptions that are not available under the federal program –

namely, exemptions for RI residents who are blind or permanently disabled, and RI residents who are on leave from active military duty.

Another benefit of having a RI state program is reciprocity with neighboring states and federal waters. Pursuant to Rhode Island's licensing statute, Rhode Island will extend reciprocity to any other state that offers reciprocity to Rhode Island. Any resident from a reciprocal state who is licensed by that state can fish in RI waters without having to obtain a RI license, provided that a RI resident with a RI license can fish in the waters of the reciprocal state without having to obtain a license from that state. The states currently covered by a reciprocity agreement with Rhode Island are: New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Maine.

A portion of each Rhode Island license sold, \$2 for every license sold online, and \$3 for every license sold via a vendor, is used to cover the costs of administering the licensing program. 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 set forth by statute. Monies from the account may only be used for: 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 availability of this dedicated revenue source for use in supporting programs and activities that address the priority interests of RI's recreational fishing community is a major benefit associated with the RI license program. Of particular value is the opportunity to use the state funds to leverage federal funds.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service's Sport Fish Restoration Program provides federal funding for saltwater recreational fishing programs. The funding is administered via grants to the State; projects written into these grants require a 25% state match. The fees generated by the RI saltwater license program are used to leverage an additional \$3 for every \$1 dedicated to projects and activities that enhance recreational saltwater fishing access, as well as science and management programs that relate directly to recreational fish stocks.

d. Implementation

Internet 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 a portal to obtain licenses. The system developed by the vendor is used directly by recreational fishermen and by authorized licensing agents.

During 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 internet-based licensing system. RII followed through by developing and implementing a system that serves as the mechanism for issuing licenses, and for collecting all of the required contact information at the point of sale for the national registry.

The internet-based system is used by authorized vendors to provide a point of sale alternative for anglers and spear fishers to acquire a license. These vendors include bait and tackle shops, marinas and big box stores. To date, there are twenty-five (25) authorized vendors. RII is responsible for handling the business arrangements with each vendor, including billing, remittance and technical support. Vendors must pay an annual fee of \$75 to RII to cover these 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 the NMFS MRIP program for incorporation into the national registry.

Information & Outreach

Since the rollout of the Rhode Island Saltwater Recreational Fishing License, the Division has continued to provide information and outreach to the Rhode Island angling community. The primary vehicle is the webpage, www.saltwater.ri.gov, which provides direct access to the licensing portal. The page includes a detailed FAQ section, covering all aspects of the license program, a link to all authorized license vendors, links to 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.

Since 2013, the Division has contracted with a publishing company to create a recreational fishing guide for distribution throughout the state. The guide provides information on a variety of recreational-fishing-related issues, including current recreational fishing regulations, information on local fishing and boating access sites, and commonly caught species. It also provides information on the license program. The guide has emerged as a popular, widely circulated annual publication that serves to both promote recreational saltwater fishing in RI and inform the angling community.

The Division continues to issue periodic press releases regarding the license program and produce fact sheets, informational cards and brochures for dissemination at public events, such as the Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association (RISAA) annual New England Saltwater Fishing Show. The Division continues to man a booth at the show to answer questions about recreational fishing, and issue licenses. The show offers an ideal opportunity to interact directly with the recreational fishing community. Per the suggestion of our recreational saltwater license study group the division will provide more frequent updates to the RISAA and other interested parties on projects funded by recreational license funds. For example the division will report any boat ramp repairs or construction updates to RISAA to disseminate to their members. The group feels that it is important to increase public awareness of how the recreational saltwater license funds are being spent. Tangible results increase the perception of the program. To that end the division will also highlight these projects in its annual magazine. The group also suggested more communication between the division and the angling public to direct where access point maintenance is needed.

To help increase awareness regarding the license program in the field, the Division also continues to maintain weatherproof vinyl signs at fishing access points throughout RI. The signs feature an illustration of the license and clear text informing the public that the license is required and how it can be acquired. RI also continues to provide informational signs to vendors to advertise the availability of licenses at their places of business.

The goal of the saltwater recreational fishing license is to foster healthy diverse recreational fisheries which are easily accessible by the fishing public. By providing funds to promote better data collection and stock assessment, the license leads to better management programs which should ensure sustainable fishing in to the future. Robust fishing opportunities coupled with modern, well thought out, and convenient fishing access is ultimately the best strategy to increase awareness of the license to ensure that all Rhode Islanders are participating in the program equally. To this end the saltwater recreational license program will continue to direct funding towards these two aspects of recreational fishing.

