

Currents

News briefs on sportfishing issues and trends affecting the marketplace

Millions of Dollars Go to States for Fish and Wildlife Projects

In February, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar announced that more than \$740 million will be distributed this year to all fish and wildlife agencies in the states, commonwealths, the District of Columbia and the U.S. territories for fish and wildlife conservation, boating access and hunter and aquatic education.

The [Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program](#) funds come from federal manufacturers excise taxes and import duties on sporting firearms, ammunition, archery equipment, sportfishing equipment, electric outboard motors and fuel taxes attributable to motorboats and small engines.

In 2008, the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund had \$720 million in revenues, \$402 million of which was apportioned to all 50 states specifically for sportfish restoration. From 1952 through 2008, state fish and wildlife and natural resource agencies have received more than \$5.7 billion in funding through the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund for fishery conservation and enhancement. In addition, fishing license sales generate nearly \$560 million in annual revenues for state conservation and education programs.

Lake Erie Committee Recommends 2009 Yellow Perch and Walleye Catch Limits

The bi-national Lake Erie Committee, consisting of fishery managers from Michigan, New York, Ohio,

Pennsylvania and Ontario, Canada, has recommended a 2009 total allowable catch (TAC) of 12.012 million pounds of yellow perch and 2.45 million walleye (yellow perch are allocated in pounds, while walleye are allocated by the number of fish). The yellow perch TAC is an increase of about 1.85 million pounds from last year while the walleye TAC is a decrease of 1.15 million.

The committee based this recommendation on the current strength of yellow perch stocks in Lake Erie and that walleye recruitment has been poor or moderate during the previous several years, with the exception of 2003. For more information, see the Lake Erie Committee's [press release](#).

USFWS to Reopen Public Comment Period on Coast Cutthroat Trout

The [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) (USFWS) will reexamine its 1999 proposal to list some coastal cutthroat trout as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. The affected fish are the Southwestern Washington/Columbia River distinct population segment of the coastal cutthroat trout.

The USFWS withdrew its listing proposal from consideration in 2002, but as a result of litigation it is reconsidering the withdrawal to examine whether the ocean and estuaries constitute a significant portion of the range of the population segment. If the areas meet this standard, the coastal cutthroat trout

in this region could be listed federally as threatened or endangered. The USFWS intends to publish a decision by fall 2009.

Threatened Species Listing Proposed for Smelt

[The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service](#) (NMFS) has proposed listing Pacific smelt as a threatened species after studies found it was declining throughout its range from Northern California to British Columbia.

Further declines could affect the timing of spring flows in Northwest Rivers. Smelts, a dietary staple of many larger fish species, faces threats from shrimp fishing, degradation of river habitat and predation. NMFS is [taking public comments](#) on its listing proposal through May 12. If the fish were listed as threatened, the designation would apply only to habitat in U.S. federal waters, even though the population extends into Canada.

Management Measures Set for 2009–2011 for Pacific Coast Groundfish

A new [final rule](#) by NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service has set the 2009–2010 harvest specifications and management measures for groundfish taken in the U.S. exclusive economic zone off the coasts of Washington, Oregon and California. The rule also revises rebuilding plans for four of the seven overfished

article continues

rockfish species, consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan.

Together, the revisions to rebuilding plans and the 2009–2010 harvest specifications and management measures are intended to rebuild overfished stocks as soon as possible, taking into account the status and biology of the stocks, the needs of fishing communities and the interaction of the overfished stocks within the marine environment.

Red Snapper Moratorium Likely in Southeast

In March, the [South Atlantic Fishery Management Council](#) voted to request an interim rule for red snapper that would close the fishery in federal waters for commercial and recreational fishermen for 180 days with a possible extension of 186 days. The request for the closure, directed to NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, is designed to address overfishing for red snapper until more long-term management measures are implemented.

A 2008 stock assessment for red snapper in the South Atlantic region showed the stock continued to be overfished at nine times its sustainable level. If approved, it is anticipated the closure would be implemented in late June or early July 2009.

Court Upholds Federal Policy on Hatchery Stock

A federal appeals court upheld federal policy to use hatchery fish to bolster dwindling wild salmon runs but not to count the hatchery stock while assessing salmon as candidates for Endangered Species Act protections. The ruling was in response to a lawsuit on behalf of a coalition of builders, farmers and property rights advocates to remove restrictions on development and agriculture that protect salmon.

Studies have determined that while wild and hatchery salmon may be indistinguishable genetically, wild salmon demonstrate behavioral differences that make them more likely to survive in the wild. The appeals court also upheld a decision by NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, which environmental groups

challenged, to downgrade protections for steelhead salmon by changing its designation from endangered to threatened species.

MOU Formalizes Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership

In March, the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP) took effect. ACFHP aims to accelerate the conservation, protection, restoration and enhancement of habitat for native Atlantic coastal, estuarine-dependent and diadromous fish species.

The ACFHP will support on-the-ground projects, implemented cooperatively by its partners, through endorsements, funding, coordination and other opportunities. The partnership expects to generate conservation outcomes exceeding those that partners could accomplish independently.

ACFHP is a candidate partnership under the [National Fish Habitat Action Plan](#), a national effort to build and support strategic partnerships for fish habitat conservation. ■