

NEWSCAST



Summer 2010

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Expanded For-Hire Telephone Surveys in the Gulf

To help assess the fishing and financial impacts of the BP/Deepwater Horizon oil spill on the region's economically critical for-hire sector, NOAA, the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC), and the state fishery agencies of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida are working collaboratively to substantially increase the number of captain interviews conducted by the weekly For-Hire Survey (FHS) in each state, and to produce fishing activity statistics at weekly rather than bimonthly intervals. These changes will be initiated in time to provide better tracking of fishing activities – or “effort” – beginning the week of June 1.

As a result of the expanded data collection, we expect:

- 1) **NEAR REAL-TIME EFFORT ESTIMATES.** This increase in data collection will allow much more precise estimation of the total number of trips made by anglers on for-hire fishing vessels, and will also allow the production of fishing effort statistics at weekly intervals.
- 2) **ASSESSMENT OF ECONOMIC IMPACT.** Weekly tracking of changes will be useful for documenting and assessing economic impacts associated with the BP oil spill. In addition to the increased sampling, questions are being added to the survey to assess fishing trip cancellations directly related to the oil spill.
- 3) **MORE FREQUENT CONTACT FROM SURVEYORS.** Captains should be aware that they may be contacted more frequently for trip information than they have been in the past, and that they will be asked to provide data on both fishing trips taken and cancelled fishing trips.

One of the key areas of improvement that MRIP has focused on from the beginning is a better accounting of the for-hire sector. Current MRIP pilot projects (see below) are testing methodologies for census and universal logbook reporting, among other innovations. The emergency measures being undertaken to respond to the spill will contribute an invaluable array of information – such as the impact on response rates and data quality from vastly expanded sampling – to help guide the development of future improvements.

Pilot Project Update – Developing an Electronic Logbook Program for For-Hire Operators in the Gulf

While the emergency response to the BP/Deepwater Horizon crisis gets underway, the planned work of the For-Hire Work Group also continues this summer. The Work Group had previously put forth a series of recommendations for changing the way catch and effort is estimated in the for-hire sector. Based on a comprehensive review of current methodologies and informed by the NRC report, the group's recommendations were to:

1. **Rely universally on logbooks instead of surveys to gather data from for-hire operators.**
Captains would keep their logbooks electronically and update the data at least once a week during fishing season.
2. **Continue dockside intercept sampling and vessel trips to validate logbook reporting.**
3. **Include everyone fishing on a boat, whenever possible, when conducting dockside or onboard sampling** instead of surveying selected fishermen. For headboats and large party boats where every fisherman cannot be intercepted, the survey selection process would be improved to make sure the vessel's entire catch is accounted for.

The feasibility of these recommendations – particularly their ability to generate better data weighed against the resources required to implement and the reporting burden on charter boat captains – will be tested through a series of pilot projects beginning this year.

The MRIP Executive Steering Committee recently approved funding to move ahead with pilot testing the design of logbooks in two regions of the Gulf of Mexico - the Corpus Christi/Port Aransas region of Texas and panhandle region of Florida – beginning in August 2010. The project will develop and test a universal logbook reporting system for use by for-hire fisheries with methods for tracking compliance and validating self-reported data. The pilot will focus on all charter vessels in each region that possess federal for-hire permits for reef fish and/or pelagic fish in the Gulf of Mexico.

A request for proposals (RFP) was distributed to solicit proposals for the development of electronic reporting tool for collecting catch and effort data via the logbook. MRIP For-Hire Work Group received six (6) proposals and the group is currently reviewing these applications and will be selecting the appropriate tool(s) by mid-June. Outreach meetings have been tentatively scheduled for mid-July in each region to facilitate industry support and solicit feedback regarding the proposed methods. Data collection is scheduled to begin on August 1, 2010. For more information about the project, please contact project leads Bev Sauls (Beverly.sauls@myfwc.com) and Dave Donaldson (ddonaldson@gsmfc.org).

12 Pilot Projects Receive Funding for 2010

The committee charged with redesigning the nation's saltwater recreational fishing data collection program has approved 12 research projects. NOAA Fisheries Service will support those projects with an investment of \$1.8 million in 2010. Project results will inform improvements to the collection and analysis of recreational fishing information.

The approved projects cover a range of topics related to recreational fishing data collection and analysis including: 1) the use of fishing licenses as the basis for telephone surveys; 2) examining optimal respondent recall periods and ways to enhance response rates; 3) developing new survey designs to

better estimate angler participation; and 4) field testing of new dockside sampling methods for headboats.

Fifteen proposals were submitted by multi-disciplinary work groups made up of scientists, fisheries managers, and marine recreational anglers from Alaska to Florida. Proposals were evaluated and ranked by the Operations Team, a group of experts from both inside and outside government. Finally, the Executive Steering Committee, an eight-person team overseeing funding and management for the overall data improvement initiative, approved 12 projects. A complete listing of all funding research projects will be available shortly at www.CountMyFish.noaa.gov.

Adding Functionality to the MRIP Organizational Structure

The MRIP teams and work groups have undergone a few changes to better account for changing program needs. The latest round of project funding proposals along with some changing leadership roles on the current work groups made it a good time to evaluate the structure and function of the MRIP organization. The new structure includes the addition of a fourth team - the Information Management Team – to support the national-level data processing and management. Also, the number of work groups has been expanded from four to seven to better match type of projects selected as priorities this year. More information about MRIP organization can be found at www.CountMyFish.noaa.gov.

Angler Registrations Top 400,000

NOAA's registration requirements went into effect on January 1, 2010. Since then, over 400,000 anglers have registered with NOAA. Most of the registrations are in the northeastern states that do not yet qualify for exempted state designation, led by New Jersey (125,800); Maryland (87,700) and Massachusetts (68,700).

Since the final registry rule was adopted in January 2009, 10 additional states (Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, Maryland, Virginia, South Carolina, and Florida) have enacted legislation that will enable them to qualify as exempted states. The anglers and for-hire fishing vessels in those states will be licensed or registered by the states and the states will provide data to NOAA Fisheries to complete the national registry. For more information on the angler registry, contact Gordon Colvin at Gordon.colvin@noaa.gov or visit www.CountMyFish.noaa.gov.

Better Data Among Top Agenda Items at Rec Fishing Summit

At a summit of more than 150 recreational fishermen in Alexandria, Virginia in April, one of the issues that topped the agenda was the need for better recreational data. Many of the concerns identified were among the key priorities that MRIP is already seeking to address. A complete report of the summit can be found at the NOAA Fisheries website (<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/PartnershipsCommunications/recfish/RecFishSummit2010.htm>). The report summarizes the presentations, captures the round table discussions, and inventories the myriad ideas for an improved relationship. In addition, NOAA Fisheries prepared a short 5-minute video summary of the Summit that is posted alongside the Final Report. Entitled "How Can We Build Trust?", the video includes interviews with a number of Summit participants and NOAA leadership and captures some of what it was like to be at the Summit. Both the final report and video can be downloaded and reposted so that others can follow what transpired in Alexandria.