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 continues to declare a free fishing day each summer. Since 2010, the free fishing day has coincided with Governor's Bay Day

e. Licenses Issued, Revenues Received: Fiscal Years 2011-2015

Tables 1-3 summarize licenses issued and fees generated since the inception of the license program. For the purposes of this report gross revenue is the total amount of fees paid to RIDEM for the saltwater recreational license. Net revenue is the balance of fees deposited into the restricted account after the administrative costs are paid to the

internet portal contractor. License numbers and revenues increased after FY11, as expected, as the federal registry switched from being a free alternative to being a more costly alternative. In the three years since FY11, license issued have plateaued at approximately 42,000 per year, generating an average gross revenue of about \$270,000, and average net revenue of about \$186,000. The number of licenses sold and revenue generated fall well short of initial predictions, resulting in a much more constrained budget than originally envisioned.

Table 1. RI Saltwater Recreational Fishing Licenses – Number Issued: FY11 through FY15

License Type	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15
Resident Full Year	18,658	26,556	25,864	25,938	26,084
Non-Resident Full Year	5,249	7,649	6,975	7,432	7,381
Resident 7-Day	60	122	107	144	134
Non-Resident 7 Day	1,310	2,505	2,730	2,958	3,055
Resident Over 65	3,635	4,613	4,653	4,667	4,704
Active Military Stationed in RI	703	993	996	1,055	992
Totals:	29,615	42,438	41,325	42,194	42,350

Table 2. RI Saltwater Recreational Fishing Licenses -- Gross Revenue: FY11 through FY15

License Type	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15
Resident Full Year	\$130,606	\$185,892	\$181,048	\$181,566	\$182,588
Non-Resident Full Year	\$52,490	\$76,490	\$69,750	\$74,320	\$73,810
Resident 7-Day	\$300	\$610	\$535	\$720	\$670
Non-Resident 7 Day	\$6,550	\$12,525	\$13,650	\$14,790	\$15,275
Resident Over 65	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Active Military Stationed in RI	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Totals:	\$189,946	\$275,517	\$264,983	\$271,396	\$272,343

Table 3. RI Saltwater Recreational Fishing Licenses -- Net Revenue: FY11 through FY15

License Type	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15
Resident Full Year	\$88,462	\$124,413	\$120,880	\$120,736	\$121,175
Non-Resident Full Year	\$40,702	\$58,566	\$53,340	\$56,970	\$56,682
Resident 7-Day	\$174	\$352	\$304	\$411	\$382
Non-Resident 7 Day	\$3,605	\$6,528	\$6,988	\$7,794	\$8,085
Resident Over 65	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Active Military Stationed in RI	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Totals:	\$132,943	\$189,859	\$181,512	\$185,911	\$186,324

III. Status of State-Based Fishing Assessments

Rhode Island's recreational catch and effort data is collected via the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). MRIP is designed to improve recreational data collection by using the data generated from license sales to create a national recreational angler registry and by employing new angler survey protocols. This registry of licensees is a known sampling frame that can be drawn upon to conduct more focused surveys. Addresses taken from the registry are used to assess fishing effort, i.e., the number of anglers and the number of trips they make in Rhode Island. Catch data is collected by intercept interviews with anglers at fishing access sites. This catch data is used to calculate the number, species, and size of the fish being caught by recreational anglers in Rhode Island. Data from the two independent surveys is combined to produce regional and coast wide estimates of recreational harvest. Results are reported in two-month periods called waves. No recreational data is collected in Rhode Island during wave 1 (January - February) due to low fishing activity.

Though the end of 2015, the Division has a contract with RTI International, the federally approved contractor, to perform the MRIP intercept surveys. ICF International is the federally approved contractor that conducts the effort survey. Throughout the year, the data collected by both contractors is presented to the Division for review; once approved by the Division, the data is provided to MRIP. The number of effort and intercept interviews and related statistics collected by ICF International and RTI International are displayed, by calendar year, in Tables 4 - 6 respectively. Note that the data is presented by calendar year, not fiscal year, and that 2015 phone data is only for waves 2-3.

To date, the effort data has been collected by random telephone surveys to households in coastal communities. However, successful interview rates have been dropping over the past four years, despite large increases in sample size. This trend is a main driving force behind the planned switch to an alternative mail-based methodology. MRIP has completed pilot research projects in several states evaluating the mail-based survey methodology. Preliminary results show that the response rates are higher and survey answers are more comprehensive using this methodology. The program is expected to fully transition soon.

Collection of catch data via angler intercepts has also been improving over the past two years, due to the new approaches employed under MRIP. The number of successful interviews is increasing, as is the spatial and temporal distribution of the interviews. A more comprehensive sampling frame of potential sampling locations with accompanying site pressures is being used to better distribute the interviews. Better statistical sample distribution is expected to increase the accuracy of the estimate. Additionally, interviews are now being conducted at night and at an increasing rate during the winter months. Intercept refusal rates have been decreasing, likely due to increased outreach activities by NOAA Fisheries and the Division, as well as the recent

change in contractors used to conduct the intercepts. The professionalism of the (now uniformed) employees working for the new contractor is noticeably improved.

As an add-on to the above-described improvements, the Division is increasing the number of angler intercepts across all months using revenues from RI's recreational license program matched 3:1 with federal grant money. The funds are being used to purchase more interviews from the contractor. The Division plans to continue this practice into the foreseeable future. This state-specific increase in sample numbers is expected to further increase the accuracy and precision of recreational catch and effort data for RI. Currently the division accomplishes the increased sample size by purchasing 85 additional interviews from RTI each year. This methodology will change in 2016.

The Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS) is being transitioned from contractor-based administration to state-based administration. Beginning in 2016, the Division will be responsible for overseeing the surveys. Recreational saltwater license funds are not being used to make this transition; it is a federally funded initiative. Agreements have been forged between NOAA Fisheries and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) outlining the duties and responsibilities the Division must accomplish to successfully transition and run the program. To accomplish this transition the Division will hire a full time Coordinator to administer the program. This MRIP coordinator will be responsible for maintaining and scheduling a staff of personnel who will conduct angler intercepts throughout RI. In addition to staffing duties, the coordinator will be responsible for disseminating data collected to the Atlantic Coast Cooperative Statistics Survey (ACCSP). ACCSP is part of ASMFC and will be coordinating the collection of data from state partners for delivery to NOAA Fisheries. The Division will hire two full time field interviewers to perform angler intercepts during waves 2 -6 throughout RI. These full time employees will travel to shore based sites as well as ride on board head boats to collect angler interviews and measurements of recreational catch. Temporary field interviewers will also be hired during waves 3-5 which are the most active fishing periods. As in the past saltwater license funds will be used after the transition to increase the number of interviews beyond the base number funded by NOAA Fisheries, in much the same way as they are now. After the Division takes over the survey, these additional interviews will be accomplished by hiring additional samplers during peak fishing waves. NOAA Fisheries will provide funding for two temporary samplers each year, the Division will hire an additional two temporary samplers using RI saltwater angler license fees matched 3:1 with USFWS grant money. It is estimated that the two additional temporary samplers will accomplish the same number of additional samples (likely more) that were purchased directly from the contractor in the past. After the first year the effectiveness of the two additional hires will be evaluated and if needed more temporary samplers will be hired in future years. The Division intends to build on the recent improvements to the survey and anticipates better data collection and more accurate information will be the result of the change.

Table 4. RI phone Surveys conducted by ICF International: 2011 through 2015

Category	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015 (W 2 – 3)
Successful Phone Interviews	254	244	252	222	49
Total Phone Calls	72834	74753	90769	108055	6654

Table 5. 2014 RI Phone Interviews Conducted by ICF International

Disposition	WAVE 2		WAVE 3		WAVE 4		WAVE 5		WAVE 6		TOTAL	
	#	% of total	#	% of total	#	% of total	#	% of total	#	% of total	#	% of total
Total Numbers Attempted	6089	5.64%	23774	22.00%	43411	40.17%	24798	22.95%	9983	9.24%	108055	100.00%
Non-Response	4689	77.00%	18669	78.50%	34888	80.40%	19346	78.00%	7691	77.00%	85283	78.93%
No Contact	4397	72.20%	17494	73.60%	32982	76.00%	18175	73.30%	7092	71.00%	80140	74.17%
Busy	24	0.40%	78	0.30%	671	1.50%	63	0.30%	204	2.00%	1040	0.96%
No Answer	645	10.60%	5461	23.00%	15331	35.30%	857	3.50%	1087	10.90%	23381	21.64%
Not Available for Screening	3620	59.50%	11345	47.70%	16354	37.70%	17087	68.90%	5650	56.60%	54056	50.03%
Answering Machine	108	1.80%	610	2.60%	626	1.40%	168	0.70%	151	1.50%	1663	1.54%
Contacted Non-Respondents	292	4.80%	1175	4.90%	1906	4.40%	1171	4.70%	599	6.00%	5143	4.76%
Language Problem	15	0.20%	95	0.40%	95	0.20%	72	0.30%	37	0.40%	314	0.29%
Refused	277	4.50%	1080	4.50%	1811	4.20%	1099	4.40%	562	5.60%	4829	4.47%
Response	1400	23.00%	5105	21.50%	8523	19.60%	5452	22.00%	2292	23.00%	22772	21.07%
Respondent Ineligible	1048	17.20%	4100	17.20%	7110	16.40%	4347	17.50%	1833	18.40%	18438	17.06%
Failed Prescreening	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Not in Service	524	8.60%	2168	9.10%	4105	9.50%	2328	9.40%	944	9.50%	10069	9.32%
Business Phone	462	7.60%	1723	7.20%	2621	6.00%	1822	7.30%	784	7.90%	7412	6.86%
Wrong Number	0	0.00%	3	0.00%	2	0.00%	3	0.00%	1	0.00%	9	0.01%
Wrong County	38	0.60%	116	0.50%	245	0.60%	138	0.60%	78	0.80%	615	0.57%
Not Permanent Resident	24	0.40%	90	0.40%	137	0.30%	56	0.20%	26	0.30%	333	0.31%
Eligible Non-Fishing Households	347	5.70%	959	4.00%	1318	3.00%	1036	4.20%	452	4.50%	4112	3.81%
No Fishing Last 12 Months	312	5.10%	926	3.90%	1279	2.90%	978	3.90%	417	4.20%	3912	3.62%
No Fishing Last 2 Months	32	0.50%	33	0.10%	36	0.10%	56	0.20%	34	0.30%	191	0.18%
First-Time Contact/Non-Fishing	3	0.00%	0	0.00%	3	0.00%	2	0.00%	1	0.00%	9	0.01%
Eligible Fishing Households	5	0.10%	46	0.20%	95	0.20%	69	0.30%	7	0.10%	222	0.21%

Table 6. 2015 RI Phone Interviews Conducted by ICF International

Disposition	WAVE 2		WAVE 3		WAVE 4		WAVE 5		WAVE 6		TOTAL	
	#	% of total	#	% of total	#	% of total	#	% of total	#	% of total	#	% of total
Total Numbers Attempted	5884	19.22%	24737	80.78%							30621	
Non-Response	4542	77.20%	19425	78.50%							23967	78.27%
No Contact	4267	72.50%	18332	74.10%							22599	73.80%
Busy	13	0.20%	188	0.80%							201	0.66%
No Answer	513	8.70%	7390	29.90%							7903	25.81%
Not Available for Screening	3701	62.90%	8672	35.10%							12373	40.41%
Answering Machine	40	0.70%	2082	8.40%							2122	6.93%
Contacted Non-Respondents	275	4.70%	1093	4.40%							1368	4.47%
Language Problem	26	0.40%	38	0.20%							64	0.21%
Refused	249	4.20%	1055	4.30%							1304	4.26%
Response	1342	22.80%	5312	21.50%							6654	21.73%
Respondent Ineligible	1010	17.20%	4380	17.70%							5390	17.60%
Failed Prescreening	0	0.00%	0	0.00%							0	0.00%
Not in Service	523	8.90%	2364	9.60%							2887	9.43%
Business Phone	450	7.60%	1819	7.40%							2269	7.41%
Wrong Number	1	0.00%	1	0.00%							2	0.01%
Wrong County	30	0.50%	126	0.50%							156	0.51%
Not Permanent Resident	6	0.10%	70	0.30%							76	0.25%
Eligible Non-Fishing Households	330	5.60%	885	3.60%							1215	3.97%
No Fishing Last 12 Months	296	5.00%	826	3.30%							1122	3.66%
No Fishing Last 2 Months	33	0.60%	58	0.20%							91	0.30%
First-Time Contact/Non-Fishing	1	0.00%	1	0.00%							2	0.01%
Eligible Fishing Households	2	0.00%	47	0.20%							49	0.16%

Table 7. 2010 – 2014 RI Intercept Interviews Conducted by RTI International.

Months	Total Interviews	Successful Interviews	Refused Interviews	Percent Refused
2010				
March – April	55	46	9	16.40%
May – June	503	395	108	21.50%
July – August	942	527	415	44.00%
September - October	646	432	214	33.10%
November - December	154	100	54	35.10%
Totals	2300	1500	800	34.80%
2011				
March – April	46	35	11	23.91%
May – June	358	273	85	23.74%
July – August	554	428	126	22.74%
September - October	426	323	103	24.18%
November - December	204	163	41	20.10%
Totals	1588	1222	366	23.05%
2012				
March – April	79	65	14	17.72%
May – June	364	285	79	21.70%
July – August	935	716	219	23.42%
September - October	761	598	163	21.42%
November - December	147	124	23	15.65%
Totals	2286	1788	498	21.78%
2013				
March – April	6	6	0	0.00%
May – June	391	285	106	27.11%
July – August	1154	1022	132	11.44%
September - October	525	496	29	5.22%
November - December	115	112	3	2.61%
Totals	2191	1921	270	14.06%
2014				

March – April	12	11	1	8.33%
May – June	817	624	193	23.62%
July – August	1641	1167	474	28.88%
September - October	870	672	198	22.76%
November – December	26	22	4	15.38%
Totals	3366	2496	870	25.85%

IV. Issues & Initiatives

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 portion of the population continues to prefer to obtain a license, in-person, at a local store or shop. Such individuals may either not have, or not be comfortable using, a home computer and printer. Or they may have the need to pay for their license using cash, instead of a debit or credit card.

To date, there are twenty-five local vendors authorized to issue licenses at their places of business. This is up from just seven vendors at the start of the 2011 fishing season. The locations of the twenty-five vendors cover the major population areas of Rhode Island, including Block Island. Increasing the number of vendors should remain a top priority, since adding more vendors to the program will make it easier for more people to get their licenses, thereby enhancing compliance.

The Division applied for and was awarded a grant from the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to administer a vendor-incentive program. The program has been up and running since 2011. Pursuant to the program, the Division loans computers and printers to any establishment that agrees to vend licenses for a period of five years. The Division has enough funds to provide equipment for up to 50 vendors. This grant ends in November of 2015. The Division will continue to distribute computers as long as supplies last.

b. Developing Regulations for the License Program

In 2010 the Division developed and enacted comprehensive regulations for the recreational license program. The regulations largely codify the key statutory provisions governing the license program. The Division tracks recreational fishing issues and strives to keep pace with advances in technology as it pertains to fishing licenses and will amend regulations if needed to address current issues. At this time no new regulations are proposed.

c. Meeting with the Recreational Saltwater License Study Group

The Division plans to continue meeting annually with the Recreational Saltwater License Study Group. This ad-hoc group worked closely with the Division on the development of the original saltwater recreational license bill. The purpose of these annual meetings is to review and get input on the status of the overall license program, as well as the draft budget for the saltwater license restricted receipt account. These meetings are in addition to, not in lieu of, the Council and public comment processes set forth by the license statute.

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 spear fishers to obtain a license, it is recognized that there are still a large number of people who either do not own a computer and printer or do not have a convenient means of accessing a local library or local vendor. While this constituency may be a minority, it constitutes a meaningful portion of the recreational fishing community in Rhode Island. If too many people perceive the process of obtaining a license as too difficult or inconvenient, it may have the effect of turning people away from fishing, which is clearly counter to the spirit and intent of the license program. The Division is open to exploring options to make it easier for people to obtain a license, e.g., mail-in or call-in options. However, the additional costs for administering such options would have to be assessed and budgeted. There are no proposals for development of additional options to obtain a fishing license at this time.

e. Allowing Volunteer Contributions to the Restricted Receipt Account

It has been suggested that some anglers and spear fishers 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, it can be pursued. Examples of voluntary methods for contribution include license plate programs and elections on state tax forms. There are no proposals to develop additional means of acquiring voluntary contributions at this time.

f. Streamlining the Online License Renewal Process

The Division has continued to coordinate with RII in an effort to streamline 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. Phone numbers remain an important data field, the system still requires phone numbers to be re-entered every year, to help ensure that they are up-to-date and accurate. The future of MRIP's methods is still unclear and will likely shift to a mail based survey. This change will make the address of the applicant the key data element. It is unclear if the telephone number will become self-populated from previous license data after the switch is made to the mail survey, it will still be required.

g. Compliance

As mentioned above the number of licenses issued for the past three years has plateaued at approximately 42,000. Estimates for the number of potential licenses have proven to be highly unreliable; it can be assumed that the past three years are more representative of future license sales. It is important to know how closely the number of license tracks the actual number of anglers in order to assess the effectiveness of the saltwater license program. RIDEM Division of Law Enforcement (DLE) conducts field

checks of the recreational license to ensure compliance with the saltwater license requirement with good results. In 2014, they conducted 1,161 recreational saltwater license checks resulting in 60 citations and 120 warnings of noncompliance. These results indicate an approximate 85% compliance rate with the saltwater license program. DLE states that this is similar to rates seen by other regional law enforcement agencies. While 85% is a good compliance rate it still remains necessary to promote a high level of awareness to the saltwater license program to keep noncompliance in check and foster steady participation with the program in the future.

The Division will continue working to increase compliance as well as prevent license sales from eroding. Several ideas provided by the Saltwater Recreational License advisory group will be pursued to this end. The Division collects email addresses from license applicants; these email addresses will be used in the future to send an electronic reminder to renew their licenses annually. It is generally accepted that the frequent recreational angler is aware of the recreational license requirement; a lack of compliance likely exists in the casual angling population. To address this compliance gap the Division expanded its distribution of its saltwater fishing magazine to more diverse locations such as popular tourist hotels and attractions. Additionally, the Division will reach out to the office of Boating Registration to include a reminder to get a fishing license and link to www.saltwater.ri.gov on boating registration forms.

V. Expenditures and Budget

a. Preface

As noted previously, in accordance with the provisions of the RIGL Chapter 20-2.2, all funds from the saltwater license fees are deposited into a restricted receipt account that can only be used for the purposes list below.

- 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.

It is important to note that this account does not need to be spent down every year. License revenue that is not spent remains in the account and is available for projects the following year and into the future. If designated funds are not spent in any given category they are kept in that category for the next budget cycle.

The Division undertakes a range of programs that address and support recreational fishing interests in Rhode Island. These programs are largely funded via a federal grant administered by the US Fish & Wildlife Service's Sport Fish Restoration (SFR) Program. The SFR Program is derived from excise taxes on fishing and boating equipment, and is structured as a user-pay/user-benefit program. The SFR program is the

primary source of funding for recreational fishing programs in Rhode Island, providing some \$2 million annually. SFR grants require a 25 percent non-federal match.

The primary RIDEM programs pertaining to recreational fishing fall into the following general categories:

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

In developing annual budgets for the recreational saltwater license account, RIDEM draws upon the following guidelines: projects must be consistent with the licensing statute; address the needs and interests of the recreational fishing community in Rhode Island; and maximize opportunities and benefits by leveraging federal SFR funds whenever possible.

b. FY15 Expenditures

During the 2015 fiscal year, a total of \$209,433 was spent on the Rhode Island Marine Recreational Fishing Program (Table 8). This amount is down from the \$298,397 expended in FY2014. Of that total:

- \$113,915 was used for personnel and equipment costs in support of the Division's finfish surveys for stock assessments;
- \$33,133 was used for the management of the Marine Recreational Fisheries Program;
- \$7,141 was used to support the Division's boating/fishing access site maintenance program;
- \$15,933 was spent on major repairs to Bold Point and Oakland Beach boat ramps;
- \$4,321 was used for public education, information, and outreach, including production of the second annual Rhode Island Recreational Saltwater Fishing Guide; and
- \$35,000 was used for the purchase of additional MRIP intercept interviews.

Table 8. FY2015 Recreational Saltwater License Program budget.

Category	FY14 Carryover	FY15 Revenue	FY 15 Available	FY15 Budgeted	FY15 Expended
Enhanced MRIP Data Collection	\$177,675	\$27,887	\$205,562	\$24,000	\$35,000
Boating/Fishing Access I	\$42,964	\$37,182	\$80,146	\$75,000	\$15,933
Boating/Fishing Access II	\$2,756	\$18,591	\$21,347	\$18,000	\$7,141
Rec Fisheries Support	\$30,919	\$18,591	\$49,510	\$27,000	\$33,133
Fish Stock Assessment Support	(\$48,308)	\$65,069	\$16,761	\$105,450	\$113,915
Artificial Reef	\$7,389	\$9,296	\$16,685	\$0	\$0
Public Education, Information, and Outreach	\$29,934	\$9,296	\$39,230	\$5,000	\$4,321
TOTAL	\$243,329	\$185,911	\$429,240	\$254,450	\$209,433

c. FY15 Budget

The budget for FY2016 is described in Table 9. It is anticipated that the restricted receipt account will receive another \$180,000 from FY15 license sales, and the proposed FY15 Programmatic Budget, as set forth below, is based on that amount. In the interest of going forward with a more balanced budget, enhanced MRIP data collection and Public Education, Information and Outreach categories will not receive any revenue for FY2016. The expenditures in these account categories will still be actively budget, the expenses will be draw from the current existing balance in the account. This will allow over drawn categories to recover.

Table 9. FY2016 Recreational Saltwater License Program budget.

Category	FY15 Carryover	FY16 Revenue	FY16 Available	FY16 Budgeted	FY16 Expended
Enhanced MRIP Data Collection	\$170,562	\$0	\$170,562	\$24,000	
Boating/Fishing Access I	\$64,213	\$36,000	\$100,213	\$75,000	

Boating/Fishing Access II	\$14,206	\$18,000	\$32,206	\$18,000	
Rec Fisheries Support	\$16,377	\$18,000	\$34,377	\$30,000	
Fish Stock Assessment Support	(\$97,154)	\$108,000	\$10,846	\$105,450	
Artificial Reef	\$16,685	\$0	\$16,685	\$0	
Public Education, Information, and Outreach	\$34,909	\$0	\$34,909	\$5,000	
TOTAL	\$219,807	\$180,000	\$399,807	\$257,450	

1. Enhanced MRIP Data Collection (\$24,000)

Proposal. Continue to expand the recreational catch and effort data collection program for Rhode Island (under the MRIP sampling umbrella) by providing funding for add-on intercept surveys to increase the overall precision of the State-based estimates and better enable mode-specific (e.g., shore-based) estimates. The \$24,000 investment will leverage an additional \$72,000 in federal (SFR) funds to provide \$96,000 in total programmatic benefits. The \$96,000 will allow the Division to continue ordering additional add-on interviews from the APAIS contractor (RTI) in the short term until the transition to the Division’s running of the program. There will be 85 total; 40 for private/rental mode, 40 for shore mode, and 5 for Party/Charter mode per calendar year.

When the transition of the APAIS occurs the Division will hire additional seasonal interviewers during the high fishing months to collect more interviews. These employees will be in addition to the base number of interviewers to be hired with federal funding by the Division to conduct the survey. This significant change in doing business makes the additional interviewers the method of adding extra interviews. The ACCSP recreational technical committee, which is providing oversight for the state takeover of the shore based interviews, estimates that a single interviewer represents 20 shifts (shift = 6 hours) dedicated to interviews per month. By this logic hiring two additional seasonal interviewers should effectively add on approximately 240 shifts. This year as in the past, the Division has purchased 85 additional interviews from the contractor. Although it is unclear what the average number of interviews per shift will be, even if it is as low as one per shift, it will increase the number of interviews almost three fold. Hiring interviewers directly will not only increase the number of add on interviews but will also be less expensive.

Rationale. The MRIP program is the major source for 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 fishery independent 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. Better accuracy and precision will lead to a better understanding of fishing activities by mode. This information is paramount if the Division is to pursue mode splits such as differential regulations for shore-based fishermen versus boat-based fishermen. Mode specific regulations require adequate survey and sampling of the two modes to enable relatively precise estimates of respective catch and effort.

It is unclear as to how the transition to a state run recreational sampling program will affect the number of interviews. The proposed enhanced data collection initiative will continue to attempt to maintain sampling to prior levels (2002-2005). An assessment of how many added interviews are derived by the hiring of additional interviewers will be conducted at the end of the year to determine whether the number of additional hires is sufficient to acquire the desired interviews. Additional interviews combined with perceived benefits of a state run recreational sampling program should 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 (\$75,000)

Proposal. Improvements to Goddard State Park Boat Ramp

Rationale. The ramp at Goddard State Park is one of the most popular and important ramps in western Narragansett Bay, providing direct access to lots of great fishing and boating. The ramp is heavily utilized and in need of rehabilitation.

The Goddard State Park 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 addition to the Goddard State Park ramp, the fishing pier at Rocky Point, will also benefit from recreational licensing fees once that project starts. Other minor projects can be funded from this category when the need arises. In FY2015 funds from this category were used to make emergency repairs to the Bold Point and Oakland Beach boat ramps where a safety issue had to be addressed. Using \$75,000 in licensing to leverage \$225,000 in SFR funds frees up \$300,000 to be used on these selected projects expediting the public access program as a whole.

3. Boating/Fishing Access II (\$18,000)

Proposal. Continue to support the Division’s boating/fishing access site maintenance program. The \$18,000 investment will leverage an additional \$54,000 in federal (SFR) funds to provide \$72,000 in total programmatic benefits.

Rationale. The Division is responsible for maintaining 60 state-owned and operated boating/ fishing access sites used by an estimated 28,000 boats that are less than 24 feet in length. In order to foster compliance and repeat participation in the recreational saltwater license program, it is as important to keep our public access points clean and functional as it is to build new ones. The Division lacks adequate resources to undertake all of the work that’s needed to maintain these sites on a regular basis. The allocation of these funds from the license fee account, leveraged with federal funds, supports the Division’s ability to properly maintain state-owned boating/fishing access sites throughout Rhode Island.

4. Recreational Fisheries Management Support (\$30,000)

Proposal. Continue to provide staff time, equivalent to a full-time employee (FTE), for the Division’s Recreational Marine Fisheries Program. Staff will coordinate a range of projects and activities that relate directly to priority marine recreational fishing issues. The \$30,000 investment will leverage an additional \$90,000 in federal (SFR) funds to provide \$120,000 in total programmatic benefits.

Rationale. In the past, the Division has never had staff time completely dedicated to marine recreational fishing programs. In 2012, the Division hired a fulltime staff person dedicated to RI’s marine recreational fisheries program and proposes maintaining an FTE equivalent to focus on 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 NOAA Fisheries, pursuant to the Division’s MOU with NOAA Fisheries.
- Coordinating recreational fishing assessments; implementing the scheduled RIDFW takeover of angler intercept sampling; serving on the ACCSP’s Recreational Technical Committee; advancing Rhode Island’s electronic reporting 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.
- Serving as a principal point of contact for recreational fishing groups and organizations throughout 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.

5. Fish Stock Assessment Support (\$105,450)

Proposal. Support the continuation of finfish stock assessment surveys of recreationally important species in Rhode Island waters. The \$105,450 investment will leverage an additional \$316,350 in federal (SFR) funds to provide \$421,800 in total programmatic benefits.

Rationale. The key programs funded via the federal SFR grant are the continuation of the Narragansett Bay trawl survey; the juvenile finfish seine survey conducted in the coastal ponds, and the newly developed fish pot survey. These projects are important annual finfish fisheries surveys in Rhode Island waters with long standing time series of data. In the past, these programs have been funded by the Division'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 stands to reason that a portion of the recreational fishing license fees should continue to cover the non-federal match requirements of the SFR grant pertaining to these projects. Project reports are submitted annually for these programs to USFWS and are available upon request.

6. Artificial Reef Support (\$0)

Proposal. The Division has reallocated a dedicated staff person paid from a different grant to administer this project. The project is continuing as planned and is still considered an important recreational fishing initiative. The narrative will remain in the report as it may warrant future funding.

Rationale. Due to public input and interest, the Division, in collaboration with The Nature Conservancy, has undertaken a 5-year artificial reef project. The project is designed to test the feasibility and performance of artificial reefs in Rhode Island waters. The main goal of the project is to determine if artificial reefs actually produce more biomass or merely attract/aggregate fish from surrounding areas. The outcome of this study will help to determine if permanent artificial reefs should be placed in Rhode Island waters. This project was initiated by recreational fishermen's requests for the placement of artificial reefs in RI, if necessary funds from the recreational saltwater license will be reallocated to fund and support the project in the event of loss of current funding.

7. Public Education, Information, and Outreach (\$5,000)

Proposal. The \$5,000 taken from recreational license receipts will leverage an additional \$15,000 in SFR funding resulting in \$20,000 used for outreach and education pertaining to the recreational fishing license. The primary goal is to continue the annual

one page water resistant regulation abstract and the Rhode Island Recreational Saltwater Fishing Magazine and maintain signage informing the public of the license requirement.

Rationale. Although compliance with the new license program has generally been good, it is clear that a number of recreational fishermen and spear fishers 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 spear fishers, it makes sense to continue making a modest investment in public outreach, 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.

Each year the Division published a one page regulation abstract which contains the current year's recreational fishing rules and regulations. These are printed on glossy water resistant paper and supplied to various locations throughout the state. The abstracts are heavily utilized and raise awareness and foster compliance to the current regulations.

In 2015, the Division published the third annual edition of the Rhode Island Recreational Saltwater Fishing Magazine. 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 State. The guide informs fishermen on the issues associated with the licensing program and the associated benefits. It also provides recreational fishing information as well as other issues of interest to the community, including current regulations, informative articles, and lists of local bait and tackle shops and party/charter boat services. 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 enhances the Division's ability to connect with and inform recreational fishermen, and to promote recreational fishing in Rhode Island. The publication has been well-received, and so it makes sense to continue utilizing a small portion of funds from the license account to fund it annually.

VII. Looking Ahead to FY17

While there is reason to believe that the license program, and associated receipts received, could grow at a modest pace over the next several years, there is no clear indication that that is likely to happen. As previously noted, the total number of licenses issued during the 2015 fiscal year was 42,350, and total revenues deposited into the license fund for the calendar year were \$186,324. ***For planning purposes, the FY17 Programmatic Budget is projected to be approximately the same as FY16, i.e., \$180,000.***



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Addendum

to the

Rhode Island Saltwater Recreational Fishing License Program Annual Report For FY 2015

In accordance with RIGL section 20-2.2-10, the Rhode Island Division of Fish and Wildlife (Division) presented the draft Rhode Island Saltwater Recreational License Program Annual Report for FY 2015 to the Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Council (Council) and attending members of the general public, at the Council meeting on December 7th, 2015. The draft report was provided to the Council members prior to their meeting for review. The public was informed of the report via the Division's website, and email alert and asked to give comment. John Lake, Principal Biologist with the Division, presented the report to the Council. No members of the public offered any comments on the draft report. The discussion and comments between the Council and Division is found below.

- A member of the Council commented that he was satisfied that the two items brought forward by the recreational stakeholder group, of which he is a member, were incorporated into the report. The two items were for the Division to provide regular updates on boat ramp maintenance and improvements, and to clarify that unspent license fees remain in the restricted account and are available to be spent in the future.
- A member of the Council inquired about fishing access at the Stonebridge site in Portsmouth where a fence is restricting access. The issue was subsequently brought up [at the next RIDEM Boating/Access meeting] and it was determined that that part of the site is owned by RIDOT. As such, further coordination with RIDOT will be required to address the issue.
- A member of the Council was pleased that the revenue from license sales is being used to match federal funding sources, consistent with the intent of the legislation.

- A Council member asked for clarification about whether recreational license revenue was the only source of matching funds for the fish stock assessment budget category. In response, the Division explained that that budget category is funded approximately half from recreational and half from commercial license receipts, along with federal matching funds.
- On the basis of the Council's review and the above-noted discussion, the council voted unanimously in support of a motion that the Rhode Island Saltwater Recreational Fishing License Program is continuing to meet its intended purposes.